

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

9:05 a.m.

[Chairman: Mr. Schumacher]

MR. CHAIRMAN: The chair sees a quorum and would like to take this opportunity of welcoming members of the committee and members of the management group of the Legislative Assembly Office to this first meeting of the Members' Services Committee for 1995. I wish you all the best for 1995.

MR. BRASSARD: Likewise, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Taylor sends his regrets. He's at a doctor's appointment today.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I hope it's nothing serious.

MR. BRUSEKER: No. He's going to try and get his ears fixed so he can hear us better.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, okay.

MR. BRASSARD: We won't quote you on that, Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: I know it's already in *Hansard*. We should delete that part.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I believe all members have copies of a proposed agenda. Would there be agreement to this agenda?

MR. BRASSARD: I move the adoption of the agenda, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any discussion? Those in favour of Mr. Brassard's motion, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

Now we have the matter of the minutes of the last meeting, which are under tab 3.

MS HALEY: I move them as presented.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms Haley has moved that the minutes be approved. Those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Number 4 is the 1995-96 Legislative Assembly Budget Estimates, and I'll just maybe ask the Clerk to give us the overview under that heading.

Clerk.

DR. McNEIL: Corinne is handing out a written overview, but I'll just highlight some of the points in that overview. The '95 to '98 financial plan states that it was developed in the context of the stated purpose of the office. One item that I added this year to that purpose was the last item, and that's to support other offices of the Legislature as required. I'll talk about that a little further when we get into some of the items.

The branches of the office have developed our plans for this next fiscal year with the objective of achieving a 20 percent reduction in expenditures by the end of the '96-97 fiscal year in comparison to the actual expenditures of '92-93. So in terms of the target we set last year, we're still moving towards that target. In terms of those elements of the budget that we have some control over, in terms of

the Legislative Assembly Office proper, excluding the caucuses and the constituencies, we project an 18.6 percent reduction from those '92-93 actuals for '95-96 and a 20.8 percent overall reduction by March 31, 1997, everything else being equal.

Now, in terms of developing the '95-96 budget specifically, there were a number of factors that entered into the equation, if you will, this year. Consistent with our past policy and with government bargaining unit settlements, we have factored into the salary structure for nonmanagement staff in the Legislative Assembly Office merit increases in the same proportion that were allocated to those in the bargaining unit in the government. So this is consistent with what's happened in government. The one thing that's noted there is that the 5 percent decrease in salaries for nonmanagement staff was effected on April 1, 1994, for the Legislative Assembly Office. They were not effected for the government until September 1. So our staff took a five- or six-month, four-month anyway, earlier reduction than the government bargaining unit staff did.

Although the costs of many of the employee benefits that are provided increased this year, we were fortunate to basically offset those increases by a very significant reduction in workers' compensation. Therefore, the overall impact on the cost of benefits is pretty well nil. The other factor that doesn't affect the bottom line but affects some of the individual budgets is that in past years some of the materials and supplies in copying costs which were incurred by various areas of the Legislative Assembly Office were charged to MLA administration. What we've done this year is factored those costs out so that each area is budgeting for and managing those funds relating to copying and materials and supplies. Now, that's not a big factor, but you'll notice as we go through the individual budgets where those things show up.

One of the things that's not included in the 20 percent target reduction is funds which are this year being transferred from Treasury to the Legislative Assembly Office budget to pay for payroll and accounts payable services. These services up until this point in time have been delivered by Treasury and will be up until, I guess, the beginning of the next fiscal year. After April 1, in effect, they'll be delivered by a joint venture between Treasury and the private sector through a company called ISM Alberta. We will be paying this private-sector firm the charges for payroll and accounts payable. Treasury entered into an agreement with this private-sector firm which purports to bind the Assembly and all its offices to use the services of this company for the next three years. We have a bit of concern about that, number one, in terms of the ability of Treasury to bind the Assembly to a contract with this organization, and, number two, about the cost of these services. We believe we could probably deliver at significantly less by developing our own systems to do the same thing and do a better job.

Treasury's estimate of these costs is just over \$66,000. Using their formulas on our number of employees, we come out to a number that's more like \$85,000. Presently we're in discussion with Treasury over what that transfer amount should be. So in the short run there is, as I say, some discussion going on about that number. In the long run we do have a concern, though, about being bound to this contract for services which we feel can be more efficiently delivered.

MRS. MIROSH: Can I ask a question on that, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mrs. Mirosh.

MRS. MIROSH: Isn't there anything that you can do as the Chair of the Legislative Assembly: send a memo to Treasury indicating that the Leg. Assembly is run by separate legislation and that there shouldn't be any interference by Treasury?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I certainly don't mind doing that. We just thought that we should bring this to the committee so that the committee is aware of it. If it's the feeling of the committee that the chair should do that, I'd be very happy to do it.

MRS. MIROSH: Well, I would certainly like to move that you bring it to their attention, because this Leg. Assembly has always run independently of any department, particularly Treasury. We sit here making decisions on budget and shouldn't have their interference. I think a memo would be wise.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Mr. Henry.

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The motion I certainly would support, but I'm wondering if we're dealing with a much broader issue. In my experience in the few years that I've hung around this building, it seems to me that the line that delineates what is essentially the Speaker's responsibility and the Members' Services Committee's and what is the government's responsibility, whether we're talking about handling payroll or security in this building or allocation of space or any of those kinds of items, isn't very clearly defined. It kind of moves, and it's moved over the years that I've been here.

I have over the last few years, when I've had the opportunity, looked at other Legislatures and talked with their staff and indeed a couple of Speakers to determine how it operates in other jurisdictions in this country, and it seems to me that it's clearer in some other jurisdictions than it is here. I'm wondering: at some point does this committee want to look at that whole issue? Because it seems to be an ad hoc kind of management: every time somebody in government, regardless of the government of the day, decides that they want to make a decision or Members' Services Committee or the Speaker wants to make a decision and there's a conflict, then it's dealt with. Perhaps we would all be better served by asking our staff to come back with a report that would look at how those responsibilities are delineated in other jurisdictions across Canada, including the House of Commons. Then maybe we could sit down and outline, based on that, a framework so there won't be this kind of mix-up every time, because we keep crossing those paths, whether it be this issue or another issue. It seems that we have to be very clear as to what's in the Speaker's realm and what is in the Premier's realm or Treasurer's or otherwise.

So I would support this motion, but I would come back with another motion that perhaps we'd look at this on a broader scale.

9:15

MR. CHAIRMAN: Can we take that as a notice of motion?

MR. HENRY: Sure.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, I wanted to stick specifically to the topic. My question is basically one of how Treasury arrived at the \$66,100 when, using the formula, I gather that Dr. McNeil is saying that it should figure out to \$85,200. Now, that's a 23 percent difference, variation. I just wondered how they arrived at their figures.

DR. McNEIL: The essence I think of the difference is that they make certain assumptions about the number of employees we have. The problem there is that the existing payroll system doesn't allow different sets of payments to one individual. Where we have a member who might be a member of, let's say, five or six committees, we have to treat that individual, although one employee, as six employees. They don't take into account that complexity within the Legislative Assembly Office.

MR. BRASSARD: But again, there's a variance of 23 percent. That's very significant.

DR. McNEIL: Definitely, and as I say, that's why we're in discussion with Treasury over that difference: because we do have that concern. The problem is that if we're shortchanged, we're going to be overexpending our budget for those services to provide the members and the staff the services they need. Cheryl I think can add to that. Cheryl, if you want to come up. It's really in the payroll area that the difference arises.

MRS. SCARLETT: I think it's important to recognize that the payroll system that we've been using, which is technically piggybacking onto the provincial government's payroll system -- we have for years now had to do unique things to it and work with Treasury to make it pay members properly, to recognize committee activity properly, to take tax properly. Now in a situation where we have implemented the minus 5 for all of the Leg. Assembly Office staff in a different way than the union people chose to negotiate, technically we are having to use their system to cut cheques, but we're running it manually. Everything we put into the system has to be manual, and our audits are manual as well. So regardless of what we end up paying for this system, we're doing all the work for it, and it's not even providing basic service to the members, to the constituency office, to all those people on employment contracts. We are unique in terms of how we pay and administer the payroll in comparison to government. We're just using the government system and trying to make it fit and make it work. More and more now it's not fitting, and it's not working.

The spin-off of that, then, relative to these charges is that under this new joint venture agreement they set up a pay schedule where it's assumed that for base services, in terms of just normal automatic processing for government people, there is no additional charge, but most of the kinds of things that we do from a payroll perspective on behalf of your constituency employees, caucus employees, and you as members are deemed to be exception payments, and we're going to get charged additionally for each one of those transactions. So it's a concern relative to the payroll system, relative to the charges. I think it's important to note that we don't fit neatly into the system that we're using and never have. We have always just piggybacked.

MR. BRASSARD: Can I further ask then: is this an ongoing thing? Can you see some kind of a sunset clause to the method you're using? It wouldn't seem like the most efficient method of dealing with the situation.

MRS. SCARLETT: Yes. I think what David is looking at is first off what they feel is the appropriate transfer of charges to provide those services. What we're turning around and saying is that for starters you're not providing the services. In addition, we feel there are alternatives that exist that should be pursued that can provide better services to you relative to our payroll situation for a lesser charge.

MR. BRASSARD: Just so that I understand it clearly. The Treasury Board, then, has established a budget based on what they see as a more efficient system, and it's just not practical right now. Is that right? It's not possible right now?

DR. McNEIL: I'm not sure that it would ever be possible within their system. What we have to do is really develop an alternative. The concern I'm raising is that this three-year binding contract -- although we don't believe that it applies to the Legislative Assembly, we are included under that contract as it's written -- would preclude us from doing anything for three years. We think that's too long,

because we think we can do something in a shorter time frame and save significant dollars.

MR. BRASSARD: Then my final question -- and perhaps while Cheryl is still here -- deals with the additional \$16,000 transferred from Treasury to cover risk management services. Could you just elaborate a little bit on that?

DR. McNEIL: Bill can do that.

MR. BRASSARD: Oh, I see. Okay. Thanks very much, Cheryl.

MR. GANO: Yeah. Risk management is another component that Treasury is transferring to the department as well. Along with that they have suggested that an appropriate number would be \$16,000 that they'd be transferring into our budget. We don't have any argument with that particular dollar amount. Basically, the rules for risk management have changed over the last year or so. It used to be that it was basically a \$500 deductible type insurance if you had a theft from your office. Over the last year that was changed to a \$5,000 deductible. Very few of the thefts from the offices, constituency offices, and so on reached that limit, so we end up having to pay to replace all the items. In other words, they're not covered by insurance at this point. So that's why the \$16,000 has been transferred in.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you.

MS HALEY: Let's go back to another one. Who increased our deductible to \$5,000?

MR. GANO: Well, the risk management people themselves through Treasury.

MS HALEY: Is that standard for offices throughout the province, or is it just more so for MLAs' offices?

MR. GANO: No, it's for the entire government. The risk management thing increased to \$5,000, so all departments are now responsible for this \$5,000 deductible.

MS HALEY: To go back to what I'd originally wanted to ask. With regard to the \$66,000 versus the \$85,200, do you have a chart or a graph of any kind showing what it really costs versus what Treasury says it will cost and versus what you think you could accomplish down the road by not being involved in this particular contract?

DR. McNEIL: We can give you a comparison of the basis for our calculations versus theirs. I don't have that right handy but can get it for you. We haven't done enough work yet to give a definitive idea about the cost, but in Bill's judgment in terms of his systems background I think he's indicated to me that there would be significant savings in developing a stand-alone system to service the unique needs of the Legislative Assembly Office. What we're saying is that this year we need to have this service provided as it has been provided until we can do something about it in-house. That's the essence of the proposal.

MS HALEY: The reality is that we're doing the work ourselves, and we're paying somebody else to do it as well.

DR. McNEIL: Well, we're paying somebody else in effect to cut the cheques, but in terms of a lot of the calculations, we're doing it with our own staff. We have spent a fair amount of time over the past

years dealing with Treasury in terms of making sure that things were worked through properly so that members and staff got paid properly.

MRS. MIROSH: David, have you been in touch with anybody in Treasury about this concern at all?

DR. McNEIL: Yeah, we've discussed it generally in terms of -- we just received the information about the amount to be transferred on the 20th, I think it was, of December. So two days before the holiday we got back to them and said: we've got a concern about this, and we want to know, first of all, what the basis of your calculation was. All we were given was a number. We weren't told initially how they arrived at that number. We have since then indicated to them -- I think it was on the 22nd -- that we have a problem with this, that this is our number, and we need to have some discussions. We have yet to follow up on that other than indicating our concern.

9:25

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there any further discussion on Mrs. Mirosh's motion?

Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those in favour of the motion proposed by Mrs. Mirosh, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

DR. McNEIL: In terms of the individual areas of the office, I'll just go through them one by one. In terms of financial management -- and again this is an overview. We'll get into a bit more detail as we go into the individual budgets. Because of this downloading of financial responsibilities from Treasury, we again this year propose that this budget be maintained in effect at the status quo level so that we can continue to provide those services in accounting, financial management at the present levels.

Another factor that comes into this is that we are providing financial administrative services to the Ethics Commissioner, and we have suggested to the chairman of the Legislative Offices Committee that there may be savings available if this office provides basic administrative services to the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner so that that organization doesn't set up a parallel function and duplication of effort.

In light of those factors, our proposal is to maintain the status quo for that area as well as in the personnel area, because it's reviewing personnel, financial management, information systems, and to a large extent in the legal area as well, where we do provide services to the Ethics Commissioner and possibly the Information and Privacy Commissioner. We do provide legal advice to the Chief Electoral Officer as well.

MR. BRASSARD: Just so I'm clear, Mr. Chairman, is it being recommended that this office will be able to absorb the services to the Information and Privacy Commissioner once that's established? Is that what you're suggesting?

DR. McNEIL: Well, I'm saying we could provide those services, but we have no idea as to the size of that organization. If you look at B.C. or Ontario, you're talking about, you know, a hundred people. So I don't know whether with our existing resources we could provide those services, but I think overall the Legislative Assembly budget might be better off trying to consolidate those support

services in one area rather than having each organization that starts up develop their own.

MR. BRASSARD: So your recommendation that the same services be provided to this office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner doesn't imply an absorption of that within the existing budget?

DR. McNEIL: No, not necessarily.

MR. BRASSARD: Okay. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any further questions?
I guess we'll carry on with the overview.

DR. McNEIL: Okay. Human resource services. What we've done this year is that we've broken out the human resources branch as a separate entity. What this budget does is reflect a continued maintenance of services: payroll, pension, benefits administration, contract administration, and basic human resource services. The increase shown reflects the required transfer of funds from the previously combined administration area and doesn't reflect any increase in staff at all. Again the downloading and privatization of the payroll function and the possibility of providing services to the Information and Privacy Commissioner cause us to recommend that this budget be maintained at its status quo level.

MRS. MIROSH: The Speaker's office. Oh, he spends way too much money.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A very lean, mean office.

DR. McNEIL: We're projecting a reduction of 1.7 percent from last year, and that represents a little over a 15 percent, almost a 16 percent reduction from the '92-93 actuals. So in terms of our targets set last year, you know, 10, 5, and 5, we're on target for that net budget.

The public information branch projects to decrease 4.2 from last year's with an overall reduction of 17 from the '92-93 actuals. I think the one thing to highlight here is the success of the gift shop in that we're projecting a 50 percent increase in revenues from what we projected this year. When we get into the budget, Gary can give you a little more detail on what we've done with the gift shop and what we're planning to do there.

One of the things that the Speaker and I discussed is whether or not there may be some interest in members' possibly tomorrow first thing, if you haven't seen the gift shop, just taking 15 minutes and going over there to look at that setup. As well, I think it would be useful to go up to the eighth and ninth floors and especially look at the information systems area so that members understand a little more the complexity of what goes on there to support the members, which may not be self-evident on a day-to-day basis. Once you see sort of the technology involved and the equipment involved, it may be a little more meaningful to you as to, you know, why some of these numbers are what they are. They do reflect the complexity of the services that are being provided both to the public in terms of the gift shop and the interpretive centre and in terms of the administration area -- personnel and information systems -- just keeping the caucus offices and the constituency offices operating with hopefully minimal involvement of the members so that the members can focus on their primary role, which is to serve the citizens of Alberta. So that's a suggestion that we may want to take up later: to spend a little time tomorrow morning just looking at

some of those facilities. I'm not sure everybody has seen what we've developed there, especially in terms of the interpretive centre.

The Legislature Library: projecting a further reduction of 2.7 percent from last year's budget and an overall reduction of 18.65 from '92-93.

House services: a 2.1 percent reduction from '94-95 and an overall reduction of 14 from '92-93 actuals. One of the things we're proposing in this budget, which the Speaker is strongly supporting, is to provide some base funding for developing further interparliamentary relations activities. This is something that's arisen out of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, the hosting of that conference and some of the needs that especially the members who attended that conference identified. When we get into that budget, the Speaker will address that further.

As well, there is Access radio. Because of the privatization of Access radio, they're no longer in a position to provide radio coverage of question period, at least on a no-cost basis. So they have sent us a proposal as to what it would cost to cover that for the projected length of the session.

As well, we've looked at two alternatives with respect to TV coverage, as was mentioned last year. We can get into those in more detail there. One is basically almost a status quo proposal, but we're recommending the improvement to move to closed captioning rather than the sign language interpretation. The other is another proposal coming from a private broadcaster who's assumed a different technical approach to presenting the TV coverage of question period. So that's included in the House services budget.

9:35

Information systems: projecting an increase there. With this increase, however, the overall reduction from 1993 is still projected to be over 20 percent, 22.3 percent, compared to the 1992-93 actuals. Just one of the things to highlight there is that our estimate of the savings that we've realized through the implementation of various electronic data processing activities is about 1 and a half million dollars since 1989, and that's probably a conservative estimate. That's not a political statement.

The committees' budget. The projected increase, 5.8 percent from '94-95 levels, is because of the requirement to budget for the Information and Privacy Commissioner search committee as well as those administrative charges from MLA administration which I mentioned earlier. However, even with that increase, the committees' budget is projected to be reduced by almost 63 percent from the actual spending in '92-93.

Just sort of an historical overview here. I looked at some numbers comparing Assembly spending, which included all the offices in the Assembly -- the Chief Electoral Officer and the Auditor General and the Ethics Commissioner and so on -- as a percentage of total government spending over time. It was interesting to note that in 1906 the Legislative Assembly budget was almost 2 percent of total government spending, and that decreased every 10 years. It went from 1.89 in 1906 to 1.41 in '22 and 1.22 in 1943. In '53 it was .61. In '63 it was .56. In '73 it was .44. In '83 it was .21 percent of total government spending. In election years it goes up because of the higher spending on elections, but it's been around .21 to .25 over the last I'd say 15 years. So as a percentage of total government spending it's a minuscule amount, and it's an interesting statistic to observe upon. In terms of the Assembly's role to sort of oversee the government expenditures, it gives you some idea as to what's happened over time with this.

MRS. MIROSH: And, actually, the amount of time we're sitting has increased quite a bit.

DR. McNEIL: Oh, yeah. Well, this last session, in terms of the number of hours, was the longest session in history.

I think that completes the general overview. Are there any questions or observations?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. . . . Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: The break's only been 10 days, Mr. Chairman. That's all right. I went and bought Boomer's book, and he went to sign it, and the guy forgot my name. I couldn't believe it. A memory blank.

MRS. MIROSH: See how soon we forget.

MR. WICKMAN: How soon we forget.

Mr. Chairman, I wanted to say that I think the administration has done a superb job of getting this information together and presenting it in a fashion that's easy to understand. I'd like to see us now go through a process fairly rapidly where we have an opportunity to maybe direct those questions that we may have on particular departments.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, the first item, then, is Financial Management and Administrative Services. Anything further under that heading?

DR. McNEIL: Bill can present that one.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll let Mr. Gano present this area as he's the manager.

MR. GANO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Looking at the overview for financial management and administrative services, you'll note right at the top that it shows a 2.5 decrease. Going back to what David indicated earlier, that this is more of a status quo type thing and also that we split personnel out from administrative services this year, this minus 2.5 is a little misleading. When you combine it with personnel, it actually comes out to a zero percent change.

Looking at the salaries, wages, and employee benefits, there is a .6 increase there due mainly to the merit increases, but a lot of that was offset by the decrease in workers' compensation this year.

There is a significant decrease in supply and services of 47.7 percent. Again this is due mainly to the transfer of funds to human resource services.

There is no planned significant acquisition this year in the area of purchase of fixed assets.

I will ask for some direction here, Mr. Chairman. Did you want to go through it page by page?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I think maybe we could just give an opportunity to the members to ask any . . .

MRS. MIROSH: Do you want a motion? [interjections] Well, I'd just move that we accept financial management and administration services as presented.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Any discussion on that motion? Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those in favour, please indicate. Carried.
Clerk.

DR. McNEIL: It just might be useful to have somebody move that specific number just so that it's in the record.

MRS. MIROSH: Well, "as presented." So that number was presented.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is \$363,025?

MS HALEY: That's the forecast.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh. Well, \$353,880. Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The next head is Human Resource Services.
Mrs. Scarlett.

MRS. SCARLETT: Again, similar to what Mr. Gano presented, the two budgets have been split out. What you are seeing in the budget for human resources -- it still maintains manpower of 3.6 persons. There has been no increase there. On the salary, wage, and employee benefit proportion, then, the amount that was increased reflects merit increases that were owing to staff as appropriate as well as moneys that were transferred from the administration budget to cover the 3.6 bodies that we have.

Supply and services has an increase, again a transfer from either administration or in this case a transfer from the MLA administration account to cover actual costs incurred relative to delivery of services.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any discussion?

MR. HENRY: I'm just wondering if you'd like a motion, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sure.

MR. HENRY: I'd move that the amount of \$167,887 be approved for human resource services for '95-96.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any discussion on this motion?

MRS. MIROSH: I just wanted to ask one quick question about a human resource consultant. Who's that consultant for?

MRS. SCARLETT: The human resource consultant is a classification title previously referred to as a personnel administrator. That's Moyra Johnson, and she works 60 percent of full-time. Our title has switched from personnel services to human resource services, and all the titles that went with it have switched as well.

MRS. MIROSH: All right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

9:45

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

MRS. MIROSH: We might be done in one day.

MR. WICKMAN: No, no. This is the Speaker's budget coming.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, as the material indicates, this year's estimate for the budget calls for minus 1.7 from last year: no changes in salaries, wages, and employee benefits, a 13.5 percent decrease in supplies and services primarily because the photocopier lease got paid for, and really no other changes there. This area where we wanted to say something about the interparliamentary . . .

DR. McNEIL: No. It's in House services.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, that's House services.

Basically, the Speaker feels that the Speaker's office is well on its way towards the 20 percent reduction. It's almost there.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm prepared to move the budget of \$267,226. I just have one question. We noticed over the past couple of years that the travel expenses have reduced significantly, particularly in this area. Is that the only travel expense that the Speaker's office has available, or are there other budgets that provide for specific conferences?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Maybe the Clerk could answer that better.

DR. McNEIL: Yeah, there are other budgets that provide for specific conferences, some of which the Speaker attends and others which other members attend, and those are in the House services budget.

MR. WICKMAN: But if we were to do a comparison, say two years ago to today, travel costs would be down significantly; would it not?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The total would be.

DR. McNEIL: The travel costs would be down probably 60, 70 percent.

MR. WICKMAN: Okay. Thank you.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Chairman, just a question under the other expenditures. I'm just wondering. Pay to the Members of the Legislative Assembly: what does that cover?

DR. McNEIL: That covers the Speaker's salary and benefits.

MS HALEY: And the Deputy Speaker?

DR. McNEIL: Yeah. And the Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Chairman, to be complete.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any further questions or comments?

MS HALEY: Has this been moved already?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wickman moved it.

MS HALEY: I'd call the question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those in favour? Opposed? Carried. Thanks for your confidence.

MR. HENRY: Don't expect it to be that easy all the time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No.

I'll go to House services, No. 6, seeing that it is related, and then we'll come back.

DR. McNEIL: The major element in this budget -- the increase in salaries, wages, and employee benefits -- relates to the addition of what I would term the interparliamentary relations budget. Arising out of the Commonwealth parliamentary conference was a need identified by those members who attended the CPA conference in Banff. Number one was to develop the Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association: give it a higher profile, give members a better idea of their parliamentary role, if you will, in the Commonwealth. I think the Speaker can follow up on that in terms of some of the things that he's done and discussed with those members. The whole thing is really in the planning phase. This is reflected on page 7 of your budget if you want to look specifically.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, we had a very good opportunity to become much more aware of the activities of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association because of this 40th parliamentary conference in Banff in October. Because Alberta was the site and sort of a co-manager of the conference with the Canadian branch, we became quite highly involved. There was a total of -- was it five or six?

DR. McNEIL: Six.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Six MLAs including myself attended. Following that meeting, I convened a meeting of the participants sort of as a debriefing and to get a sense of what members thought should be accomplished by our branch in light of that experience. It was the feeling that our branch should become much more active, with the idea of having at least an annual meeting in which all members would be given the opportunity of participating and of having perhaps in conjunction with that a dinner at which either a former parliamentarian or a current parliamentarian from another jurisdiction or whatever might have the opportunity of updating our members on what is happening in other jurisdictions and just making the whole idea of interparliamentary relations more accessible to more members. Right now it takes a long time for every member to be exposed to any CPA activity, when you consider there are only two or three opportunities each year at which we may have one or two or three members able to attend. So that is the idea behind this. The chair certainly feels that there's great merit in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

There's also another matter here that's being asked for, and that's support for membership in the Francophone parliamentary association. Speaker Parent from the House of Commons spoke with me in August about this, and the chair has taken the initiative for our Assembly to become a member of the Francophone parliamentary association, because it's certainly felt at least in this year that any meetings of that association should have representation from outside of the province of Quebec as much as possible so that all points of view can be expressed at those meetings. So we're progressing along that line, because our Assembly is very representative of the Francophone element in our country and as it is also representative of the multicultural aspects of our country. That's one thing that I was very pleased with, that at Banff we were able to have as a delegate our former member from Calgary who was a member of the Sikh community. That was, you know, very nice to have happen. We do have, I believe, a unique Assembly. We certainly do have a Francophone presence, and I felt that should be represented. So that's really the basis for why this element has been upgraded this year.

Welcome, Mr. Woloshyn. Happy New Year.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you very much. I apologize for being late. Happy New Year to you too, sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Your apology is certainly accepted but not necessary though.

MS HALEY: I'd like to move the amount of \$924,201 for this particular budget.

MRS. MIROSH: I just want to ask questions about -- I don't have any problem with what you have just said, Mr. Chairman, with regards to representation. I do want to discuss page 9. Did I hear Carol move the whole budget?

DR. McNEIL: Yes.

MRS. MIROSH: I do want to discuss page 9. You've got the CPA, June 1994, Canadian Regional Council in Ottawa. Is that a mistake?

DR. McNEIL: Yeah, that's a mistake. That should be '95.

9:55

MRS. MIROSH: Are you suggesting that this budget include all of these conferences and seminars? Zero delegates I see -- some of them.

DR. McNEIL: Some of those have a listing of zero delegates.

MRS. MIROSH: Is that because of the expense? I mean, just going along with what the chairman said on representation, maybe some of these things should be revisited.

DR. McNEIL: This is reflective, I guess, of a decision made last year about no out-of-country travel unless it was on travel points.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. We made major cuts on travel last year, and that's continuing of course.

MRS. MIROSH: I know that, but based on what you had just said, though, without representation are we losing out on maybe some significant conference?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, this is based on what we feel is possible, but I guess the feeling of the chair is that we'd like to upgrade the activities of the branch here in our province a little bit this year. We're certainly not reducing things any further as far as travel, but we feel there's not much room for more financial support for out-of-province travel.

MRS. MIROSH: To places like Sri Lanka.

DR. McNEIL: With respect to Sri Lanka our membership in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association pays for one delegate to go to that conference. So the membership pays for that. In the past we've sent in some instances an additional delegate and in some instances two additional delegates. Right now it shows zero delegates, but that does not include the one delegate whose fare is covered within the membership in the CPA.

MRS. MIROSH: And New Guinea?

DR. McNEIL: Typically that CPA seminar is at a time when the House is sitting, and I don't think that we have historically ever sent anybody to that particular seminar.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Which one is this? Is it Ottawa?

DR. McNEIL: It's Papua, New Guinea, seminar.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, yes. It's very difficult to get away at that time.

MRS. MIROSH: Yeah. Thanks.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Chairman, I think to put the thing in proper perspective, if I recall correctly, two years ago the decision was made very clearly that the committee was going to strip any out-of-country travel in view of budget restraint. It included spousal travel; it included the whole shot. I think that in terms of the restraint program we're still presently under, it's the only way to fly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Bruseker.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah. I have a question. I'm looking at page 2, Mr. Chairman. We're looking at the salaries for permanent staff. I thought there was an understanding that management salaries would be itemized, and I see just a total for five management positions. I'm wondering why those are not itemized?

DR. McNEIL: We have never done it.

MR. BRUSEKER: That was then and this is now is the phrase we're hearing. So I'm wondering: was there not an understanding that that would be the directive, Mr. Chairman, that management positions would be itemized?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The chair would have to have its memory refreshed. Was that a decision of the committee last year?

MR. WICKMAN: No. The Premier made the statement that hospital administrators . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, that statement. Mr. Bruseker, the chair is reminded that at the meeting last month, it was decided that the committee was not going to follow that general practice for the other areas of governmental activity because the committee felt that this was not a government operation.

MR. BRUSEKER: Is that in the minutes from the last meeting? It is, huh? I notice that the same procedure has been followed elsewhere in other sections of the book as well.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, I'm just wondering for future reference. I don't want to revisit that decision, but it might be helpful if the staff-years were broken down for management and nonmanagement. As a member who might get questions out in the public, I have no problem outlining that \$304,000 was spent on management salaries, but if I had just an equivalent to that, that it was X number of person-years -- we don't know that there's not a \$150,000 salary and some part-time salaries there. That's all. Or, as I see you breaking down the budget for the Clerk and spreading costs more accurately, we might find one person's salary spread over more than one budget, and it would just be useful to have either person-years or percentage of salaries there in the future. Could I just do that under advisement?

DR. McNEIL: Yes. We've tried to do that. If you look at I think the third page in the budget where it says output statistics, what we've tried to do is look at the total budget allocated by service and

by client group just to give you some better idea of where those moneys are spent. I'd be happy to sit down with individual members and go over in detail the salaries that individual members receive.

MR. HENRY: Okay. If I get questioned, I'll give you a shout.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. Mr. Chairman, I'm going back to the minutes here. I realize that we adopted the '95-96 budget guidelines that reflected a certain direction, but on reflection and in a bit more study of the detail of that, the direction was given out very clearly that salaries of agencies, boards, and such would be disclosed. We talk in terms of freedom of public information, and I don't see any shame in any management salary being disclosed. Possibly it's time that we revisited that and gave direction that it should in fact be itemized for management positions. I think the public has a right to know how their tax dollars are spent, and these are tax dollars.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Chairman, I don't support that. We don't do that in a minister's office, we don't do that in the Speaker's office, and \$304,000 for six people isn't a big-ticket number. I think that what we see here is quite satisfactory in my view.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any further discussion?

MR. BRASSARD: On another issue, Mr. Chairman. On page 16 it deals with TV coverage and radio coverage of the sessions. I've just been handed a paper dealing with the television coverage of question period and wonder if this is going to be superimposed over the budget. Are we going to have this discussion because there are some alternatives that may impact on the budget itself? So will this discussion take place after approval of this budget?

DR. McNEIL: No. I would propose that it be done in the context of this budget.

MR. BRASSARD: So are you prepared to speak to this at this time then?

DR. McNEIL: Yes.

MR. BRASSARD: Obviously I haven't had a chance to digest it all, but we have been approached by two Edmonton broadcasters to produce the program Oral Question Period, and I gather that there will be some difference in costs. I would like to speak to the broader context, though, of closed captioning versus signing. I imagine they would apply to both of these proposals. I have a bit of difficulty with closed captioning in that there is an additional cost to the viewer. Am I correct in that?

10:05

DR. McNEIL: There is, but those people who need closed captioning would likely already have that. In fact, although they haven't set a specific deadline, CRTC has indicated to both the private and public broadcasters that sometime in the future all programming will have to be closed captioned. Most people who have a hearing deficit already have that capability for existing programming, so my guess would be that the additional cost to viewers for closed captioning of question period would be really nonexistent.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, if I could be assured of that fact, I would rest a little easier. I would be opposed to implementing something that would provide additional costs to people with existing disabilities to those which they already have in order to deal with their disabilities. If that were not the case, as you describe it, then I would be concerned. If indeed I could be reassured that most people who require closed-captioned TV already have it, then I will back off.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Chairman, just on that point. I know that your office has received a couple of letters of concern about the current signing that is being provided in terms of the quality. I've spoken to a number of individuals who are involved -- and I forget the exact name of the group who are concerned about the quality of that sign language interpretation -- claiming that many things are being left out. I guess, along the line of what Mr. Brassard has said, if the current service that is being provided is not adequate or appropriate, then perhaps moving to closed captioning might indeed be a better way to go if it delivers a more accurate representation of what's happening in question period.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I just have to say that the Legislative Assembly Office has not received one single indication of dissatisfaction with the signage except from this very small, determined group who are looking for, in the chair's view, a measure of control as to who does the signage. As far as from the general public, there has not been one single complaint about the signage of the program.

MR. BRASSARD: I have a daughter and know others who sign, and they have commented on the accuracy, as a matter of fact, of the signage. Mr. Chairman, I find myself at complete odds with the statement being made by Mr. Bruseker.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, I don't think Mr. Bruseker is saying that there's anything wrong with the thing. I think he said he's heard from this small group.

MR. BRUSEKER: I've heard from the same group. They copied me the letter.

MRS. MIROSH: What do they want?

MR. BRUSEKER: Mrs. Mirosh asked the question: what does this group want? They claim there's a certain standard of education, and in my understanding of it, they want someone who's achieved this certificate or diploma or whatever it is of signing.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, they're the ones who happen to issue the certificate.

MRS. MIROSH: How self-serving.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, the closed captioning without question, in my opinion, is the way to go. Private stations we see have done more and more, but more and more programming on TV is closed captioned because that's the preferred option for people with hearing impairment problems. Government, rather than always having to wait for somebody to squeak the wheel, maybe should take a bit of initiative. Maybe the recourse here is if we gave some direction to consult with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, have them come forward with a recommendation. I'm comfortable they would recommend closed captioning. Reading this documentation, it looks pretty

straightforward to me that closed captioning with the CFRN option was the most desirable for all Albertans.

MRS. MIROSH: Did you say that the price between closed captioning and the other is the same?

DR. McNEIL: No. If we went with the Videotron proposal, if you look on page 3: with sign language interpretation it's approximately \$50,000; with real-time closed captioning, it's approximately \$57,000. So there's a \$7,000 difference there with Videotron. With CFRN, it's \$71,250 because their proposal involves real-time closed captioning.

One of the important points to note about closed captioning is that anybody who's severely hearing impaired can deal with closed captioning, but with respect to sign language, it's estimated that only about 4,000 of the 20,000 severely hearing impaired in Alberta can handle American Sign Language. The audience for closed captioning is five times as big, if you will. So that's one of the reasons to do it. There's no question that in the TV business that's the way they're going. The other advantage is that it goes out with the signal, so any rebroadcast or whatever has the closed captioning available to people with the appropriate equipment. As I say, I would estimate that over 90 percent of the people who require closed captioning probably already have it to watch programs they like to watch.

MS HALEY: Just on a point of clarification, could you please explain to me why it's shown in Edmonton and then shown on Access as well?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, the cable companies here in Edmonton . . .

MS HALEY: Just choose to do it?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, Videotron has been the producer, and they've been a cable company, so they've broadcast on the community channel. In order to get it to the rest of the province, it has to have a wider network. Access has a much broader network across the province than the cable companies, which are primarily the community channels really within Calgary and Edmonton.

MS HALEY: I'm just trying to understand. If we just had it on Access, would it make any difference to the cost?

DR. McNEIL: Well, the thing is that we need somebody to produce it in the first place. All Access has said is: we'll broadcast and rebroadcast it at no cost. But the issue is the production of the program in the first place.

We have the one proposal from Videotron basically saying: we will continue to do what we have for the same price for the next two years and then up that price in the third year. One of the things that's important to note is that they increased our price this past year. We used to pay \$410.88 a day, and they in effect increased it to \$410.88 an hour. On average we probably go for an hour and 15 minutes a day.

The biggest difference in the two proposals is in the way they approach it. Videotron would continue the same way, with their two manually operated cameras, with the camera operator in the Chamber and the remote camera up underneath the sound person, whereas CFRN is saying that they'll put in two remote cameras in the ports that were designed in there when the Chamber was redesigned in 1986 as well as another remote camera where Videotron's is. That would mean nobody in the Chamber, that the

camera is operated by remote control, very likely a much higher production value in terms of the program that goes out.

One of the things that may be useful to do here is to have CFRN and/or Videotron come in and talk about their proposals to give you a better idea as to what their motivation is. We went out to the market with a request for a proposal, and we received these two proposals: one basically maintaining the status quo, and the other what I would consider a more enhanced production of question period.

10:15

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm going to move an amendment to the motion that was passed, and the amendment would be to reflect the necessary change.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We haven't passed any motion yet.

MR. WICKMAN: No, no. That was made.

MS HALEY: I just made a motion. That's all.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. Somebody made a motion. I'm making an amendment to that motion that's on the floor.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. WICKMAN: The amendment is to change 712K00 to reflect the CFRN coverage with closed captioning. Speaking to that, Mr. Chairman, the additional cost, from the figures that I look at, is roughly \$20,000, \$21,000 to provide that enhanced coverage, and it is very enhanced. We're talking in terms of a proposal that shows a rebroadcast on the normal TV channel, even though it's at a later hour, but you get that in addition to the live broadcast. In terms of the right of Albertans to be informed as to what their legislators are doing, that's extremely important. We have the Premier of this province who's going to spend -- what? -- \$54,000 in taxpayers' money to do a personal broadcast on a few select stations. This is a chance for Albertans to see all the legislators: the government's point of view plus the opposition's point of view. I don't see how we can even think of denying Albertans that opportunity.

MRS. MIROSH: I'm not sure what the amendment was, but I'm not speaking necessarily to an amendment. You have a recommendation here that you obviously want us to make on this extra sheet with regards to sign language versus closed captioning. My question is with regards to the sign language, first of all. There are a lot of hard-of-hearing or deaf people who are seniors who would not know sign language. Certainly our biggest audience is seniors. I would support closed captioning, without any question. I'm just wondering: when you say on page 16, TV coverage, \$53,000, who does the TV coverage include then? CFRN is \$71,000.

DR. McNEIL: Well, that TV coverage, between the Access Network videotaping and the TV coverage: this was basically a status quo budget, and this was put in before these proposals came together.

MRS. MIROSH: So you're looking for an increase in that budget then?

DR. McNEIL: We require a change in that number depending on what alternative the committee chose to proceed with.

MRS. MIROSH: Okay.

MR. WICKMAN: My amendment would reflect about a \$21,000 increase; would it not?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I think that we've sort of agreed that closed captioning would be the way to go. I suggest that we stick with Videotron for the time being for a couple of reasons. One, I don't know what the raw numbers work out to, but just briefly reading this -- and please correct me if I'm wrong -- we get \$410 per hour of coverage out of Videotron and \$950 per hour of coverage out of CFRN.

What's not clear to me -- I understand that Access will cover a good portion of Alberta, both Edmonton and Calgary markets, at night. CFRN's proposal here indicates to me that it would only be the Edmonton market. The other aspect that gives me some trouble here also is the fact that they are planning to buy a cable company for the live broadcasting. It's not there, and we start in a month or so in the House. If we went with CFRN, we would not have live transmission on cable because they don't have the cable company yet and they certainly won't have it within six weeks or so.

This deal, I would imagine, is for two or three years, and I think at the end of this deal would be a good time to revisit it once again the way you've done. Quite frankly, I'm not so sure that the quality of the broadcast would increase that much whether the camera was remote or not. Then it would beg the next question. If you're going to remove from the House the cable cameras, our next logical step would be then to have no TV cameras on the floor, which is a discussion on its own merits. I guess what I'm saying is that I'd like to see both the closed captioning with Videotron and revisit the whole issue, as we must, when this particular contract expires. At that time, CFRN will be in a better place to be more definitive in what they're going to offer, and maybe we can have discussions along the way as to whether we're going to have any cameras on the floor, period. So I guess what I'm saying is let's go with Videotron.

MR. HENRY: I appreciate some of the comments Mr. Woloshyn has made, but I think it's important to point out that nobody's talking about removing cameras. The CFRN proposal simply talks about . . . [interjection] No, it doesn't talk about removing cameras. It talks about having remote control and preprogrammed cameras. So I think that analogy about taking it further to all the cameras is a bit much.

My question is for the Clerk. If we made a decision today -- and again reflecting on Mr. Woloshyn's comments, and I appreciate the comments about CFRN not having actually purchased a cable company yet -- can we revisit this for the next fiscal year, or are we locking into a three-year contract, because we seem to be talking in three-year time frames, or can we do a one-year deal and then ask CFRN to come back after they actually purchase a cable company, et cetera? That's my question.

DR. McNEIL: When we sent out the request for proposals, we said a one-, two-, or three-year proposal. My assumption with Videotron is that we can continue for another year. I'm not dead certain about that, but I think that's the case.

In terms of CFRN buying a cable company, what they're really doing is purchasing time on a cable channel as opposed to buying a company, and they have given us some degree of reassurance. Gary has been dealing with them, so he can add to what I'm saying here, but they've given us reassurance that they could be operative by mid-February or whenever the session starts. Gary, do you want to add to that?

DR. GARRISON: The only thing I wanted to add to clarify what Mr. Woloshyn was saying was that CFRN's proposal wouldn't limit coverage. It wouldn't be a smaller broadcast area than Videotron's. If you note under footnote 2, Access would carry the broadcast of question period regardless of whichever company produced it. I've been in contact with people in the Department of Education and Access, and for the coming spring at least they have said that there is a time slot available at 1:30 p.m. to carry question period live provincewide on Access regardless of who produces the program. I talked to CFRN again yesterday, and the fellow there said that it wouldn't matter to him or to CFRN whether Access carried it live or not. Their proposal would still stand, and they would still be interested in producing the program and rebroadcasting it on their station as well as on their cable station that they intend to buy.

MRS. MIROSH: Provincewide?

DR. GARRISON: Well, provincewide on Access, because that's provincewide. CFRN covers about the top half or two-thirds of the province, the northern half.

MRS. MIROSH: Yeah, so Calgary misses out again.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Except for Access.

DR. GARRISON: They're covered by Access.

MRS. MIROSH: So what you're saying is that Access is the better way to go. It's cheaper and it's . . .

DR. McNEIL: Either alternative gives you Access.

DR. GARRISON: Access is free. The government of Alberta has bought through the Department of Education . . .

MS HALEY: It's paid for.

DR. GARRISON: Yeah. They bought a block of time from Access. It's now called LTA, Learning Television Alberta. That's free time already. We're not paying for that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah, a question on that point. I read it that under Videotron it's provincewide on Access for cable subscribers. Like, in other words, if Videotron is to get it, is it more restrictive to cable subscribers?

DR. GARRISON: Because Access is accessible through cable.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Also through dishes though.

MS HALEY: It's accessible on antennas as well.

MR. WICKMAN: But just on antennas.

I think you have to watch, Mr. Chairman and committee members: not only Albertans but Canadians are becoming very, very concerned and upset with this negative marketing that these cable companies are employing -- like Videotron is -- where they add these new channels and if you don't phone in and say to cancel, you're billed. That's happened to me. I've cancelled half of mine already. I may cancel the rest in protest. A lot of people are doing that, and that's why the CFRN one has an additional bonus in that they're not

hampered by that because they would broadcast on their own stations as well.

10:25

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, that doesn't cover the whole province though, Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: No, but they would have the cable plus. There'd be the two options.

MR. BRUSEKER: But you can pick up Access. You don't have to have cable.

MS HALEY: No, you don't have to have cable. I get it on my little television set that isn't hooked up to cable.

MRS. MIROSH: So Access is free, but we have to pay Videotron or CFRN to access Access.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. It's just the production. If Videotron or CFRN is not involved, there won't be anything on Access. There has to be a producer of the program, and the question is: who's going to produce it, Videotron or CFRN?

MR. HENRY: I just want to make sure I understand. To the Clerk here. Regardless of which proposal is accepted, Access will rebroadcast in the evening? No, they won't.

DR. McNEIL: Their proposal now is to broadcast question period live.

MR. HENRY: Then whoever is doing the production would rebroadcast it in the evening?

DR. McNEIL: That's correct.

MR. HENRY: So Videotron would rebroadcast it for Videotron?

DR. McNEIL: No. Videotron would provide it live to their subscribers.

MRS. MIROSH: Only in Edmonton.

DR. McNEIL: Only in Edmonton; exactly.

DR. GARRISON: But if they're already getting it on Access, why would Videotron need to give it to them on another channel?

MR. HENRY: I'm trying to sort out in my head the evening broadcast, the rebroadcast. Can you maybe describe how that's going to happen with the two proposals? I understand that it's going to happen live regardless of which company does it. Is there a difference in terms of the evening broadcast?

DR. GARRISON: Well, I've not been able to reach anybody at Videotron to ask them how they would react to us using the live broadcast on Access, so I don't have a response from Videotron whether they would rebroadcast it or not or how that would affect their proposal.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think his question is: what is Access's position on rebroadcasting in the evening?

DR. GARRISON: When I talked to them last, the 11 o'clock time slot is not available.

MR. HENRY: So there's no rebroadcast on Access?

DR. GARRISON: It would be broadcast the one time on Access, at 1:30 p.m. I assume that if we didn't want it to be broadcast live provincewide at 1:30 on Access, then we could probably go back to them and say, "Well, we'd prefer that it be a delayed broadcast." I assume that the members would prefer to have a live broadcast instead though.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, I'm not making a motion here but putting out a feeler to members. I'm wondering if we need to table this item. If we went with Access, we don't know that Videotron's proposal would even stand. So we could accept Videotron's proposal and then not be able to do what we want to do with Access. I think there is general agreement here that we want to get this out to as many Albertans as cheaply as possible. I see some heads nodding, so I would like to make a motion that this matter be tabled. Can we revisit it tomorrow? Can we touch base with Videotron by tomorrow given that we are meeting?

DR. GARRISON: I'm expecting a call back from them any minute.

MR. HENRY: Well, given that, then I would move that we table this item and bring it back tomorrow after we know from Videotron, after they produce it, whether they will allow Access to rebroadcast it or not.

MRS. MIROSH: Before we vote on this, I'd like some clarification. I'm really quite confused here. Videotron will only carry it to Edmonton subscribers; right? So that leaves out everybody else.

DR. McNEIL: That's correct.

MRS. MIROSH: If they're just broadcasting to Edmonton, what's the point? I really resent that.

DR. McNEIL: They provide the feed to Access, who would provide it live across the province.

MRS. MIROSH: But still their own. They show it on their own at the same time?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just for clarification, though, I think members should be aware that what we're asking is: who is going to do the production of this? Put the broadcast out of your mind for a moment, because Access will broadcast it in any event.

MRS. MIROSH: Only in the afternoon at 1:30 live.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MRS. MIROSH: Well, that doesn't help the people who go home at night and who might want to pick it up later.

MR. WICKMAN: Exactly. That's why my motion's on the floor.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Before putting the vote, Ms Haley has been trying to get the floor.

MS HALEY: There are just a couple of things I'd like to say. Number one, I think a 1:30 p.m. broadcast, if we're going to talk about times, is more appropriate because I think a lot of people do

not watch it at 11 o'clock at night, period. It's too late for the vast majority of people who may well be involved in another show by then.

MRS. MIROSH: Are you kidding? That's when most of my constituents watch it.

MS HALEY: No. Lots of MLAs watch it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's the only time it's available.

MS HALEY: The question is: has anybody ever tried to find out how many Albertans have watched this show or are interested in watching it? I mean, what a concept. You know, finding out if there's even anybody interested enough to watch it.

DR. McNEIL: We have attempted to get from Videotron and Access some data on the number of viewers, and they are unable to provide us with that. They really don't have a sense of how many viewers they have.

MS HALEY: Then how can they put their rates up? How do you justify that? You're selling advertising time on a television station. It's based on some type of viewers.

DR. McNEIL: But again this has been public television, so there hasn't been advertising associated with it.

MS HALEY: I know, but it would be nice if we had some idea of how many people were watching it. How many people, in fact, are there in northern Alberta who weren't watching it because it's not available to them?

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, just so I'm clear. I appreciate the comments. I agree with Ms Haley. We're paying for the production here, not for the broadcasting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Right.

MR. HENRY: Okay. Regardless of whether one person watches or 2.6 million watch it, we're paying for the production. We're not buying advertising the way an advertiser would.

MS HALEY: If there are only 83 people watching it, maybe we shouldn't spend the \$53,000.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, we do have a tabling motion on the floor, and we should vote on it, but before we do, could we add to that further information on the CFRN proposal for tomorrow or whenever we can get back to this with all of the information? In rebroadcasting are they, CFRN, going to sell advertising during the broadcast, or is it going to be an uninterrupted hour and a half? I don't know when they're going to find an hour and a half in their broadcasting without one advertisement. So if they're going to be using it for their profit, then perhaps we should revisit the cost of the taping.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for the question on the tabling motion, that this matter be tabled until further information is available? Is that a fair statement of the motion?

MRS. MIROSH: Tabling for tomorrow only.

MR. STELMACH: Until such time as all the evidence is presented. I mean, there's no sense in discussing it if we don't get the information tomorrow.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll have some information for tomorrow. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

DR. McNEIL: We probably want to leave this budget, but before we do that, there's one other item here on the same page, and that's Access radio coverage. We've been advised, because of the privatization of the CKUA radio network, to continue coverage. The sponsorship requirement would be \$100 per day, in effect, or \$7,500, and that's what that Access radio coverage of \$7,500 is there for. At this point, that's for information. It probably may be best to revisit this whole budget tomorrow when we get that other information.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Agreed. Okay.

So we will revert now to public information, tab 4. Dr. Garrison will introduce the subject.

10:35

DR. GARRISON: Okay. As you can see, the '95-96 budget proposal for the public information branch shows a decrease of 4.2 percent from last year. There's about a 4 percent increase under salaries, wages, and benefits and about a 13 percent decrease under supplies and services.

Just briefly, we've got a decrease under nonpermanent salaries. We had a turnover in one position. We had one position that became a job-share position, and half of that position moved into wages. The wages are up about 12 percent. One reason for that is that the console operator for *Hansard* used to be a contractor, and now we've got wage people doing that. One of them is here, as a matter of fact. We've also got some increases to reflect the demand for tour guide services. There have been some adjustments made in the *Hansard* wage areas to reflect the actual expenses over the last year now that we've had a little bit of experience with the new sitting hours and the new subcommittees of supply and that kind of thing.

In supplies and services under travel one thing I might note is that we had in the budget for several years money to go to teachers' conventions to talk about our services that are available both to students who come to the building here and who receive our materials or to teachers who want to teach about the Legislature in their classrooms. We've decided that that really isn't a good use of our time and our money, so what we're doing instead is we're going to be targeting primarily social studies teachers to get from them an idea of how they use our materials, how our materials can be improved, and exactly what they would like from us.

There's an increase a little later on, on another page, in photocopy charges: 18.6 percent. A lot of that is due to the fact that our budget previously was based on a certain percentage of our sitting days having night sittings, and now that percentage has gone up considerably since parliamentary reform.

Under professional, technical, and labour, which is 712K, there's a decrease of 23.6 percent. That's broken down in a number of different ways. A lot of it has to do with economies in printing, because we're getting really good printing prices, and part of it is because we've trimmed our quantities a little bit more. One item you can see, the last item on page 12, the Budget Address and estimates. That item has gone down from \$41,000 to \$25,000. A lot of that is because the production of that, the typesetting of it anyway, has moved in-house at Treasury, so our costs have gone down in relation to that.

Okay. The last item that I should note is under materials and supplies. We've increased the amount for gift shop inventory. We actually had that budgeted under 712K before. We had \$20,000 budgeted in the current year, and we're budgeting \$30,000 for next year. That's simply based on our first year's experience at running a gift shop. As you can see from the very last page, we are also projecting that our revenues in the gift shop will be about \$45,000 next year compared to the \$30,000 that we estimated for the current year. I should mention that our actual sales in the gift shop to date are about \$37,000 for the current year, and we just opened the shop -- well, the official opening was the end of June, but we were actually open at the beginning of June. So for a little over half a year, the busiest half of the year of course, we've taken in \$37,000.

I should also mention that under *Hansard* subscriptions the numbers have gone up slightly. We had anticipated last year that with electronic subscriptions we would be able to decrease the number of print subscriptions and maybe we'd take in a bit more money that way. We've only got 40 paid electronic subscriptions. It's not a real big seller. The biggest users, of course, our primary market for this is internal: all the members, the researchers, and people within government circles who use this. Most of them have free access to it.

So that's basically the overview. I'd be willing to answer any questions, of course, if members have some.

MR. BRASSARD: I have a comment and a question. First I'd like to compliment you on the changes to the gift shop and the procedure for dealing with visitor services where they are starting the tours from the gift shop. I think that's working out excellently. Obviously you're on the right track.

There's just one small item on page 13, the MLA congratulatory scrolls. With the day and age of computerization could we not come up with some format and paper material that these scrolls could be generated on individual computers as opposed to originating from one central source? It would cut down on handling a great deal. The quality that we're getting on some of the scrolls is just excellent. Affixing a seal to a fairly plain piece of scroll paper really makes it very authentic looking. Has any thought been given to that type of thing?

DR. GARRISON: Yes. As a matter of fact, what we were thinking of in order to achieve our further reduction for the third year of our three-year reduction plan was to do pretty close to exactly that. I should mention that the blank scrolls themselves really only cost about 12 cents to produce.

MR. BRASSARD: It's the handling though; is it not?

DR. GARRISON: Yeah, there is a fair bit.

MR. BRASSARD: Calligraphy work and so on?

DR. GARRISON: There's no calligraphy done. It's all done on laser printers right now.

As a matter of fact, the budget for this item just a couple of years ago was I think about \$20,000 or \$22,000. So it's gone down considerably. I've got a breakdown here of what all of the things are that go into the scrolls when the package is sent out. The biggest single item is actually the pin. The pin costs \$1.30 per item. The total cost of a birthday scroll, for example, is \$1.90, and \$1.30 of that is the pin.

MR. BRASSARD: Oh, I see. So there isn't a great deal of savings to be achieved.

DR. GARRISON: Not really. There's some, of course, but not a large amount.

MR. HENRY: Given the times we're living in, has any thought been given to frankly scrapping the pin if that's a major cost? Certainly I know a number of MLA offices, mine being one of them, that have decided that generally they're not purchasing pins for redistribution. If the scroll itself costs 12 cents and you're talking over a dollar more for the pin, perhaps it's more appropriate to leave the pin off or leave it to the discretion of the individual MLA. Frankly, in my office we've distributed several scrolls without pins.

10:45

DR. GARRISON: Yeah. It's funny you should mention that, but that also is part of the three-year plan. I'm glad you agree with our thinking on that. We wanted to move into that gradually, but of course if the committee wants to move it ahead faster, that's fine with me.

MRS. MIROSH: Two questions, Mr. Chairman. With regards to recorders, the change in cost there, a 12 percent increase, does it cost more to have people on wages than it would to contract it out? Does that reflect that 12 percent increase on page 1?

DR. GARRISON: You're talking about the wage increase?

MRS. MIROSH: You said that you've gone in-house to wage for recording as opposed to contracting it out. Why have we not continued to contract it out?

DR. GARRISON: Well, the console operator was a wage person on and off. He did a lot of work as his own company as well, and it was simply a matter of convenience for him I guess. It was to his advantage to be on a fee-for-service contract.

MRS. MIROSH: You only need someone at the time of sitting.

DR. GARRISON: That's right.

MRS. MIROSH: But then when you have wage earners, they're here all the time when we're . . .

DR. GARRISON: No. They're only here when we need them.

MRS. MIROSH: But that cost comparison is a 12 percent increase.

DR. GARRISON: No. The 12 percent increase is basically due to a number of factors. You're referring to page 4.

MRS. MIROSH: I was looking at page 1, third line.

DR. GARRISON: But it's the wage item.

MRS. MIROSH: Yeah, the wage item.

DR. GARRISON: The detail is on page 4. Toward that 12 percent you can see the reservations co-ordinator, \$11,800. That's half of a nonpermanent position that's now a job share. So that's really not an increase in anybody's work hours; it's not an increase in person-years or anything like that. I mentioned the console operator. That's about \$14,000. I've got that now under input editors. See, there's an increase there from \$87,000 to \$108,000. If you add the \$14,000 onto the \$87,000, that makes it \$101,000, and you're looking at a difference of \$7,000. But that \$7,000 is more than balanced out by

the decrease under copy editors just above. See, it's just basically an adjustment among the different types of work that are done and how the money splits out over the year. So the increase in wages is attributable primarily to a number of transfers from other areas.

MRS. MIROSH: I see.

My second question is with regards to page 13 on MLA school photos. I thought we the MLAs were paying for that out of our administration budget.

DR. GARRISON: You pay for half of it . . .

MRS. MIROSH: Just half?

DR. GARRISON: . . . and we pay for the other half.

MRS. MIROSH: So when we order them, why don't we just pay for it all? Some MLAs have a lot more schools than others, and I'm subsidizing them.

DR. GARRISON: Well, that's a good point. You may recall last year, when we first submitted our three-year plan, that this was one item we projected we would need to drop in order to meet our targets over the three years, and if things go on as they have been, I would see this having to be dropped next year.

MRS. MIROSH: Yeah. I'll support that. I like them, but . . .

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, this question has probably been answered before in previous years, but just to refresh my memory, when we look at the management pension as opposed to the nonmanagement pension and the contributions or the percentage that is used, the management pensions are at 10.25 percent; nonmanagement pensions are at 6.5. Does that reflect a higher employer portion of contribution, or does it reflect an enhanced pension plan?

DR. McNEIL: Well, I guess both. The management pension plan benefit is higher than the bargaining unit pension plan benefit, but the contribution rates on the part of both the employee and the employer are higher as a result.

MR. WICKMAN: But in proportion they're the same.

DR. McNEIL: Yes. In terms of the . . .

MR. WICKMAN: The employee/employer share.

DR. McNEIL: They're both 50-50, but because of the higher benefit paid out of the management plan, both the employer and the employee have to contribute more.

MR. WICKMAN: That's fine. That answered my question. I was concerned with the proportion of the percentage of the contribution.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Further discussion or questions or comments?

MR. BRASSARD: I move adoption of this budget as presented.

MR. CHAIRMAN: For a net expenditure of \$1,261,671.

MR. BRASSARD: That's right, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

There's been a suggestion that we might break for 10 minutes. We've been working rather diligently for the last over two hours. It's up to the feelings of the committee. Would the committee like a little break?

HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No? Let's just continue on.

Thank you very much, Dr. Garrison.

DR. GARRISON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Next will be the Legislature Library. I'd like to welcome Mr. Buhr. It's nice to have you with us, Lorne. Happy New Year. If you'd like to say something to get the committee off on the right foot.

MR. BUHR: If we could again, as I and my predecessor have done in other years, have this table given to the members here. It gives you an idea how we rate with other Legislature Libraries and the Library of Parliament. In looking through our material, you would see very few changes from last year in the various elements. We're cutting close to \$30,000 this year for an overall cut of 2.7 percent from last year, and with our overall targets now we have reached 18.65 percent of our 20 percent cut. In the manpower costs we are \$19,000 and a little bit lower than the current year. That's a 2.9 percent reduction. In supply and services we'll be \$10,000 lower, which is a cut of 5.2 percent. In our fixed assets, we are keeping that unchanged.

As you go through, you will notice some minor changes on various pages, but a lot of them are the same. The overall effect I think is what we were asked to do, and we are able to live within that. Some of our work actually is also funded via Bill Gano's area, for which we're very thankful. In this past year we were able to get our on-line catalogue up in April. Some of our costs are reflected in Bill's presentation to you later.

I'll leave it at that, and if there are some questions, I'll be happy to address those.

MS HALEY: The Library was doing a survey earlier in the year. What were the results of that survey?

MR. BUHR: The results of that survey are being tabulated right now. The work to prepare for this and the Christmas break in between have kind of caught us a little short on that. I have about half of it done, and it should be ready within a month. Certainly members will then be aware of what the survey results were. They generally were very positive. The kinds of things that we have been emphasizing seem to be the things that members appreciate: timeliness of service, accuracy, and knowledgeable staff. These are the things that were marked highest.

MS HALEY: Well, the only reason that I raise it is because this budget is a status quo type of a budget. It's not forecasting the concept of moving the Library out of the building or anything like that. It's just this is where it will be.

MR. BUHR: And there's no indication from the survey that that is something we should be doing.

MS HALEY: Good.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, I've had occasion to use the Library quite a bit in the last year, and as well I've referred several of my constituents to the Library. I just want to make a comment. I'm also a frequent user of other libraries in the city, and the services from this library are top-notch in my experience. My compliments to all the Library staff. They've been very good. With that, I'd just like to put a motion on the floor that the committee accept the figure of \$824,279 as presented.

10:55

MRS. MIROSH: You sound like Pam Barrett.

MR. HENRY: Oh, no. I'd like to debate on that last comment, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Before calling for the question, Mr. Bruseker.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just one brief question with respect to the revenue side. I notice they're down because of reduced traffic. Who gets charged ultimately for the services of library loans, photocopying, subscriptions? Is it the individual user, or is it sometimes another library?

MR. BUHR: The interlibrary loan traffic. That's other libraries within the government. They contract with us to do work for them to the university. Photocopying is free to Members of the Legislative Assembly and to government departments, but anybody else pays for photocopying. So that's where that money comes in.

MR. BRUSEKER: What about the subscriptions? There's a third entry.

MR. BUHR: Okay. We produce a number of directories out of our offices in the Annex which are primarily for other libraries, and that includes government libraries, and they pay a subscription fee for those.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour, please indicate. Opposed? Carried. We've dealt with 6. Number 7: Information Systems Services.

Well, Louise. Nice to see you. Happy New Year.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Thank you. The same to you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Gano.

MR. GANO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As the Clerk noted in the overview, there is a 2.2 percent increase in information systems requested. This is due mainly to merit increases in salary, where there is a 21.8 percent increase, and that is due mainly to a transfer from supplies and services into salaries and wages. Last year we had one contract employee working for us. Our three-year plan last year showed that that employee would move to wages this year, and that's what's happening under that category.

In supplies and services there is a 25.9 percent decrease, and again this is due to that transfer from supplies and services to salaries and wages. Under purchase of fixed assets there is no change there. However, there is a note there called "administrative transfer," and

this is where the \$85,200 is being placed. It is being transferred from Treasury. That was discussed earlier. Although this \$85,200 is not shown as part of that 2.2 percent increase, it is included within this budget.

There are a couple of specific points that I would like to note, and one of course is the \$85,200. That is shown on page 12 as an administrative transfer. Consequently, the budget on page 12 for data processing services increases quite dramatically because of that transfer.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So this budget is based on what you feel is going to be the actual cost of that and not the Treasury's estimate.

MR. GANO: That's correct. As the Clerk indicated earlier, Treasury was proposing a transfer of \$66,000. Based on our calculations we suggest that it should be closer to the \$85,000 mark simply because there is a discrepancy.

MRS. MIROSH: But that might not happen; right?

MR. GANO: Potentially, yeah.

DR. McNEIL: You still have to budget for that amount though. It's the bottom line.

MR. GANO: The bottom line is that we are going to end up having to pay for this service in some manner, and so this is the number that we're proposing at this point.

Okay. Those are the basic comments I have on my budget. If there any other specific questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Bruseker.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just going back to the \$85,000, earlier on Ms Haley asked a question that we were doing much of the work already anyway and that we're almost double-accounting for this. Why is that?

MR. GANO: The system that Treasury uses for payroll and for accounts payable does not fit very well with the operation of the Legislative Assembly. As a result, a lot of the calculations need to be done manually by personnel and by the financial management area in order to get the records to the state that they can then be submitted to the system. In other words, the system does not accept some of the transactions that we are required to process, so we have to kind of manipulate them to get them to that state.

MR. BRUSEKER: So much of this \$85,000, then, would be for additional staff that are required.

MR. GANO: No. That's just processing charges that this new private company is going to charge us, and a lot of it is because we fall outside of the category which is called basic services and fall into another area that they call discretionary charges. Those discretionary charges will be quite significant for the Legislative Assembly Office, because we do not fall under a lot of these basic services that are being offered.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, I've heard the explanation twice now, Mr. Chairman, and I'm afraid it still doesn't make a whole heck of a lot of sense to me. It seems to be a rather silly expenditure.

MS HALEY: So we'll try and fix it.

DR. McNEIL: I think we've identified this. I guess in our long-range plans something we want to do is develop our own systems in these two areas. I think what this has done is really focused that need to a shorter objective, if you will.

MR. GANO: Just as an extension to that, we currently have a project under way where someone is reviewing the alternatives to providing these services. Certainly the alternatives that come to mind right off the bat are, you know, the status quo, go with a new private company, but certainly another more attractive alternative appears to be to move the services in-house and be able to provide us with better reports than what we've been able to get to this point, and the processing would be a lot quicker.

MR. BRASSARD: Just a comment, Mr. Chairman. Recognizing the rapidity of change in the computer application of the day, I'd like to compliment Mr. Gano and his staff on his ability to keep abreast of these changes and implement them throughout the system. We've just upgraded all the computers from 5.1 to 6, which is in itself a very significant task. So I would just like to echo the comments that I've received from my staff on the co-operation we've received, and I think you're doing an excellent job. Thank you.

MR. GANO: Thank you very much.

MRS. MIROSH: Just a general comment, Mr. Chairman, with regards to the so-called information highway system and the ongoing changes we recognize throughout government. Have we allowed anything in our budget for those specific changes? There are changes now where you can access libraries just about anywhere in the world, but we don't have that capability with our current equipment. With that ongoing change are we keeping up, or have we allowed anything in our budget for that flexibility to change?

MR. GANO: Yes. Another one of the projects that is under way right now is access to the quote, Internet information highway. We have had meetings with Public Works, Supply and Services. We have included those costs in our fixed asset budget to allow us to provide that capability early in the next fiscal year.

11:05

MRS. MIROSH: You know, I would hate to see us fall behind. Right throughout government we're already so far behind everybody else in keeping up with Internet and Freenet and all those network systems that are out there that we should be able to access. We can't with our current equipment.

MR. GANO: Well, you can with the equipment that you have on your desk, but there is another link required. That's what we are anticipating implementing early in April.

MRS. MIROSH: Well, we've got some firms who are willing to let us use some of their software and hardware as a testing, so this might be a good place to do it for free.

MR. GANO: We can take a look at that, I guess.

DR. McNEIL: I just want to add further to that point. The committee four or five years ago adopted a budget strategy that we would budget for ongoing maintenance and upgrading of software and hardware. In terms of Mr. Brassard's comments, I think the area's been able to do that because of that strategy the committee adopted so that we wouldn't every five years have to throw everything out and spend a whole pile of money and bring a whole

bunch of new stuff in. We've been able to manage the process so that we've been continually upgrading. I think we've tried to stay on the leading edge and, as some people say, not on the bleeding edge. So we haven't made any commitments to technology too early and haven't made any big mistakes that I'm aware where we've committed a lot of resources and then found out that this doesn't work. I think that's the strategy we adopted. So we've tried to stay current but not necessarily leading the pack.

MR. BRASSARD: I move acceptance of the budget forecasted at \$644,264.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any further questions or comments before calling for the question? Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Gano.

The next item is number 8, Legislature committees. We have the Clerk Assistant with us. Welcome.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Happy New Year to you all too. You may have read the overview regarding the Legislature committees which shows a projected increase of 5.8 percent. The reason for this, of course, is because of the establishment of the Information and Privacy Commissioner committee. The committee has just begun its deliberations and has not yet approved a budget, so everything regarding that committee related to estimates has been on a guess basis. We expect the committee to continue into the 1995-96 budget year.

Otherwise, of the 83 committee meetings that were held last year, you will see from the forecast that the committees were very frugal and have come in way under budget in spite of the three select special committees that were struck during the year, being the Auditor General, the Chief Electoral Officer, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner committees.

Corinne just handed me a note. She was speaking this morning to Mrs. Abdurahman, who is chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Mrs. Abdurahman had intended to compile a memo regarding the committee's 1995-96 budget estimates, but she thought the meeting of Members' Services was not till tomorrow, so the memo did not get drafted. She has three points to make. If there are any clarifications needed, I may have to ask Corinne. Mrs. Abdurahman would like to observe that she would like the opportunity to discuss her thoughts on the committee with the Members' Services Committee. She feels that the budget for the Public Accounts Committee has been seriously reduced without addressing the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees' guidelines. The standing committee on parliamentary reform has not yet addressed the role and mandate of the Public Accounts Committee, as had been directed in the committee's mandate.

Otherwise the standing committees, of the five that are active, are all showing a decrease, and of the three that are inactive, of course we cannot budget anything, because no issues have been referred to those committees.

If you have any questions, I'll be more than happy to answer them.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Chairman, are we inviting chairs of all of these committees to come forward or just as necessary?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I don't think we've issued a general invitation. I think it's just as required.

MRS. MIROSH: Mrs. Abdurahman wants to make a special presentation to this committee.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: That's my understanding as of this morning. It was the first time we've heard of it, so we couldn't address the concerns of the committee.

MRS. MIROSH: Well, I would like to make a comment on that. If the chair is making a presentation reflecting what the committee as a whole wants, I accept that, but if it's just the chair as a chair without the committee input or recommendations, then no.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Is there a problem with the amount that's being left for Public Accounts?

MRS. DACYSHYN: I don't particularly want to speak for Mrs. Abdurahman, but what she said to me on the phone about half an hour ago was that she feels that the budget has been seriously reduced without addressing the Canadian Council of Public Accounts' guidelines. A lot of you are probably not familiar with those guidelines. My understanding of the guidelines as I learned them over the past few years is that other public accounts committees across Canada have budgets for researchers. Some of them may meet outside of session or for longer periods of time than our Alberta committee does meet. I believe that's what Mrs. Abdurahman is talking about.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Just a moment. Are you suggesting now that that committee would become an entity of its own with employing or buying research and whatnot, and that's what the money would be going toward? Is that your understanding, Corinne? I know it's sort of unfair to be asking you, because you didn't put the proposal forward.

MRS. DACYSHYN: From past discussions in the Public Accounts Committee that is, I think, what Mrs. Abdurahman is talking about.

MS HALEY: Well, just as a member of the august body of Public Accounts, as awesome as it is, there has been no discussion with committee members as to enhancing the role or changing the role or expanding our role outside of the current system. So I as a member of that committee want to tell you that there's been no discussion with me or information coming to me about this, and I would have a really hard time discussing it in any other way than a bare-bones budget at this point.

MR. BRASSARD: Basically my point has been made by Ms Haley and Mrs. Mirosh. Mr. Chairman, I think what we're really discussing here is a change of format and operation for the Public Accounts Committee, and I don't think that that's the prerogative of this budget consideration. I believe that we have to pass the budget based on the status quo, and if indeed we're going to change the nature and scope of the committee, then that takes a separate discussion altogether. So I think the discussion we're having is rather redundant.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm going to move in respect of the request that has been made that this be tabled till tomorrow to allow the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee to make her views known.

MS HALEY: By a memo.

MR. WICKMAN: I didn't say that, but if you want to make an amendment, you can make an amendment.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: I just wanted to mention that the budget for this committee has been drafted and prepared for presentation to this committee based on the past practice for attendance at the conference. As you know, members do not get paid for attending a meeting during session. So what you mentioned about the change in format of course is quite correct. This is how the budget was compiled.

MR. BRUSEKER: That change in format I think is an issue before the Parliamentary Reform Committee, Mr. Chairman, of which you and I are members.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: That's right.

MR. HENRY: I appreciate the comments being made, Mr. Chairman. As I understand it, what Mrs. Abdurahman wanted to do was to present a memo here, and that's in keeping with the Member for Three Hills-Airdrie. I understand the role of this committee compared to the role of the Parliamentary Reform Committee, et cetera, but if she does have budget concerns, we should hear them. It wouldn't hurt to table this one item until tomorrow so that she does have that time. In defence of that, I might point out that I just received these budget estimates yesterday afternoon, actually midafternoon. I did spend some time yesterday evening talking on the phone with some of my colleagues about some of the items, and I wasn't able to get to that particular phone call. I would not have been aware of the reduction. Again, there may be other factors as well. As you know, the Liberal Party has a new leader since the last session.

11:15

MS HALEY: Oh, really. We didn't know.

MR. HENRY: Oh, you didn't know that. As a result, I'm not predicting anything, but there may be changes proposed in terms of committees and whatnot. I'm not sure whether that's going to happen or not. I haven't had a chance to consult with our leader, but there may be a new Public Accounts chairman who would want to collect the per diem salary for that. Perhaps we should check those facts. I'm prepared to do some of that and then come back tomorrow. So I move that we table this one item until tomorrow.

MR. BRUSEKER: Percy's already done that.

MR. HENRY: Okay. Sorry.

MRS. MIROSH: Before we move the tabling, though . . .

MR. HENRY: It's been moved.

MRS. MIROSH: We haven't passed it yet though.

MR. HENRY: No.

MRS. MIROSH: Before we pass it, with regards to the policy of Public Accounts, we made a policy statement at Members' Services from what I understand -- and maybe we should bring this up for clarification -- that when we're in session there'd be no moneys or remuneration for any committees, not just Public Accounts. While we're in session. Isn't that true?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: All of the committees. That's right. That's correct.

MRS. MIROSH: Well, that policy still stands, so if there is a new Public Accounts chair that would reflect . . .

MS HALEY: But the chair's salary is different from the per diem. That's his point. She doesn't collect it.

MRS. MIROSH: And that chair's salary is not reflected in this budget?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: The current chairman of the Public Accounts Committee has written and indicated that she did not wish to collect the chairman's salary throughout the year.

MRS. MIROSH: That's reflected in this budget?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Yes, it is in this budget. Should the chairman change and the new chairman wish to collect and is perfectly entitled to receive this amount, then this committee budget would not have adequate funds to provide for that based on the current budget that's before you.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I'm really, really distressed that that money has been taken out of there. A chairman can choose to refuse it, but it should appear in the budget and would appear as a savings. So I would be totally in favour of this being tabled with the provision that that number come back revised to reflect what a chair is entitled to. If at some point this committee determines that that chairmanship is nonremunerated, that's the only time when we start removing the salary from there. That was a personal choice that she's perfectly entitled to make. So I move that we agree to table and it's brought back.

MS HALEY: Stan, that is impacted throughout this section, not just that one account.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Right. We have a number of committee chairmen who have indicated that they wish to be paid only during the months that certain committees meet.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Well, if we could revisit this whole thing. It has to be reflected. You could put a footnote that those are anticipated savings. Until this committee takes those wages out or adjusts it, they have to be budgeted items. Now, they can be savings at year-end somehow. What happens in this February session if we have a significant number of changes to the people on these committees? Maybe some of those chairs are going to change their minds and say, "Hey, I'm entitled to this here, and I want it." Then we're going to have a problem in the budget. However, we don't have a problem in the budget if at year-end the members choose not to. Then you can do whatever was proper with the dollars in there. That, I guess, is where I'm coming from.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, there's a tabling motion before the committee. Is the committee ready for the question? All those in favour of the motion proposed by Mr. Wickman, please indicate.

MR. HENRY: Just a question, Mr. Chairman. Are we tabling the entire budget for this section or just that one line?

MRS. MIROSH: The whole budget, because it reflects every single committee chair.

MR. WICKMAN: My motion was Public Accounts.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Parts of this have already been approved. The chair would suggest that this matter be . . .

MRS. MIROSH: None of it has.

MR. BRUSEKER: None of section 8.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, I thought there were some of them.

MRS. MIROSH: Can we amend the motion?

MR. BRUSEKER: Do you want to table all of section 8?

MRS. MIROSH: Yeah.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the motion that this number 8 be tabled till tomorrow?

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, my motion, though, for tabling was a little different in the sense that my motion was to allow the chairman to make a presentation to make her views known.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That was by memo or orally?

MR. WICKMAN: Do it by memo. It doesn't matter to me. Just to provide her the opportunity.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Memo. Okay.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, a friendly amendment then. That's fine. Then I'll have it also apply to those other committee budgets in which the same adjustments are required.

MRS. MIROSH: So all the chairs would have the opportunity to make a presentation if they so choose.

MS HALEY: No. We're just talking about the budget, not lines.

MRS. MIROSH: I thought we were talking about having the chair of Public Accounts coming here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, no. It's by memo. It's not oral.

MR. WOLOSHYN: There are two issues here, if I may, Mr. Chairman. The first issue . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: And the other issue is, as Mr. Woloshyn is going to say, that other aspects of this budget that involve chairman remuneration should be held.

MR. WOLOSHYN: That's correct. That's one issue. The other issue is Mrs. Abdurahman's desires -- whatever they may be -- that we're going to get a memo on tomorrow to see what changes are in there.

MR. WICKMAN: You see, if you look through these very quickly -- standing committee: there's no problem there; right? I'm sure the Clerk could point out rapidly which ones would be a problem.

MRS. MIROSH: We're just tabling it, though, till tomorrow. We can have a better look at it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee in favour of this motion? Please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm going to move we adjourn now until 1 o'clock.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There's a motion that the committee now adjourn until 1 p.m. this afternoon. Those in favour, please indicate.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

[The committee adjourned from 11:23 a.m. to 1:01 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: While we're going through this mechanical procedure that appears to be going on with our material, could the chair raise the matter of the willingness of the committee or the interest of the committee in perhaps gathering at the interpretive centre at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning to have a look there and then also to perhaps invite Videotron and CFRN to maybe come about 10 o'clock to talk about their wares regarding the broadcasting of question period? Would there be interest in proceeding that way? If there is, then we can ask these people to be here at 10. We would like to know if whoever is doing it is well motivated or just what's motivating them to express their interest in this.

MR. BRASSARD: I think that's a good idea, and I would so move, if you're looking for a motion, to meet at the interpretive centre at 9 and meet with the media people at 10 and get this resolved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Is there any objection to that by any member? Well, hearing no objection, so ordered.

MR. WICKMAN: Are you inviting both?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Both.

MR. WICKMAN: And what time is the meeting at? I've done those tours so many times, Dave, I'm probably ready to be put on staff at some of those places. I'm up and down so often.

DR. McNEIL: Are you going to volunteer? Well, the meeting would be here at 10.

MR. WICKMAN: Ten. Okay. That's when we're going to hear from these companies?

DR. McNEIL: Yes.

MR. WICKMAN: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: While this is continuing, instead of going back to item 8, perhaps we could go to item 9, MLA administration, and maybe we could open that up for discussion.

DR. McNEIL: Bill will review that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. I'd ask Mr. Gano to give us the overview.

MR. GANO: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With MLA administration it's basically a status quo type budget. It does show a .1 percent decrease there. This is as a result of what David had

mentioned earlier, that we are transferring some of the supplies and services out of MLA admin to each of the managers so that they can then account for it more within their own budgets.

A couple of points to note. Number one, there is an administrative transfer of \$16,000 in the MLA administration budget. This is to account for the \$16,000 risk management transfer that Treasury is implementing this year.

A couple of other points. If you go to page 8 of the budget where we talk about photocopiers and whatnot, we have shown it as just straight across, no increase. However, we did want to bring to the attention of the committee that there has been an increasing number of requests lately for improved photocopiers within the constituency offices. Recently we did a survey which again indicated that there was increasing concern over the aging photocopiers in some of the constituency offices, so the committee may want to entertain an increase in this particular area. We do have some numbers here which basically would allow us to replace about 20 of the photocopiers in the constituency offices. There are, of course, different levels of photocopiers that you can put in depending upon usage and the different bells and whistles that you want on the photocopiers. We're suggesting that you may want to look at a \$30,000 increase in this area, which would let us replace approximately 20 machines with a fairly low-level machine that does allow duplexing; in other words, you can do photocopying on both sides of the paper. With this equipment that would satisfy most of the needs of the constituency offices.

MR. BRASSARD: Meld copies as well?

MR. GANO: That's right.

MR. BRASSARD: Can I just ask approximately what dollar value we're looking at per machine to upgrade it to a multicopy, duplex machine? Just a ballpark figure.

MR. GANO: Of course, like I say, there are different levels that you can get, but we're looking at an annual charge of about \$1,356 per machine.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Stelmach.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Are there some constituency offices presently that do have machines with the same capability that you want to bring these other machines up to?

MR. GANO: Yes, we have managed over the last few years to upgrade some of the offices. The budget level hasn't allowed us to basically keep up with the upgrades.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, I think I missed part of the explanation. Did I hear right that you were looking for an additional \$30,000 to achieve this? If so, where is that in the budget?

MR. GANO: We haven't put it in the budget. We're simply suggesting that you may want to consider that as a committee. If it was placed in the budget, it would be placed on page 8.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Chairman, I recall from our discussions during the last go-around that when there were unused portions of dollars in the residency allowance or whatever it's used for -- I'd like to see it restored in next year's budget, as we did in the previous budget in terms of postage, but we can have a smaller amount. Possibly we could find some dollars from there to upgrade

those constituency offices that need that upgrading. My constituency office has probably requested an upgrade on six different occasions, because we have the Xerox guy down there about once a week. I'm sure that throughout the province there would be many, many constituency offices that have photocopying equipment that is outdated, that doesn't fulfill the need for that particular office.

MR. GANO: Yes, that's right, and that's why we're suggesting 20. We have had actual requests from about 15 offices for upgrades. When we went through and kind of looked at the equipment that was in the offices, there were actually 20 offices whose equipment is five years or older. They really do require an upgrade because the maintenance on those machines is now beginning to be more than what it would be to get a new piece of equipment.

MR. WICKMAN: But my question, Mr. Chairman, was to David. Are there dollars in another portion of the budget that it could be transferred from?

1:11

DR. McNEIL: Well, the problem here is that these are ongoing costs. You might have savings in one area of the budget this year, but that may not necessarily be the same savings that could be realized next year because of a longer session or more travel on the part of members or whatever.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, so that I understand, the suggested \$30,000 figure is not a capital cost; it's a leasing cost that would then continue on.

MR. GANO: That's correct.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Were you finished with the overview?

MR. GANO: Well, if there are no further questions on that, we can go on to the next.

MS HALEY: Just a second.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, sorry.
Mr. Woloshyn.

MR. WOLOSHYN: What does the \$72,000 in there currently do?

MR. GANO: It rents the existing equipment that is there now.

MR. WOLOSHYN: So then for improving some 20-odd machines, we would be asking for another \$30,000 on top of this to rent equipment.

MR. GANO: That's right.

MR. WOLOSHYN: How many of the machines are upgraded now? In other words, how many do we have at this new high standard out of the 80 offices?

MR. GANO: I'll defer that to Jacqueline. She might have a better idea.

MS BREAULT: I don't have an exact number, but I would think there are no more than 10 to 12 offices.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Okay. So then we would have at the end of this year an additional \$30,000 in 30 offices. Then we'd come back with a request next year for another 20 machines and another \$30,000. So by the time we've got all these machines upgraded on a leasable basis, we're looking at \$150,000, \$160,000 in leasing for copiers.

MR. GANO: Potentially, yes.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Holy mackerel. I was afraid of that. So this would be the thin edge of the wedge. We've got 10 machines out there now that are luxury models. Just so I have this clear in my head, for 80 constituencies we're going to pay \$72,000 at current levels. To upgrade another 20 constituencies to a higher level would be an additional \$30,000. Is that correct?

MR. GANO: That's right.

MR. WOLOSHYN: So then that would leave us with another \$90,000 to do them all. I won't comment any further.

MRS. MIROSH: They aren't all done at the same time.

MR. BRASSARD: It's a leasing cost so the cost continues.

MRS. MIROSH: Are you saying that we should buy them instead?

MR. WOLOSHYN: No, I'm not. I'm saying that we should have a good look at copiers because if we approve this \$30,000 now, then we'll have 30 out of 80 constituency offices with the high-quality machines and the request for another 50 to go at the rate of \$1,500 per machine, if it stays at this leasing level. I would be hard pressed in my own mind to start looking at \$2,000 leasing per constituency office for copier machines fairly soon. Maybe we should be looking at centralized copying. I don't know. Just a thought.

MRS. MIROSH: Centralized copying? Are you kidding?

MR. HENRY: I was just going to say that I'd be glad to do Stony Plain's copying in downtown Edmonton anytime.

MR. STELMACH: Obviously \$72,000 . . .

MS HALEY: Must cover something.

MR. STELMACH: Yeah. It must be buying us something.

These machines are getting fairly old. Now, does this reflect the maintenance costs?

MR. GANO: Yes, it does.

MR. STELMACH: So that's leasing and maintenance.

MR. GANO: Right.

MR. STELMACH: So if we take the maintenance out . . .

MR. GANO: Just to clarify, the leasing costs normally cover maintenance.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But after a certain period the lease is paid and then you have a maintenance contract.

MR. GANO: Yeah. Then you would have to buy maintenance separately at that point.

MR. STELMACH: So can we not put into effect a capital replacement when these leases expire and we're going to be paying X amount of dollars to repair these machines? I would suggest that in a few years some of these would be totally obsolete.

MR. GANO: That's right. That's the point that we're reaching on a number of machines now.

Jacqueline, did you have a comment?

MS BREAULT: I just wanted to make one comment. When I was doing my analysis, I worked off of, I believe, the most current Alberta Public Works, Supply and Services standing offer for photocopiers. Right now with the list of vendors that they have, they make arrangements for a three-year rental. Within that rental is a base cost and a per copy cost, and that's machine and maintenance. So there shouldn't be, aside from that rental cost, any costs above and beyond that. Most vendors will extend that contract if at the end of three years we decide we still like the machines, they're still working properly, and you as individual members like the features that the machine has. There's probably no reason why we couldn't continue at the same rate or with a minimal adjustment upwards, but that's, I guess, at the vagaries of the economy in three years' time.

MR. GANO: Okay. If there are no other questions on that point, we'll move to page 9 of the budget. At December's meeting a request was made for the administration to look at the budget impact if fax lines were included as part of the budget for constituency offices. The numbers shown here do not include fax lines. They're just a status quo. If fax lines were to be included, that would increase the budget by \$34,320.

MR. BRUSEKER: What's the MLA equipment rental on this page?

MS BREAULT: That's the telephone equipment.

MR. BRUSEKER: Two hundred grand just for phones?

MR. GANO: Yeah.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, this budget reflects how many constituencies using a third line in their homes?

MS BREAULT: I don't have the number off the top of my head, but I would think two-thirds. I can certainly find out.

MR. WICKMAN: I'd like to see us look at the option of one choosing to forgo that government line at home and just using their own phone, of having that third line in the constituency office, which could be used for the fax.

MRS. MIROSH: No way.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, certainly, because everybody has a phone at home in any case.

MR. GANO: Okay. Those were the two basic points in MLA admin. As indicated, the budget as proposed is status quo, no changes. If there are any other questions, I'd certainly be glad to address them.

MRS. MIROSH: What are you doing? Asking us to support the budget status quo with the additional \$30,000 for copying machines?

MR. GANO: Basically, we presented all the information to you. If we maintain it the way we are, then there will be a number of offices that are not upgraded for photocopiers and fax lines will not be included.

MR. BRASSARD: I move that we adopt the budget as proposed at \$12,850,451.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there any discussion on that motion?

1:21

MR. STELMACH: What I would like to add is that we seriously review the problem of aging copiers. I'd hate to get caught in a situation where for the sake of trying to save \$30,000 we then get hit by a bill four times that amount in another year or two, because it's going to be there as technology changes.

MRS. MIROSH: It's like your information system. You have to upgrade it all the time.

MR. STELMACH: That's right.

MR. HENRY: To Bill: if the committee were to put in the \$30,000 for the copying equipment, would it be reasonable to assume that we would want to do that on an ongoing basis, like the information system, so that you can upgrade so many a year and we don't get into the situation you're into now with aging photocopiers and kind of in a crunch? Would that be \$30,000 a year? If we had upgraded copiers every year for the past five years, do you have any figures that would say what we would be spending every year?

MR. GANO: I don't have any figures in front of me. The upgrade philosophy for information systems equipment versus photocopiers is a little bit different in that photocopiers we generally lease, whereas information EDP equipment we generally buy. That then allows us to maintain a standard, constant level for buying equipment every year and therefore upgrading it. With photocopiers you enter into, as Jacqueline indicated, a three-year rental or lease agreement. That cost then continues on over the years.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I would request that my hon. colleague Mr. Brassard, if he wouldn't mind, hold his motion because I would like to address the postage issue, which should be done prior to the acceptance of this whole area. So if you wouldn't mind, Roy, just pulling it back or holding it for a minute . . .

MR. BRASSARD: Not at all.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The motion will be deemed to be withdrawn for the moment.

MR. BRASSARD: I will withdraw that motion for the moment, yes.

MRS. MIROSH: What motion are we on?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The budget for MLA administration, number 9.

MRS. MIROSH: Okay. May I ask a question, too, on this? I really want to support what Ed's saying, because I don't want us caught without money to pay for upgrades. On the other hand, with regards to the fax machines, are you talking about new fax lines?

MR. GANO: No.

MRS. MIROSH: No new fax lines?

MR. GANO: No. What we're talking about here is that currently Members' Services orders provide for MLA administration to pay for two phone lines into your office along with a RITE line, but it does not include the fax line. So as a result, constituency offices have been paying for the fax lines themselves. If we were to pay for the fax lines, then the MLA administration budget would have to increase by that \$34,000.

MRS. MIROSH: I don't have a problem paying for that out of my constituency budget, but I do have a problem with my machine because it's dying fast.

MR. GANO: The fax machine or the photocopier?

MRS. MIROSH: The photocopier.

MS HALEY: I just wanted to point out, from another conversation going on, with regard to your photocopiers, as MLAs you have a constituency allowance and you can in fact upgrade your photocopier yourself and use part of your . . .

MR. WICKMAN: Are you looking at me or Dianne?

MS HALEY: I'm not looking at anybody. It doesn't matter. It's not specific to any party or gender.

MRS. MIROSH: Not with my budget.

MR. WICKMAN: Not on mine either.

MRS. MIROSH: That's a high-rent district.

MS HALEY: Well, I'm just saying that there are MLAs who turn money back in. If they wanted to use that money to upgrade their photocopier, surely to God that's within their choices.

MR. WICKMAN: Carol, when you run an office in the city, you're talking \$10,000 a year basic rent.

MS HALEY: Well, I pay \$820 a month rent, too, Percy. I've been there, done that, and got the T-shirt. You know, the reality is that you learn to allocate.

MR. BRASSARD: Further to the photocopier, unless I'm misunderstanding, we're talking about the obsolescence of photocopiers. We are on a three-year lease program. At the end of the lease you have the option of turning the old one back in and leasing a new machine at quite often little or very little increase. So we're not talking about obsolescence here. If I've got a machine that will die at the end of my lease of three years, I'll expect to lease another machine for about the same amount. So it's pretty well a status quo from here on other than inflationary increases. Am I right?

MR. GANO: That's correct for the most part. However, some of the offices are finding that the level of machine that you currently have is not adequate anymore.

MR. BRASSARD: Yeah, but we're not talking about obsolescence then. We're talking about upgrading then; are we not?

MR. GANO: Partly, yes.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, maybe we should just refer this particular item back and have the administration look at various options. I don't mean the budget; I just mean that discussion.

From the point of view of my constituency office and others that I've visited in this city, I'm not talking in terms of fancy-type equipment, just something that is solid, that is reliable, that every week isn't going on the blink. There are groups in the neighbourhood and people who want one or two photocopies here or there, and they like to drop by and be able to do that. That's a service that they appreciate, and then we have photocopying to do as well. I don't want anything fancy. I just want something a bit reliable. So what Roy is saying is right: for a few dollars more.

MS HALEY: It's not a few.

MR. GANO: We do have some numbers. As we indicated, we have recently been doing surveys and whatnot. The survey results indicate that a lot of offices are not happy with the current level. Therefore, they're asking for upgrades as well as straight across.

MR. WICKMAN: Maybe their expectations were too high.

MR. GANO: If we were simply to go with a straight across based on what you currently have, then that impact . . .

MRS. MIROSH: I saw that questionnaire. Everybody asks for the best when they're asked.

MR. GANO: The budget impact there would be approximately \$14,000 instead of the \$30,000. That's based on increased . . .

MR. WICKMAN: Those are the kinds of options that I'm saying we should be looking at and have it come back at a reduced cost that would still suit the needs of the constituency offices.

MS BREault: I'd just like to make one other comment. In the past we have treated or attempted to treat all 83 constituency offices with exactly the same standard of machine as directed by this committee. With the diversity of the different types of offices, I don't know whether it's a question you wish to address in terms of determining maybe that there are three levels of what we'll consider a standard-type machine or a standard type of features and break it up. It's probably, administratively and in terms of equity, better to keep it the same type of machine.

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Chairman, if we get into that, then everyone of us around this table and the rest are going to want the best machine, and we will go to great extent to justify why we would require that. I think the fairest, most equitable method is to provide everyone with a standard, basic machine of equal capabilities and leave any upgrading, if they so desire, to the individual constituency itself. That's my honest opinion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready to accept a motion on this?

MR. WOLOSHYN: I'd like to move the following motion. I believe all members have copies of it, and it reads as follows:

That within the MLA admin budget the amount of \$62,250 be transferred from the nonsessional temporary residence allowance, 715A00, to freight and postage, which is 712E00, to provide for constituency postage caps for individual member mailings from the Leg. Building and Annex of \$750 per member per annum.

As members will recall, last year we eliminated our postage. There was some understanding that got lost in the process, and then at the December meeting I put forth a motion that \$1,200 be moved from the subsistence this year to take care of this year's needs. In effect, what we would be doing would be reducing this year's postage allocation by some \$450.

I'd like to make it abundantly clear and recorded that this would be for the individual MLA's postage that emanates from either this building or the annex, period, and then they do have tracking processes, whatever, in the way.

That would be my motion, Mr. Chairman.

MRS. MIROSH: The \$62,250 from nonsessional temporary residence allowance: is that excess money? Does it mean that you don't get temporary residence allowance? What does that mean?

1:31

MR. WOLOSHYN: No. If you recall this current year, the temporary sessional residence could change, depending upon how the House sits. Assuming that things will be normal, there should be sufficient funds to break even at both ends. It should work, because it worked for this year, and that's where we got that number from before.

MRS. MIROSH: I move that we take a little break to discuss this.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There's a motion that the committee adjourn for refreshments for 10 minutes. Is there agreement?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So ordered.

[The committee adjourned from 1:32 p.m. to 1:45 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, when the committee adjourned briefly, there was a motion by Mr. Woloshyn concerning the transfer of money from the nonsessional temporary residence allowance to freight and postage in the sum of \$62,250. Are there any further questions or comments, or is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those in favour of the motion proposed by Mr. Woloshyn, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

MR. BRASSARD: In view of that may I reinstate my motion for adoption of the budget as presented?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's the motion for \$12,850,251?

MR. BRASSARD: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Chairman, just a question. I don't know if we're getting out of sequence here a little bit, but on our agenda we have an update of the report from Peat Marwick coming later on that deals with the whole issue of MLA remuneration, and I'm wondering if we should be discussing that. Obviously, it potentially has an impact on the budget. Mr. Woloshyn was going to get an update on that. I'm wondering if that should be discussed now or what the issue is. Or is that going to come back, and then will we see a modification to the budget if that's necessary? Or how will that happen?

MR. WOLOSHYN: The report isn't -- could we move to that item, Mr. Chairman, just for clarification?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Certainly.

MR. WOLOSHYN: When that report from Peat Marwick comes -- which we'd expected by now; the government hasn't got it yet -- it would be forwarded to the chairman, who I would hope would then call a special meeting of Members' Services to deal with that report specifically. Then what would emanate out of that, I guess, is we'd start looking at what we'd be doing there. Unfortunately the report isn't out yet. So when we came to that item, I was going to ask the chair if he'd be willing to call a special meeting to deal with the report specifically, whether it be in session or whenever it came out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. . . . Mr. Henry.

MR. HENRY: I'm not sure if it was the name or the honourable that you tripped over, Mr. Chairman.

Just a question. Is there a time line for the production of the report or an expected date?

MR. WOLOSHYN: To be totally frank with you, I had expected that it would have been completed by now. It hasn't, and I'd say within the next two months for sure. We have to have it out. We can't procrastinate on it.

MR. HENRY: Okay. We can call the question?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those in favour of the motion, please indicate. Those opposed? Carried.

Now, do we wish to go back to item 7, or shall we move on to item 10?

MS HALEY: Yeah. Let's move on to that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. 10. Now, who introduces this one? This says government members. Is this government members? Oh, yeah. No. 11 is opposition. Does Mr. Henry or anybody have any questions of the government members proposal?

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, why would you expect me to have any questions?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just wondering.

MR. BRASSARD: I move acceptance of the budget in the amount of \$1,371,040 for government members' services as presented.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any questions or comments? All those in favour of the motion, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

Item 11, opposition members.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'll move the budget as presented, the reduced budget of \$1,629,266.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any questions or comments on that? Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

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

Now, the next relates to independent member's services.

MS HALEY: I'll move it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms Haley moved this matter in the sum of \$42,845. Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

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

The vacant electoral division, which will be filled in the forthcoming fiscal year, \$42,845.

MS HALEY: So moved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms Haley moves. Any questions or comments? Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those in favour, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

With the committee's indulgence perhaps we could deal with certain matters under item 8 on committees, because the chair has received a copy, as I believe all hon. members have, of Mrs. Abdurahman's memo. The chair believes that the revised material that has been provided reinserts the chairman's remuneration in all of the budgets. So there's the matter of the Public Accounts Committee's chairman's views to be dealt with and then the overall budget for committees.

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to go back to my earlier comments in that I can appreciate the desire of the chairman of Public Accounts to change the structure and operation of this committee, but I don't feel that that concern should be part of our deliberations in reviewing the budget for this committee. I do honestly believe that we have to move on, strike the budget as it currently exists, and allow the discussion of changing the function of this committee to unfold as it may. I think that we could be held in limbo here forever awaiting some unforeseen change to a committee that may not take place at all. So I would move

that we accept the budget as presented, recognizing that this may come forward for discussion at a future date.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, I think that there are two issues specifically in the memo from the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and one by Mr. Brassard certainly was identified regarding the operation of Public Accounts, which I think we agree is outside the parameters of our discussion here. But there is another issue raised, which is generally the ability of a standing committee through its chair to have input into the budget process. What I would like to do after we deal with this motion is make a motion that the administration in future years be directed to contact each of the chairs of the standing committees prior to our budget deliberations.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Could I say, please, that every committee chairman, whether they're active committees or not, has been contacted, has been shown the budget estimates, and has approved them as you now have them. So, yes, they have had them.

MR. HENRY: So then the issue here becomes the inability of Public Accounts to meet outside of session.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: That's right.

MR. HENRY: Am I correct in that Public Accounts, if they wished to, could at their last meeting during session discuss budget and provide any advice they wanted to us? They could do that?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Sure.

MR. HENRY: So there is that mechanism. Perhaps that could be conveyed to all the chairs, that if they don't meet outside of session, they should take the opportunity when they do meet to provide any budget advice to this committee that they would want. I would like to have a motion that we accept this memorandum for information after we deal with the one on the floor.

1:55

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. So the motion before the committee is to approve the estimate of \$177,955. Question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

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

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, I would like to make a motion that the memorandum dated January 4, '95, from the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be received for information by this committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour? Opposed? Carried. The budget part is finished for today. Thank you very much.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, do you want a motion on item 6 with the exception of the specific category being 712K00?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. I think we'd just as soon leave that whole thing open. I think it would be better just to leave it open.

Now, we do have on our agenda item 5. Some things have been dealt with there. The first item is Farm Century Awards. The Clerk was going to bring back some more information.

DR. McNEIL: If you look in your other binder, the rust-coloured binder, under 5(a) there's an information item there relating to the question that was posed at the last meeting. The bottom line is that the only expenditure that is authorized for plaques must be authorized by the member. Funds cannot be allocated from his or her constituency allowance without that member's approval.

MR. BRUSEKER: I spoke with Mr. Taylor last night on this very issue, and since we're on it today, I guess I'll jump in and speak on his behalf. He told me that he had just received yet another bill from someone for this very expenditure that he had not approved. So he suddenly finds himself with an expenditure from his constituency allowance for a Farm Century award plaque that as far as he was aware is without his consent.

DR. McNEIL: Well, if he won't approve it, we won't pay it.

MS HALEY: How did it get made without his approval?

MR. BRUSEKER: Nonetheless, a plaque has been produced, and a plaque, I guess, has gone out.

MS HALEY: Who's triggering them? Is it being triggered through agriculture?

DR. McNEIL: In other places it's the department head.

MS HALEY: If they're triggering them, they should start paying for them.

MR. WICKMAN: Two points, Mr. Chairman. The first point: in fairness to all rural members, whether it be Nick Taylor or any rural member, it places those rural members in an unfair position compared to urban members. I'm not faced with the decision: do I have to spend \$200, \$250 for a plaque? If the person says no, that MLA in that area is going to be considered cheap. It's like the photos that we talked about earlier. I have groups in Edmonton come a lot more than, say, Dianne would have, yet her constituency is expected to pay somewhat towards that cost. So in fairness to the rural MLAs, this should be allocated on some other basis. Rather than being struck from their own constituency offices, it should come out of some central type budget.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, the Farm Century awards are initiated through an application by an individual who would qualify under the very strict guidelines, and then the MLA would have to okay the purchase order to order one of the plaques. They are not made independently and then delivered to your constituency office saying: "Here you go. Deliver it." The request has to be initiated by the MLA, knowing full well that the cost of that plaque comes from the constituency office. It has always been that way. Although as time progresses over the next three to four years, especially in certain parts of Alberta, those areas that settled around 1898, we'll find that we're going to have numerous requests coming forward in some of the old constituencies, which is going to pose a problem. We'll deal with that, I guess, when the time arises.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Woloshyn.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I'll pass for a moment, Mr. Chairman. Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Brassard.

MR. BRASSARD: Yes, Mr. Chairman. On occasion I think it's possible for an application form to bypass the MLA simply because it is mailed in and forwarded without due consideration by office staff and so on. I know that happened one time when I had a temporary employee in my constituency office. They received an application, and she thought it had to go to the department of agriculture and forwarded it on thinking she was doing me a favour. So I kind of caught up to it after the fact. I'm not trying to guess at what happened to Mr. Taylor, but I think it could be something as simple as that. I've had several of these delivered. I think it's a tremendous investment in recognition of the farm community in my area, and I support the program very strongly. I can't see, perhaps other than tightening up the procedure, where it could be more explicit than going through for approval of the MLA and going from there. I think it's a good program, and I support it. I would hate to see it dissolve.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Chairman, the original motion that is on the blue page: is the report that accompanies it the administration's response to that motion which was made at the last committee, or is there additional information coming forward?

DR. McNEIL: No, that information item and all the attachments are . . .

MR. WICKMAN: But, you see, that doesn't really address that key question. Ed can probably relate to this a lot better than I could, because I'll never be faced with that situation unless you change the boundaries of Edmonton-Rutherford. Is it fair that you should have to cover the costs of these plaques? Should it be as to whether the costs should be absorbed by individual MLA constituency budgets or some other method? Now, that point hasn't been addressed, and that's the point I would like addressed.

DR. McNEIL: I don't see that that's the administration's role to address that question.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, then the committee should address it. It's again like the pictures where we pay 50 percent. At least the administration pays 50 percent, or it comes out of some other budget. That reduces the impact. Ed's point is very valid. He could have 10 of these in one year. That's \$2,500.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Henry.

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. While I'm sympathetic to the points that were just made and I certainly wholeheartedly support the program, I'd be reluctant to support any measure that would bring the cost of this out of the constituency budget. The reason for that is twofold. Number one, each constituency is very unique, and there are all sorts of various events. For instance, I have more senior citizens per capita than I believe any other riding in the province save Calgary-Buffalo. I also have more ethnocultural groups, who celebrate all sorts of events, than most ridings do. So there are always differences in terms of costs or different reasons for doing things in each constituency. Before I would consider including this cost in the umbrella budget, what I would want to see -- I think we contact Alberta agriculture -- is some sort of forecast of how many of these awards we can expect to see from now to the year 2000 perhaps, because we've talked about the 100th anniversary of various settlements happening. So if we make a decision -- and I might be amenable to that -- to include it in the overall budget not out of the constituency budget, I'd want to know what the three to five or more years' impact is before we do that. So I would not support any motion that would agree to change the status quo on this.

2:05

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, two points. One, I think Vegreville-Viking has the highest percentage of seniors of any constituency.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Many of them are going to have the century award coming up.

MR. STELMACH: Yeah. It's also going to have the highest percentage of century award winners. I do agree with Mr. Henry that we keep it out of some umbrella coverage and keep it in the constituency, because at least it's within the control of the individual MLA. As to do a study, it would be extremely expensive, because you'd have to go back to the original homestead allocations like the titles, and then it takes a fair amount of work to ensure that that particular quarter stayed within the same family because some were sold and then bought back, et cetera, which may not qualify. So there's a lot of work involved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, the chair is going to exercise a little prerogative. The chair represents a rural constituency. The chair really finds it difficult to find out why this is a problem. To me it's a good program. Mr. Henry makes the point very well: every constituency has its own features. The Members' Services Committee over the last number of years has been very good about allowing for flexibility, and this should be a responsibility of the member to identify what's important to that member in his constituency. The chair really can't see why we should be exercising ourselves over this. Maybe Mr. Taylor has some -- oh, everybody has some responsibilities themselves to find out what's going wrong that's making life difficult for them. I would certainly like to know why Mr. Taylor has these problems coming up, because they don't seem to be general.

MR. WICKMAN: So what was the motion?

MR. CHAIRMAN: There wasn't a motion. I think there was information.

MR. WICKMAN: No. I'm saying is there a motion for information?

MS HALEY: What? To receive information?

MR. WICKMAN: Did somebody move it?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. What information, Mr. Wickman?

MR. WICKMAN: Well, the report. I want the opportunity just to vote no.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Well, I'll move that we accept the Clerk's information as presented under tab A, whatever it is.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Woloshyn. Is the committee now ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those in favour, please indicate. Those opposed?

MRS. DACYSHYN: Are you asking for a recorded vote on this?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, I don't think so.

The chair is advised that we've now dealt with A, B, C, and D.

Now E. We'll ask Mrs. Scarlett to give us the information on extended benefits to former members past 65 years of age. Frankly, Mrs. Scarlett.

MRS. SCARLETT: I won't respond to that.

Corinne is handing out an information item that attempts to address the issues and the background information. The question was asked relative to the ability to extend benefits to former members past the age of 65 and also to take a look at the cost implications of that. What I'd like to do is first talk a little bit about the background, take a look at what currently exists and what would be the impact.

Right now the extended benefits program for former members allows former members to continue participation in the benefits plans until age 65 for up to five years after ceasing to be a member. Benefit premiums are based on the same cost-shared arrangement they enjoyed as a current member. After the initial five years on that

plan, members may continue to participate in the program, again until age 65, provided they pay the total cost of coverage.

The question is two parts. Number one, under our present plans we don't anticipate that it would be a problem negotiating with the carriers to extend coverage past 65. However, the major concern that needs to be brought forward is the relative cost implications of doing something like that. Right now current members over 65 are allowed to receive and participate in the benefits program. However, there are some differences. What I've done on the latter half of page 1 is identify those differences relative to seniors' health care, seniors' Blue Cross. What happens is that after the seniors' Blue Cross pays for the limited amount that it covers for those current members over 65, then all other costs that are covered under the total MLA plan are applied to our top-up provision on your plan. The impact of that is that if there were large amounts of claims put through, it tends to drive up the experience on that plan.

The other significant difference is that current members over 65 enjoy group life insurance coverage. Pursuant to a previous Members' Services order back in 1987 it was agreed that members would continue to participate at the same rate, which is .04 cents per thousand, but the employer, the Legislative Assembly, would be responsible for making up the difference. So for current members over 65 participating in the life insurance plan with us, it is quite costly from our perspective. That is not the issue, but that's the background, then, that sets the scenario. If we take a look at extending EBO coverage to former members over age 65 based upon the current criteria, they would for the first five years participate in the plan based upon the cost-shared arrangement that current members over 65 enjoy. The concern is that that proposal would not be cost neutral, that it would have the impact potentially, particularly in the present Blue Cross plan, of driving up the premiums both for current members and former members and it would drive up the employer costs.

After the initial five-year period where members are responsible for paying the total amount of coverage, the costs to the employer are not an issue. However, the experience against the plans would be an issue. As well, our experience to date with the members that are continuing after five years shows us that most do not choose to continue on a full basis because it doesn't make sense costwise in terms of the value they get for the total dollar premiums they have to pay.

The other factor that enters into reviewing this is relative to a flexible benefits proposal that the government of Alberta is looking at right now. The proposal that's being looked at is designed along the lines of top-up situations, similar to the kinds of plans that you have right now, where the employer would pay a base charge and if the employee wanted additional kinds of coverage, they would pay those premiums. The impact it has on the MLA plans is that if they choose to go ahead with a different proposal, a different set of benefit structures, your MLA plan piggybacks onto all the current existing plans. So we would have to go back and look at the complexion and the base plans that we piggyback on or look at what kind of benefit structure we need to maintain for MLAs.

Now, I've been told that the decision relative to going forward with flexible benefits is going to be coming here sometime, they anticipate, in the near future. February is the information that's been given to me. Therefore, based upon the fact that this proposal has an impact costwise and is not budgeted in this year's budget and also the fact that the flexible benefits program puts up in the air the impact of your benefits plan, I would recommend that perhaps we wait until there's a decision made on the government's flexible benefits program and then go back and look at the issue.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there a feeling that this matter should be tabled until the flexible benefit plan . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: I'll move that if you wish, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Bruseker. Is there discussion on that motion? All those in favour, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

Thank you very much for your good report.

Now, (f). We'll go there.

DR. McNEIL: There's a decision item under 5(f) prepared by Frank Work. In response to the committee's request he's proposed the alternative amendment to the information and protection of privacy Act. If the committee wants to proceed that way, he would suggest that the committee put forth a recommendation to that effect.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, I wasn't able to be present at the last meeting, but I did read *Hansard* and the draft minutes that were available. I consulted with a couple of my colleagues, a couple who were specifically on the freedom of information task force, and there may be other ways of achieving this than this particular amendment. I only received this yesterday, again, and for that reason I would not be able to support this amendment, although I may be able to at a future time.

The freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation won't be coming into effect until the fall, I understand, won't be proclaimed, and there's plenty of time between now and then to review this item. I'm going to be making a motion that we table this item at this point. The concern is that this item was discussed at the task force, if I'm using the correct terminology, the all-party committee that the Premier struck, and it was agreed at that point to recommend that the Leg. Assembly be included in the freedom of information provisions. My understanding is that the discussion at that time was that if we needed to have specific exemptions, such as the telephone bills that were talked about at the last meeting, that would be the way to go, and that may be able to be done through regulation rather than a blanket exemption, because there are some operations of the Legislative Assembly that I would hope all members would want to ensure the public had access to.

So I'm at this point going to make a motion to table this item until we've had a chance to review it more and review more options.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Before calling for the vote on the tabling, Ms Haley expressed an indication that she had a question or a comment.

MS HALEY: It's always unfortunate when somebody misses a meeting and doesn't get the flavour of the whole discussion because it doesn't read the same way that the conversation went. With respect to that, we asked them to bring forward a recommendation for us because we believed at that time -- and I don't believe anybody voted against it -- that we needed to address this issue and we needed to address it now.

I personally don't want to have my private papers in my office, constituency complaints or concerns or anything else, made public. That would directly impede my ability to represent the people that come to me in confidence. I don't ever want them to be worried or concerned that their privacy is going to be in any way jeopardized or could in fact be on the front page of the *Airdrie Echo* or the *Calgary Herald* next year or the year after. They have the right to come and see me in confidence, and I should have a right to phone anybody or write to anybody in that same strict confidence. My constituency office is safe. My Leg. office should be safe too.

There should be no difference. I would vote against tabling the motion and in fact put forward the recommendation that is here.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, to speak to the matter of time, which is permitted when we talk in terms of a tabling motion. The Member for Three Hills-Airdrie has raised a point about somebody being absent and such. However, the impact of this particular case involves a member who is not a member of this particular committee, our Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who obviously is our foremost expert within our caucus having raised some concerns, some very valid concerns, concerns that he's saying can be addressed in some other fashion. From a time point of view, by tabling it for a couple of months, whatever, it isn't going to destroy any original intent in that the freedom of information Act is not going to be proclaimed till some time afterwards. So as a courtesy, because that particular member was responsible for a great number of the amendments that government members supported as well because of his expertise in this area, I don't think we should deny that person that opportunity to make this even better.

MR. WOLOSHYN: The Act was supposed to be proclaimed this fall; that's correct. But we all around this table know how the Leg. Assembly works. If we support this motion, all that would happen is this committee would recommend to the Government House Leader that this particular amendment eliminating the LAO would become a part of the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act. We all know that if there are sections of that particular Act, miscellaneous ones, that are untenable to the opposition, those are withdrawn.

My fear of just tabling it within this committee, as suggested by Mr. Henry, would be that the issue would die here. I would like to see the input from Calgary-Buffalo and all the other folks as to their concerns on this, and the way to get the concerns on the table to be discussed properly would be for this committee to endorse a recommendation to have the chairman forward the recommendation to the Government House Leader. When it then comes on the Order Paper, if you will, our caucus -- we haven't taken this to our caucus, to be frank with you -- and your caucus would then be able to go through it.

So I think a tabling motion at this time, although very well intended, would be the wrong way to get the thing reviewed and adjusted, if necessary, prior to the proclamation. We should proceed with this recommendation at this time.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Chairman, I do not support the tabling motion because the recommendation here to put this forward for an amendment does take time. Even though proclamation is not until September, I know that our Government House Leader is working a tight time schedule and wants all of the issues that are coming forward in this legislation, changes at the table right now. I mean, it's still open for debate when you do an amendment to the legislation. We have had almost a month to bring this forward to anybody that wanted to talk about this specific issue.

The issue of concern -- and it's a grave concern to all of us -- is that we are here to protect our independence as MLAs, and that in legislation, within the freedom of information, gives the right to anybody to come into my office or access any of my information in my constituency office, which is taking away, in my view, my independence to run my constituency the way I want to or the way you want to. I feel very strongly, Mr. Chairman, that tabling this just delays it to unnecessary time.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, just to respond to a couple of the comments. I think it's very clear that even without this amendment

the constituency offices and the Speaker's office do not fall under the Act, and they're not covered. I appreciate the comment from Three Hills-Airdrie having not been able to be here for the last meeting. But having read the *Hansard*, the concerns were issues such as, if I recall, from Vegreville-Viking, where most of the constituency is long-distance charges and what happens if a constituent calls and that telephone bill becomes public information. I think there is agreement around this table that we want to protect the privacy of individuals. However, on the other hand, what this particular action will do is -- if the Speaker asked me to attend a parliamentary conference in Ottawa and I had extraordinary expenses or had high expenses, because that bill would be paid by the Leg. Assembly, in my view the public should have a right to that information, yet under this amendment they would not have the right to access that information. So I think we need to be more selective as to what we exclude from the public.

2:25

In response to Mr. Woloshyn and the miscellaneous statutes, my intention at this time is not to delay it indefinitely, but I would like to look at other alternatives. What I don't want to have happen is for us to get into May of this year and have the Justice minister come forward with miscellaneous statutes and all of a sudden at that point the opposition disagree and it's taken out and then nothing is done before the fall when the legislation is proclaimed. I would like the issue dealt with before that so that we can have an agreement as to what goes into miscellaneous statutes before it is actually presented by the Justice minister.

That's all I have to say to that end.

MR. WOLOSHYN: That's exactly supporting my position, Mike, because if the Speaker writes the letter, then I would hope it would trigger discussions between the two House leaders, because obviously if it goes through miscellaneous amendments, it has to be a prior agreement. My fear is that if we table it in this committee and it's not brought forward to be dealt with, it could be just sitting there come May or June and then, whoopsy, all of a sudden we're meeting to try and get it forward. This doesn't even recommend a particular thing. It just has our chairman flag this for the people to deal with it.

MR. HENRY: If I can ask a question, Mr. Chairman. This recommendation does make a recommendation to exclude the LAO. My question is: if this recommendation were to be passed by this committee, is it allowable under the rules to note that there was not unanimous consent? I don't want a recommendation going forward saying that all parties agreed when all parties may not agree and we get into that kind of spat.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would report it as a divided vote.

MR. HENRY: Okay. Given that, I can withdraw my motion to table if we are permitted to allow that to be recorded in the correspondence.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I undertake to do that.

MR. HENRY: Okay. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee now ready for the question?

MRS. MIROSH: What's the question now? He's withdrawing the motion to table.

MR. WOLOSHYN: So now we proceed with it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, we do need a motion to accept the recommendation of Parliamentary Counsel.

MS HALEY: So moved.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I'll so move.

MRS. MIROSH: Carol moved it.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Oh, Carol moved it. Good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms Haley did move it. All those in favour of the motion, please indicate. Opposed? Motion carries on division.

[For the motion: Mr. Brassard, Ms Haley, Mrs. Mirosh, Mr. Stelmach, Mr. Woloshyn]

[Against the motion: Mr. Bruseker, Mr. Henry, Mr. Wickman]

MR. HENRY: So for the record, Mr. Chairman, the correspondence will indicate that it was a divided vote?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, and the minutes will so indicate as well.

MR. HENRY: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're finished with all that we can do today. So tomorrow morning we will assemble at the interpretive centre at 9 o'clock, being back here by 10 to hear from Videotron and CFRN. Then we should be able to conclude the House services element, and that's pretty close to the end.

MRS. MIROSH: So we should be finished by noon tomorrow, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We should be, if all things go well.

I want to thank all members for their diligence and good spirit and co-operation. Is there a motion to now adjourn this committee?

MR. STELMACH: So moved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Stelmach. All in favour? Carried.

[The committee adjourned at 2:28 p.m.]

