

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

10:03 a.m.

[Chairman: Mr. Schumacher]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order please. We still have one item left under the House services element of the budget, and that has to do with the television coverage of question period. We have with us this morning Mr. Kendall Gibson, the director of operations for CFRN television. I'd like to welcome Mr. Gibson to the Members' Services Committee.

The feeling of the members of the committee yesterday when we invited you, Mr. Gibson, was to ask if you wouldn't mind coming to enlighten us on how you see your proposition operating with regards to televising the proceedings of question period.

MR. GIBSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Welcome to the committee. It's nice of you to come.

MR. GIBSON: Good morning. Do you want me to just launch into it? Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. CFRN television has been involved in government coverage for its entire broadcast history, 42 years, and this is just an additional extension of what we continue to do. We put a proposal together. We looked at the opportunity of covering the question period. From the beginning there was no question in our minds and it was never presented that there would be a live broadcast on CFRN television – I hope you understand that – at 1:30 in the afternoon for the period. It was always the intent of CFRN television to rebroadcast and repeat the program late at night, in a letter to Dr. McNeil 4 o'clock in the morning.

Now, our television station is in the process of applying for an additional cable channel. It's a long process. One of the gentlemen, I think behind me here, questioned whether we will actually get that in place by the beginning of Oral Question Period, and the answer is not likely. It's going to take a certain amount of time to get these additional cable channels. Basically, I have to kind of back out of that until we get the cable channels going, then we would be broadcasting on those cable channels, on the additional channels other than off air.

It came to my attention that Access – and I do have a copy of the standing committee thing here – is prepared to take the CFRN feed live on their network across Alberta. I'm sure it's across Alberta, and that is a real plus. In essence, it doesn't even make it necessary for the cable stations then to run it on their channels, at least for the first two years, because I think Access has committed two years, and that's a real boon. It basically makes question period available to the entire province of Alberta.

I should advise you that we are not charging Access for any of this. We are in business to make a profit, and our profit is made only on the production of the coverage. During the late night broadcast there would be absolutely no advertising. That question came forward too. Question period is not going to be brought to you by some company. There's not going to be advertising. We're not going to interrupt to put advertising in. It'll come up basically as it is presented on Access with the opening credit and continue until the end of it, and then we go into the next program.

The real advantage to our proposal is the robotics and the electronics of it. If you looked at the difference between the two comparable proposals with real time, it's basically a difference of \$14,000 per year, and if you divide that by the 70- or 75-odd days,

you're looking at a difference of \$200 a day for the robotics. I think your committee must really weigh the advantage of the robotics. The robotics are tied right into a computer, so as a member speaks, basically the operator punches in the number which is designated to whichever member. If you, say, just punch in 76, the camera automatically goes to person 76, the member. It's immediate – well, as soon as the camera can go. We are purchasing all new equipment for the robotics, and it's state-of-the-art equipment, state-of-the-art cameras. They're cameras that are exceptionally high quality, so they do not require high light levels. You do not have to change anything in the Chamber at all. Basically just existing lighting, and nothing really changes. It will improve the appearance of the Chamber because you're not going to have the tripods and the personnel standing on the sides. I'm not suggesting that that's a major interruption, but it really makes the House look a lot more professional. It's a lot more professional from our point of view. [interjection]

MR. BRASSARD: No. Go ahead and finish. I just wanted to get on a list. Carry on. I'm sorry.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sorry for those distractions.

MR. GIBSON: No, no. It's okay. It's my first time sitting in on something like this, and I appreciate the opportunity. It's interesting.

MR. HENRY: We all have to wave at the chairman to get on the list.

MR. GIBSON: I appreciate the fact that I got on the list without waving.

MR. BRASSARD: You're an invited guest; that's why.

MR. GIBSON: The equipment we'd be using up in the control room. The computer would also be a new computer. The closed captioning is, I think, very critical, and it's something that you should consider. Whether you take our proposal or Videotron's proposal, I would suggest that you take real-time closed captioning. As a matter of fact, I see that that's a recommendation anyway, and I'm glad you're looking at that. Real-time closed captioning is not just for the hard of hearing anymore; it is for people who are learning English. There are a lot of advantages to real-time closed captioning. We would be purchasing a new computer system for this closed captioning system. It's called a Cheetah computer system. It's state-of-the-art closed-captioned equipment. The closed-captioned equipment actually would be at the television station, and we would be wired in via telephone cable. Those are some of the mechanics of it.

That's my presentation. Hopefully I can answer the questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's been very helpful, Mr. Gibson.

I do have a list starting with Mr. Brassard.

MR. BRASSARD: I presume this equipment that you'll be installing will remain the property of the station.

MR. GIBSON: Yes, it will.

MR. BRASSARD: Okay, and I understand that you're going to rebroadcast late at night. Did I understand you to say 4 o'clock in the morning?

MR. GIBSON: Basically, it could be anytime between midnight and 6 o'clock. I looked at the schedule for the month of January, and the period is open between 4 and 5, 3:30 to 5, in that time period. We could broadcast it possibly earlier, at 2 o'clock in the morning or something like that. I don't want to commit to a particular time at this point in time. It would run at the same time when we get into it, because we would expect people to want to record this on VCRs. That's actually an interesting point too. By broadcasting this on CFRN television – and I'm not sure if you got the proposal that was submitted to Dr. McNeil – you're broadcasting to a potential 1.2 million viewers in Alberta from Red Deer north and Rocky Mountain House north. We have a very large coverage area.

10:13

MR. BRASSARD: Not at 4 o'clock in the morning.

MR. GIBSON: No, no. I say potential. I mean, everyone of those people has the option to record on VHS.

MR. BRASSARD: Yes. I guess my question deals with the cost-effectiveness and so on and so forth. Without Access picking it up, I wonder what the benefit to the Assembly would be to have you do this and run it at 4 in the morning.

MR. GIBSON: Nothing. That's why I'm suggesting that Access actually makes it a little bit easier and in all honesty is a bit of a saviour to us because we're not in that push to acquire the cable channels. We are still planning to do that. It's just that now it's kind of relaxed, takes the pressure off me to advance that as quickly as possible. We are still speaking with the cable channels.

MR. BRASSARD: My final observation is that I'm having difficulty understanding the benefit to you. At \$71,000 – I don't know what the equipment would cost you to install and everything. You're not going to have a sponsorship at 4 in the morning, and you're not going to have a wide audience at 4. I wonder about the benefit to CFRN.

MR. GIBSON: We are not in the business to lose money, and there is a small profit built into this. The equipment, when it's not in use at the House – one example being the character generator or the computer that puts on the closed captioning – can be used at the television station by ourselves for other things. I mean, I'm looking at some other options like that, and that is why we're prepared to come in at a reasonably low price. There is profit built into that. It's not a lot, but it's enough.

MR. BRASSARD: Yeah.

Fine, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Gibson, two questions. The statement that's in the report is fairly positive in terms of the station's intent to purchase a cable station, but in your presentation I get the impression you're talking in terms of negotiating with the existing . . .

MR. GIBSON: There was a little bit of misunderstanding. I noticed in here that it was purchasing a cable station, that is not the case. We have to apply for what is called a repeat channel, and it's through the CRTC. We have to basically negotiate with the cable stations to

allow our repeat channel on there, but it's not a purchase, an outright paying for a channel.

MR. WICKMAN: But can you guarantee that you'll be able to come to an agreement? Can you guarantee the cable availability?

MR. GIBSON: No, in all honesty I can't do that right now.

MR. WICKMAN: What happens if two years down the road Access drops it and we're just left with the rebroadcast in northern Alberta?

MR. GIBSON: I can't guarantee that we'll be on both Shaw and Videotron, which again doesn't necessarily help all the viewers, but we're very confident that we're going to be on Videotron anyways. We are already negotiating.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Gibson, my concern is southern Alberta. You haven't worked out any arrangement with your sister station in Calgary, for example, to cover the rebroadcast in the southern part of the province. My understanding of Videotron is that it doesn't service southern Alberta; does it?

MR. GIBSON: No.

MR. WICKMAN: Shaw does, yeah. So southern Alberta would be left out in the cold.

MR. GIBSON: I understand that. You say our sister station. Although we would like it to be our sister station, we haven't purchased it yet. It is on the market, and it's not a hidden fact that Electrohome is definitely interested. That's not hidden. There are a lot of people interested in CFCN television. I'm not sure how we guarantee delivery even via cable in southern Alberta without us actually going out and purchasing time on their television station at that time of the morning, and that's not inexpensive.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Could I just ask whether your feed would be available to any other broadcaster, cable or otherwise?

MR. GIBSON: Our feed, once it comes out of this building, is available to anybody who wants to take it, absolutely any broadcaster. If ITV, our direct competition in this town, or the CBC want to take that feed live or tape delay it, there is no problem. We are allowing that to go. This is for the public, and there's no charge for that. As I say, our proposal was basically on the production only, with the offer to run it on the air, the promise to run it on the air on our broadcast station. But, no, there would be no charge, and it's available to anybody who wants it once it leaves this building. It's basically public domain then.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I wonder if just before going to Mr. Henry I could ask: as you make progress on the cable capacity, when would you see this material broadcast once you had your arrangements made regarding cable or repeat stations?

MR. GIBSON: I was thinking that there are a lot of different times when you could run it. I was actually thinking that a good time to run it may be 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock in the morning, just kind of prior to that day's sitting. It would be fresh on members' minds and the general public who view it. We have not looked at necessarily the exact time, but it would make sense to me, if the House is sitting today at 1 o'clock, to run it tomorrow morning. I think that would be a really advantageous time to run it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. HENRY: Thanks for coming. You've answered actually most of my questions. The only one is that in two years, if Access decides not to continue their service to us, regardless of whether we go with the Videotron proposal or the CFRN, we're still in the same pickle with regard to how we get it out there. That's not as much a concern, but aside from the cable issue can you give us some sort of numbers how many households you reach in I guess central and northern Alberta who do not have cable? Do you know what I'm asking? I get you through cable.

MR. GIBSON: I can't tell you that, because that's almost a question you'd have to ask cable. I can tell you that the average cable in Alberta is around 70 to 75 percent I believe.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I can answer that for you a bit, Mike. If you're not in a town, you're not on cable.

MR. HENRY: Okay. I'm going to walk this through my head: assuming Access does not continue the service after two years, and therefore we don't have cable and it's broadcast on CFRN at 4 in the morning or whatever, then it basically advantages people who are not in town, because they don't have cable. That's the one advantage.

MR. GIBSON: That is an advantage to off air actually, and as Mr. Wickman advised, unfortunately it kind of leaves out southern Alberta at this point.

MR. HENRY: I'm still betwixt and between, but if we went with the Videotron proposal, if Access dropped it, then we wouldn't have any service to those people who didn't have cable. I just want to make sure I'm following this.

MR. WOLOSHYN: You're absolutely right. And one step further: you wouldn't have any service to half the cable subscribers also, the ones who are not getting the Videotron.

MR. HENRY: Now, I shouldn't be asking you this, but does the Videotron proposal automatically assume that Shaw cable people will get it as well or just the Videotron people? Being a Shaw cable subscriber.

MS HALEY: Why don't we wait until they're in, and then we can ask them?

MR. HENRY: Are they coming in?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, they are.

MR. HENRY: I'm sorry. I wasn't aware if they were able to come. In any event, thanks. That's all I have for questions.

10:23

MR. BRUSEKER: Just one question on the robotic cameras. We have a couple of wandering MLAs who don't tend to fix themselves in place when they're answering or asking questions. How would you deal with that?

MR. GIBSON: The robotics can be taken to the manual mode any time. It may take a couple of minutes to find the individual. It's interesting that, again, with the state-of-the-art equipment, as long as the individual doesn't wander during question period, you could

punch a new number in for that individual, and if he stays there, then the camera can find him or her.

MR. BRUSEKER: The wandering would just be a couple of feet one way or another.

MR. GIBSON: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you meant moving chairs.

MR. BRUSEKER: No, no.

MR. GIBSON: We're not talking close shots, you know, the head and shoulders. I mean, we have to allow some room for that. That's a very good point though. Once the camera has found the individual, the operator in the control room at the back still has access to fine-tune the movement of that camera, and if the individual were actually to kind of be sitting over here and then shift this way, it's a very simple operation for the operator just to simply move the camera with the control stick.

MR. BRASSARD: So members themselves may have to take a little training too.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah. That was the only question I had. Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any other members have any questions? On behalf of the committee, Mr. Gibson, I'd like to thank you for attending this morning. It was a very clear presentation.

MR. GIBSON: Thank you very much. If I have concluding remarks, it would be that the professional look of Oral Question Period I think is very important to the general public and to the members themselves and to visitors of the House as well. When you're sitting in the gallery there, it makes your government look just a little bit more professional.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Woloshyn has a question.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Your point about making the government look more professional I certainly think is a valid one. To take it one step further, we generally have two or three news cameras in there also cluttering up that way. Would there be some provision where they could have an instant feed within the building or whatever to access that so that there wouldn't be the need to have the additional three or four portable cameras? In other words, they generally are there to tape it for themselves. Would there be provision for them to tape right off your feed?

MR. GIBSON: Yes. As a matter of fact, the feed is already sent to the entire House. Now, you're asking me if I can stop the other cameras from going in there, and I'm not in that position, but that feed is available.

MR. WOLOSHYN: That's what I'm asking: if they are not in the House, can they still get the pictures instantly to be taped outside the House?

MR. GIBSON: Yes, they can. That feed already I think goes to the entire building, to different ports.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to point out that I thought it was a very valid, interesting point that Mr. Gibson raised, the benefits of the closed captioning in terms of people attempting

to learn English. You know, that enhances the need for that closed captioning, which we're all sold on anyhow.

MR. GIBSON: Yeah. I think your recommendation is that way anyway, and it's very good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Gibson. We appreciate your coming.

MR. GIBSON: Thank you very much for the opportunity. Can I stay and watch a little bit more?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Certainly.

MR. GIBSON: Thank you. May I add one more thing, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Mr. Gibson.

MR. GIBSON: I apologize for jumping in after the fact, but there's an important point here that when we put our proposal together, there was enough time to buy equipment. I should caution you that for the first few weeks, the equipment may not be there in the robotics. We will commit to cover. We've been pushed back, and the earlier you can make a decision the better, because there's time to get this equipment. So I caution the committee that for the first few weeks, the robotics would not – we'd get there as quickly as possible.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Yeah, but you're still going to have the coverage.

MR. GIBSON: Oh, absolutely. Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Sorry, Mr. Campbell. The chair would like to welcome John Campbell, who is the director of finance of Videotron Communications Ltd. I want to say thank you, Mr. Campbell, for coming to see us this morning on this rather short notice.

MR. CAMPBELL: My pleasure.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The committee was interested in hearing from both proposals as to what they saw about their respective benefits of those proposals and how they saw the proceedings of question period being delivered to as many Albertans as possible at a convenient time. So we thank you for responding and welcome you this morning. The procedure will be for you to make your comments, and then members will make their comments or ask any questions arising therefrom. So the floor is yours. Thank you very much.

MR. CAMPBELL: Okay. I wasn't aware I had to make a presentation. Has everybody had a chance to actually read the copy of the proposal?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. We've got a summary.

MR. CAMPBELL: Okay. Essentially, by way of background, Videotron has been doing the actual production of the coverage, manning the cameras and sending out feeds to the local broadcasters and to Access for distribution throughout the province. We're proposing to continue on the same basis of producing the coverage at the same hourly rate that we have been charging for the last few years. We've done a joint proposal with Shaw Communications.

Our portion of it is basically the status quo. We'll keep the same price; there's no price increase for the first two years.

The change comes about really in the Shaw portion in that up to now we've been providing the feed to Access, which has been satellite uplinking it and distributing it throughout the province in the evening. It's been distributed live on Videotron during the day on channel 10, on the community channel, and then I believe Access was rebroadcasting it in the evening. Now Access's position or status is changing somewhat, so I'm not exactly sure how Access is planning to carry on in the future. However, our proposal was that Shaw Communications would do the uplink of the satellite signal, and it would be distributed to cable companies and distributed on the community channel throughout the province of Alberta where that was feasible. Now, we canvassed the cable operators in Alberta and determined that the vast majority of them could in fact carry question period live during the day. So that's basically where it sits right now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just before asking for questions, I happen to live in Drumheller, and Videotron services Drumheller. Would it be on the community channel in Drumheller?

MR. CAMPBELL: Yes, in Drumheller it would be.

MRS. MIROSH: Not in Calgary.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Videotron doesn't operate in Calgary.

MR. CAMPBELL: No. Shaw operates in Calgary. Shaw would be distributing it in Calgary.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Of course you can't speak for Shaw as to what their intentions would be.

MR. CAMPBELL: No. That's correct.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, there's a very important point that is raised here though. Is there a formal agreement with Shaw that they will distribute question period live in the southern part of the province, or is your agreement only with the technology of the production?

10:33

MR. CAMPBELL: Shaw is a member of the Cable Television Association of Alberta, as is Videotron, and through our association there was a letter sent to Shaw Communications by the president of the association basically saying that all the medium and larger cities would in fact carry it live. It really depends on the smaller centres having the facilities to actually pick up the signal and carry it.

DR. GARRISON: Mr. Chairman, could I add a clarification here?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Dr. Garrison.

DR. GARRISON: What Mr. Campbell's referring to is a letter that was part of their proposal which came from Shaw on December 16. The cable coverage throughout the province would be an additional cost of \$900 per hour. That was not included in the summary to the committee because it was basically pre-empted by the offer from Access to give us live coverage provincewide for nothing. So it didn't make sense to us to include as an option in our package to pay Shaw \$900 an hour for what Access would give us for free.

MR. CAMPBELL: I wasn't aware of that.

MR. HENRY: It's in the package.

DR. GARRISON: Is it in the package?

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, on the first page of the package it is referenced that Videotron and Shaw carry the program live and would also propose it for \$900 more, but it isn't in the summary.

MR. CAMPBELL: Basically the \$900 comes from getting a quote from Telesat on the cost of uplinking the signal.

MRS. MIROSH: I didn't think Access was giving it to us free anymore.

MS HALEY: It's through the Department of Education.

MR. WOLOSHYN: There is a time commitment to education which would be committed to this from Access.

MRS. MIROSH: But the department paid for it.

MS HALEY: Yes.

MRS. MIROSH: No freebies then.

MR. CAMPBELL: Someone's paying the \$900. Whether it's passed on to you or not, that's the question.

MRS. MIROSH: Access is pretty well distributed throughout the province.

MR. CAMPBELL: Yes.

MRS. MIROSH: And through cable; right?

MR. CAMPBELL: Right.

MRS. MIROSH: At what time? We haven't determined that. Just in the daytime so far.

MR. BRASSARD: Access? It's going to be live.

MRS. MIROSH: That's it; right? There's no evening . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: We don't know that. This is very unclear, Dianne. It could be live plus a rebroadcast at night depending upon what time the latter – it could be live or maybe just rebroadcast.

MRS. MIROSH: Your proposal is just on production right now?

MR. CAMPBELL: Yes.

MRS. MIROSH: That is what I was asking.

MR. CAMPBELL: Videotron is saying: we will do the production in the same manner as we've been doing it. Then the question of how do we distribute the signal throughout the province: that portion of it changes.

MRS. MIROSH: That's the second point.

MR. CAMPBELL: It used to be Access. Now Shaw is saying: if Access won't do it, we will do it. They researched the cost of the satellite signal and made a quote.

MR. HENRY: Just a question, Mr. Chairman. We have some information from the staff about the Department of Education's commitment to Access. Do we know if that is only a live broadcast or if the allocated time would include a rebroadcast?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Dr. Garrison.

DR. GARRISON: Yeah. I was in contact with people at Education and Access yesterday. They said that they had sufficient time to give us an hour and a half per day during session to cover it live, but they don't have sufficient time to carry it twice. If we wanted them to carry a delayed broadcast, then they wouldn't be able to give us the live time as well. So it would be a choice that the committee would have to make: one or the other.

MR. WOLOSHYN: That's fair enough.

MR. CAMPBELL: Just one point I would add to those comments. In the letter that the Cable Television Association of Alberta sent to Shaw, it said:

In addition, the larger and medium sized cable systems (ie. those with a manned Master Control) have indicated a willingness to tape the live proceedings and replay them later in the evening. It is estimated that 500,000 to 575,000 households would have this "second window" on the Question Period.

So assuming that you wanted to go live with Access during the day, the larger centres have the ability to actually tape Access and then replay it. There's a good likelihood that most larger centres would be able to tape it and play it back later in the evening on the community channel.

MR. HENRY: Just a question on that. The taping and rebroadcast: is that related at all to the \$900 cost or would that be a freebie essentially?

MR. CAMPBELL: That's a separate item. I don't think there would be a charge for that. I can't speak for the other operators. Well, I'd say that there would be no charge for that.

MR. HENRY: Okay.

MR. BRASSARD: Just one question. Would the signal you produce be available to others? Would there be some kind of a copyright on it?

MR. CAMPBELL: No. Currently we have what we call direct feeds which go to the local broadcasters and Access. That feed is made available free of charge.

MR. BRASSARD: So that would be available free of charge to anyone.

MR. CAMPBELL: Correct.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any further questions, comments?

On behalf of the committee, Mr. Campbell, we thank you for coming and sharing this knowledge with us to help us come to a decision on what to do with regard to providing coverage for our question period.

MR. CAMPBELL: Thanks for calling me. I hope we're successful.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What is the wish of the committee? Ms Haley.

MS HALEY: Well, are we going to discuss this now, what we're going to do?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, this item is still outstanding on our budget.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, to bring the item back on the table. I had made a motion that was tabled, and that motion should now be lifted and debated.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, where is that motion? You're going to have to refresh my memory.

MR. WICKMAN: My motion called for the CFRN proposal with closed captioning. That was for discussion purposes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, then, I guess it's time to bring that motion forward now that the committee has had the opportunity of hearing amplification on both proposals.

MS HALEY: I would just like to say that I appreciated both presentations. The professional aspect of CFRN might be nice, but I can't justify spending the extra money at this time. My preference would be to go with the recommendation that was presented to us in our budget briefing: the closed captioning on Videotron.

MR. BRUSEKER: It doesn't say on Videotron. It just says: closed captioning.

MS HALEY: Well, on the Videotron presentation at \$57,000.

MR. BRASSARD: I'd like to support the motion. For the \$14,000 we're getting a rebroadcast of the program daily, albeit it's 4 in the morning at this point at least. I tend to lean towards the CFRN proposal.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think that in all fairness the recommendation did not recommend either CFRN or Videotron. It recommended to go with closed captioning. That was the recommendation from the administration, but the motion was to go with CFRN.

MR. BRASSARD: So just for clarification: is the motion for the adoption of CFRN?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, with closed captioning.
Mr. Henry.

MR. HENRY: I wasn't indicating to speak; I was leaning over. However, now that I have the floor, Mr. Chairman, I recognize the difference of \$14,000 going with the CFRN proposal, but I'm inclined to support the motion for two reasons, specifically the quality. Having been vain enough to go home at 11 o'clock at night and occasionally watch myself on television, there is a problem sometimes when the cameras move and there's a shaking of the cameras.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's you, Mike; it's not the camera.

MR. HENRY: Well, I'll look at it again, Mr. Chairman. Anything we can do to improve the quality, that would then encourage more people to watch, I think is worth while. Also, I am concerned about people who don't live in Edmonton or Calgary, who are outside the cable networks. Again, two years down the road if Access does not continue, – and it's fairly likely that it may not continue the service

for us – then CFRN would be in the position of being able to broadcast at least to central northern Alberta and maybe, depending on what happens with acquisitions and whatnot, through, quote, unquote, their Calgary sister station for taping at least for people who don't have access to cable.

So I'm going to support the motion as presented.

10:43

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, just so we know exactly where we're at. The motion by Ms Haley was that we accept the estimate as proposed with closed captioning. That would be the Videotron proposal. Mr. Wickman moved an amendment to that motion to change it from Videotron to CFRN. That is the situation we're in. We have a motion by Ms Haley with an amendment by Mr. Wickman. So we should be on the amendment.

MR. HENRY: So, Mr. Chairman, my comments apply, then, to the amendment. I'll be supporting the amendment.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, I'd like to close debate on the amendment, if there are no other speakers.

MRS. MIROSH: Can we have a little recess?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I think it might be an opportune time to have a little recess, and then we'll come back with everybody's mind in order.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Before we recess, Mr. Chairman, one question that perhaps you can answer with respect to CFRN and the possibility of their accessing a cable channel. Now, he was quite clear on that. I didn't ask him and I must apologize for it. If we go with Videotron's proposal and want to get broader coverage, then it's a \$900 addition for Shaw to beam up. In the CFRN presentation it wasn't clear to me, at any rate, that if that cable channel became available to them, they would broadcast it on that channel, as they imply in here, at no further cost to the Assembly. Could you clarify that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, seeing that the question wasn't asked, I don't know whether . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: I think it's significant.

DR. McNEIL: My interpretation of the proposal is that that's the case, but Mr. Gibson is at the back.

MR. GIBSON: I'd be prepared to answer that one.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Maybe Mr. Gibson can fill in.

MR. GIBSON: Should we acquire the cable channel, there would be no charge for that running. Now, again, that doesn't necessarily go to the rest of the province.

MR. WOLOSHYN: No. I'm referring to that cable channel which you are in the process of acquiring.

MR. GIBSON: No, there's no extra charge.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you.

MR. WICKMAN: What you're saying is that it would be available to other cable outlets at no additional cost?

MR. GIBSON: That's right. It's available, as I mentioned, free.

MR. WOLOSHYN: So if Shaw or Videotron want to hook onto your feeds, you won't charge them?

MR. GIBSON: That's right.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Gibson.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now we'll have a little, say, seven- or 10-minute recess.

[The committee adjourned from 10:46 a.m. to 11:02 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, if the committee is ready to come back to order, the chair would like to welcome Mr. Taylor and advise him that the work of the committee as far as the budget is concerned is almost complete. We have considered every item in the budget except for the matter of House services, and that was delayed so that the committee could feel completely comfortable with the proposals of Videotron Communications Ltd. and CFRN television with regard to the broadcast of question period. We've just had the benefit of hearing from those two organizations.

There is a motion that was moved by Ms Haley yesterday that the House services budget of \$924,201 be approved. Mr. Wickman proposed an amendment to that motion increasing the grand total of the budget by \$18,250 in order to accommodate the proposal of CFRN television for the production of the question period material for broadcast, which would be then distributed, at least for the next two years, by Access television on their network on a live basis. It will not be done on a delayed broadcast basis, as has been the practice in the past.

MR. N. TAYLOR: One question I might have being that I just had an ear operation: how did you work out on your translation?

MR. CHAIRMAN: This will be with closed captioning rather than sign language. It was pointed out that there's an added benefit to this process. In addition to the hearing impaired, closed captioning also is of great use to those who are learning English. So the audience will be wider for closed captioning than just the hearing impaired.

The matter before the committee at the moment is the motion by Ms Haley as amended by the motion of Mr. Wickman. Does the committee want any further discussion on the amendment?

MR. WICKMAN: Well, I just wanted to close debate on my amendment if there are no other speakers. Mr. Chairman, at one point I was questioning my original motion, but then when it was pointed out that Shaw would be an additional \$900 an hour, that particular economic argument was gone. So there are two aspects of the CFRN proposal I like. One is the higher level of quality, and secondly, I believe it is very, very important that as many Albertans as possible be given the opportunity, whether they choose to exercise it or not is their choice, to hear and see their elected representatives in action so they can form their judgments accordingly. On that basis, I think we have greater opportunity with CFRN.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Wickman.

Then I guess the committee is ready for the question on the amendment.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the amendment proposed by Mr. Wickman, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

So now the question is on Ms Haley's motion as amended. Any further debate or questions? Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

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

DR. McNEIL: I had the two alternatives ready here. They're not separate pages. One's on the back of the sheet. So that particular page now is revised. The bottom line in terms of the overall budget on the . . .

MR. BRASSARD: This is the first page here?

DR. McNEIL: The other side. That page is revised, and then the overall budget that you're approving is there.

MRS. MIROSH: Is this as amended? Is this the whole budget as amended?

DR. McNEIL: House services as amended with that particular decision.

MRS. MIROSH: You had this all ready to go?

DR. McNEIL: Well, I had the two alternatives. See; here's the package for the other one.

MR. WOLOSHYN: So how do we know which one we approved when we're all finished with this?

DR. McNEIL: It's recorded. We'll have a vote on that.

MR. BRUSEKER: We have to vote on the entire budget; don't we?

MR. HENRY: We did. That was Ms Haley's motion.

MR. WOLOSHYN: No, just this one here.

DR. McNEIL: Did you vote on that?

MS HALEY: We did as amended. I moved the whole budget as amended.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The memo is just to increase it to accommodate.

MRS. DACYSHYN: But, David, do we want a motion to make the new number?

DR. McNEIL: No.

MS HALEY: No, because it's as amended.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We did it as amended.

MRS. DACYSHYN: Oh, right. I'm sorry. I thought this was the entire budget.

MR. BRASSARD: You don't need a motion on the overall budget then?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I think there probably should be a motion on the overall budget as amended.

MR. BRUSEKER: So moved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Bruseker moves. Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of approving the Legislative Assembly budget as amended, please indicate. Opposed? Carried. So that is the budget.

Now, is there any new business to be brought before the committee today? No new business? No other business to bring forward? No monkey business?

MR. N. TAYLOR: Well, the only thing I wondered, Mr. Chairman, is that my constituency just lies outside Edmonton, and there was a pioneer, Father Lacombe, and before that the French Canadians, so it looks like the start of a blizzard of 100-year families at \$250 a shot.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The chair would advise you, Mr. Taylor, that we did discuss this yesterday. The committee is satisfied that it takes some input from the member in order for the member to be responsible for this \$250 bill. Now, we weren't clear yesterday as to what happened in your constituency. The chair knows from its own constituency that it was asked about this, and in my case I said: sure, I'll undertake this. Are you telling us that you or your office had no . . .

MR. N. TAYLOR: No. See; what's happening is that the department of agriculture tells them that they've got one coming, and if they don't get one, it's because the MLA didn't want to give them one. They're already told: "You've been here a hundred years. You've been approved. Your MLA's been passed the information, and the MLA agrees with everything. You get a form; you can get a plaque." Well, I don't like this. You know, that's a pretty good sized gun held to your head. This year it will cost me between \$2,000 and \$3,000. It's going to get higher. I don't mind getting a plastic one or even changing it, but they even tell them that they're going to get a Behrends Bronze.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I know. It's very heavy.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Oh, I know. It weighs a tonne. Well, if they kept their big mouth shut, I'd be all right, and if the MLA was the one that decided to give.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I think, then, this is a matter for the department of agriculture, and I suppose the chair will undertake on your behalf to . . .

MR. N. TAYLOR: Even if it was a letter from agriculture to me or to whatever MLA saying that . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, that's the way it should start.

MR. N. TAYLOR: . . . Joe McGillicuddy in your constituency has been there a hundred years; do you wish to do something? That's different. But they write Joe McGillicuddy and say: "You've been

here a hundred years. You've got a right to a bronze. Please contact your MLA."

MS HALEY: What it says in the actual presentation is that it would be originated through you. They would come to you and make this claim, and then you would start the research.

MR. N. TAYLOR: They're not done that way now.

MS HALEY: Yeah, but that's the way it's supposed to be.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's the way it worked in my constituency.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Taylor has a very good point and the fact that it has been applied that way in our constituency. I'm in the same boat there. I think it would be appropriate if the chairman wouldn't mind writing a letter to agriculture stating that that particular program for the plaques be applied the same to all members, because the accessing of paying for it is from Members' Services. So if there's going to be one procedure for Redwater and a different one for Stony Plain, that's not fair. I think, Nick, that would make you happy, if you initiated it. Do I read you correctly?

11:12

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yeah. Even a couple thousand dollars isn't onerous. I just didn't like the idea of being told that you're going to give a present; aren't you? I'd get a call from a guy that says, "I've been told I'll get one from you. When are you going to give it?"

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, the chair is happy to use whatever influence it has in this regard.

Now, is there any feeling with regard to the need for another meeting date, or will it be left to the normal process?

MR. HENRY: With respect, Mr. Chairman, I'd be willing to leave it to the discretion of the chair, but I have a couple of requests. Number one, I'm wondering if we can get, if possible, more notice certainly of the meetings. The last time it was about 10 days, two weeks. I had, frankly, surgery scheduled that I could have rescheduled had I known at the end of session when we were going to have the December meeting. At the same time, I'm wondering, in terms of the agenda packages and the background information – I realize the Christmas break made things difficult this time – if we could get that a few days ahead of time. It would allow us to do some of the consultation with some of our colleagues and avoid some of the problems we ran into in this particular meeting, rather than receiving it the afternoon before. Could I just leave that for advisement?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Certainly, but the chair does want to take this opportunity to say that it feels that all hon. members on this committee have acted in a very good way. Despite the obstacles that Mr. Henry has mentioned – there's validity to the comments – we have certainly made good progress, and the chair wants to thank all hon. members for their co-operation and diligence in getting this important job done in the timely way that it has.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I have one report to make. I think a couple of meetings back I was asked to put my request to the minister of advanced education that more scholarships be given to legislative interns, and I have done that. I don't know if I copied everyone or not. I can't remember.

MS HALEY: I haven't seen it.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Okay. I'll make sure you get one.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Well, there being no further business, the chair will entertain a motion to adjourn.

MR. BRASSARD: I move that we adjourn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour, please indicate. Opposed? Carried. The meeting stands adjourned with the chair's thanks and appreciation.

[The committee adjourned at 11:15 a.m.]

