

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

11:40 a.m.

[Chairman: Mr. Schumacher]

THE CHAIRMAN: I want to thank everybody for coming out on this liquid sunshiny July day. Derm Whelan is with us, the Chief Electoral Officer. Nice to have you with us, Derm.

MR. WHELAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: He was wondering whether summer was over. I assured him I didn't think it was. Edmonton had been complaining about dryness.

MR. BRUSEKER: I thought Edmonton had their summer on Thursday this year.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, anyway, thank you all for joining us, including members of the LAO down at the other end and Parliamentary Counsel. We are here for one main subject. First of all, could I have a motion with regard to the draft agenda?

MR. BRUSEKER: So moved.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any discussion? All in favour? Carried.
Now, number 3. These minutes: were they sent out?

MRS. DACYSHYN: Yes, they were.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any errors or omissions from the minutes of Wednesday, January 4? Mr. Stelmach.

MR. STELMACH: I'll move acceptance.

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in favour? Carried?
With regard to Thursday, January 5?

MR. BRUSEKER: I'll move we accept the minutes of Thursday, January 5.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Now, under 4(a) there is the matter of the Legislative Assembly accounts payable and payroll systems. Since our meetings in January there's been some progress made in that area, and I'd ask Dr. McNeil to review that with us. That will be under tab 4(a).

DR. McNEIL: Yeah. There's a decision item under tab 4(a). At the meeting of January 4, during the discussion on the budget we got into the issue of accounts payable and payroll services that are now being provided to the Legislative Assembly by Payment Systems Corporation, also known as PSC. The amount budgeted for this purpose in '95-96 was \$85,200, and we indicated at that meeting on January 4 that we thought we could ensure a more cost-effective delivery of those services by looking at alternative options. The committee asked us to do that.

Our evaluation of options indicated that we can, through acquiring certain hardware and software at a cost of approximately \$55,000 and an ongoing operating cost of about \$5,000, provide an upgraded service in accounts payable and payroll. As you can see from the economics, we have a payback period of less than two years by implementing our own payroll and accounting system. As well, there are some estimated manpower savings as a result. Right now

we're doing a lot of manual overrides of the existing system, especially on the human resource side. Essentially, that system is not designed to deal with the complexity that we have to deal with in our pay system. Each MLA has to be four or five employees because of the different sources of payments for members and so on.

So our recommendation is that we move ahead with purchasing and implementing this on-line payroll and accounts payable system and save the Assembly a significant amount of money in the long run plus deliver a more effective service. Bill Gano and Cheryl Scarlett are here if you have any specific questions in terms of details of the present problems or details about the proposed solution.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just a question, then, because I was one of the ones who certainly raised that. You know, you get three or four envelopes with three or four statements, so now conceivably you could just get one statement and would just add on the appropriate figure for committee work or House leader or caucus Whip or that sort of thing. You'd just get one statement in one envelope and make it simpler. Is that what we're shooting for, Cheryl?

DR. McNEIL: Would you like to come to the table so they can pick you up on the mike?

MRS. SCARLETT: Yes, that's one of the primary objectives of looking at any new system: one that can take all the different payments that you receive as a member, put them together, properly calculate the appropriate tax and other benefit spinoffs of that, and pay you one cheque per month for all remuneration receipts.

MR. BRUSEKER: And then it would still be an automatic deposit straight to the bank account, like we're doing now?

MRS. SCARLETT: That's our intention. Perhaps at some point in time there might be the option to give you besides direct deposit, maybe something else as well.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay. It says in here – is it a one-person position that you could save by going to this? – I guess it's the third page:

It is anticipated that the acquisition of an integrated in-house system will result in manpower savings. It is estimated there will be a .25 man year saving in HRS and a .75 man year saving in the Financial Management . . .

Is that . . .

MR. GANO: Yes. Because of the increased efficiencies and whatnot with a new system, an in-house system, it's anticipated that we would be able to save a full man-year there and consequently reallocate that man-year to other tasks that are going to be coming at us because of the increased accountability from Treasury, because of freedom of information Acts, and so on.

MR. BRUSEKER: Is that one person you're saving included in the calculation of the two-year payback?

DR. McNEIL: No.

MR. BRUSEKER: So in effect it would even be quicker than two years?

DR. McNEIL: Yes.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any other questions or comments?

DR. McNEIL: I guess the other thing to note is that we would be running the parallel systems until the end of the fiscal year, so we'll have, you know, six months or more to test all the systems and all the components before we're in a position to do the switchover as of the start of the next fiscal year.

Another thing to note is that the other legislative offices are, as part of a task force, looking at especially the accounts payable side because of their concerns about the system as well in terms of meeting their needs. So this is not just a Legislative Assembly Office exercise; the other legislative offices are involved.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee wish this to be proceeded with?

MR. WOLOSHYN: I move that we accept your recommendation; that is, choose alternative 2. That's what this is all about; is it?

DR. McNEIL: Yes.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I'd move that. Frank, do you want to second?

MR. BRUSEKER: Sounds like a good idea. I'd second that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any discussion on the motion? Is the committee ready for the question? All those in favour? Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

Now the next, under (b), is just a little report on closed captioning. Apart from one or two glitches at the beginning with the operations, this new system has been very well received, particularly in the deaf community. I have received quite a few comments saying that the users of the system have been very appreciative of what's happened, very happy with the way things were.

Percy.

11:50

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. Mr. Chairman, I just want to say that I've heard many similar comments in the community that they can now benefit further from the programming being done. It is very well received and it is appreciated, although I think one writer here may be going a bit too far when she rates us higher than James Bond 007 films.

THE CHAIRMAN: I thought the committee should be aware of this approval for its actions. I don't think there's any action that has to be taken with regard to that.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I just want to comment on the system, not on the closed captioning but on the camera angles. If I recall, I believe I sent you a note, or maybe I didn't, with respect to when the remote cameras are set, they end up cutting off people in the back at the neck and the shoulders, whatnot. Has that been addressed with CFRN to ensure that they reprogram those things, that the people who are behind the participants of the debate end up looking like human beings instead of bits and pieces of dolls?

DR. McNEIL: There has been some discussion with them about that. One of the problems is that if you have to back away much further, then you don't really focus on the individual that's speaking. So there's a balance there that has to be achieved. We'll be experimenting with that.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Well, with respect to their comments, however, watching the limited amount of question period that I do, we don't need to see half the screen covered with the desk on the bottom of the speaker and the row behind being cut off at the neck. So it's not a matter of them not being able to fill in; it's being discreet as to where they cut off the people that are in the background.

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll continue our discussions.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Or else we'll tape over the lens next session, Mr. Chairman, and then we'll get back to the four cameras that worked well.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any other matters under generally the coverage of the proceedings of the House? If not, then we'll get down to the main business of this meeting, which is 5(a), the proposed budget for the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

We have with us today the Chief Electoral Officer. Our Clerk will introduce the budget, which I believe has been developed between the two gentlemen.

DR. McNEIL: Just an overview first. The process for the development of this budget was to have the Chief Electoral Officer work with the committees branch in terms of looking at some of the historical information on the previous commission in '91-92 and put together a draft, which has had a couple of iterations just based on the new information and review by the committees branch. Subsequently, this draft budget was reviewed on Friday with the chairman of the commission. It is, I would say, an interim budget because the commission has not had a chance to go over it. Depending on what strategy the commission takes, they may have to make some adjustments in it. It reflects a smaller proposed expenditure than that expended by the commission in '91-92.

We need the committee's approval in order that there are funds made available from the Legislative Assembly budget. There is some correspondence in the file between the Speaker and the Provincial Treasurer. Until we can pass a supplementary estimate, if that is necessary, the funds will have to come from the Legislative Assembly budget envelope. We will have a lot better idea in the fall and in January whether or not there has to be a supplementary estimate put forward in the spring.

MR. WOLOSHYN: So what do we need to approve today?

DR. McNEIL: You need to approve an interim budget proposal.

MR. WOLOSHYN: This is not, then, the interim budget proposal?

DR. McNEIL: Yes. It's a proposed budget which will facilitate the commission to get moving.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Now, is there a way of allocating funds without approving this budget that would get the commission moving, and then we could visit this when we're doing all the budgets and prepare a requisition for the House come October?

DR. McNEIL: I don't know at what rate the commission would be expending funds between now and then.

MR. WOLOSHYN: They've got a year, I believe, to bring a report back, and we're talking about basically three months, three and a half months till the House comes back in. I don't know. I'm comfortable with whatever . . .

MR. WHELAN: Mr. Chairman, the pro forma budget, the proposed budget, is meant to fund the work of the commission, if possible totally, but there are a number of variables that are impossible to address at this time because the direction or the methodology that the commission will follow has yet to be determined by the commission itself.

You see on the first page of the figures that while wages are inserted in the amount of \$50,000, if the commission decides not to use the services of either the Legislative Assembly Office or my office, well, then it's quite conceivable that the amount needed to cover wages would be more than \$50,000 during the life of the commission, which we think will be at least 12 months, but it may go to 16 before they're finished.

As you look down the other items, you will see also an amount dealing with travel. It doesn't necessarily follow that the historical experience with travel by the previous commission will be the same this time round. So that's another uncertain variable. However, the \$506,400 is our best estimate and our recommended estimate for the work of the commission. I think what the Clerk of the Legislature is saying, however, is that we had to add a codicil because if the commission proceeds in a way other than the way it's suggested, it may indeed cost more, so that would bring it back for supplementary supply.

My suggestion, if you agree, is that this should be sufficient at least to see the commission through most of its work and that then, as you have suggested, if the timing is coincident with the progress of the work, perhaps it might come back at budget time, but it's hard to say that with any certainty.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Well, you see, I have difficulty, following on what you've just indicated, approving a budget that's here without knowing – and granted the commission hasn't set the direction yet since they've only been appointed for four days, and that will be forthcoming very soon – and hearing you say that this may not even be enough when it was based historically on a lot of work done by a previous commission for a considerably lower number, if my memory serves me right. I guess what I want to see is the commission get started with its work but at the same time not leave an impression that there is a bottomless pit of money to fund its activities.

THE CHAIRMAN: Dr. McNeil wishes to comment.

DR. McNEIL: It's entirely up to the committee. They are free to allocate a portion of these funds for the work of the commission up until such and such a date, at which time the commission would come back to the committee to get approval for a final budget. There would be two aspects. There would be the balance of this fiscal year, and then there would be funds required in '96-97. The budget for those funds would be developed likely in the fall and approved in January as part of the overall budget envelope. So the committee could say, well, we'll take two-thirds of this money or \$300,000 or whatever they wanted to as budget approval on an interim basis to fund the work of the commission over the next three or five months.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. Just a couple of questions, Mr. Chairman, to refresh my memory. When we look at a time line, I realize that the five members of the commission have now been appointed. When exactly is it projected that they will start?

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Whelan.

MR. WHELAN: Yes. Well, in point of fact the commission really has begun its work already. The chairman, as I understand it, has been in touch with members of the commission, and they intend to meet very quickly. So almost immediately there will be travel costs involved. Also, the commission chairman, Chief Judge Edward Wachowich, will need staff and supplies almost immediately to begin his work.

So the commission has started and within seven months must present a preliminary report, so I take that to be the end of January. Then the final phase is a five-month period, which takes it to the end of June 1996. That's the time line, and within that time line it will be necessary, with respect to both the preliminary and the final reports, for the commission to be involved in a series of public meetings so that people may have input and deliver their opinions publicly to the commission for consideration. So it's a very tight time line, and certainly they do need immediate funding to begin their work. I agree with the Clerk that it may not be in the full amount of the former budget. I think any portion that you deem appropriate, sufficient to support them until they return, would suffice.

12:00

MR. WICKMAN: My second question would be: what would that amount be?

MR. WHELAN: Well, I would think that perhaps \$400,000 would be sufficient. That should not encumber and is a safe estimate of what would be needed.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I share a concern of Stan's. Even \$400,000 I have a concern with in that it can leave a perception when the commission members are sitting there with all the variables of, well, we have \$400,000, we can do this and do that, and further down the road, after three months, we can go back to a more final-type budget. If we provide them with sufficient funding to get under way, have their first one or two strategy sessions to determine what their approach is going to be so that they can participate in drafting a final budget along with the Chief Electoral Officer, then we can reschedule a meeting to coincide with that and approve the final one at that particular time. I was tending to think something more in the ballpark of \$100,000 or \$150,000 to get them over those initial steps, to allow one or two meetings to work that kind of stuff out.

MR. WHELAN: Well, Mr. Chairman, again I think whatever the committee decides would suffice as long as it provides the start-up funding needed to get the commission working. I tend to agree. I feel a little bit uncomfortable presenting a budget that the members of the commission have not only not seen but certainly have not discussed, so for that reason it's very much pro forma. It's a theoretical thing just to get the committee started, and really it's the commission that would have to put forward its final budget anyway. So whatever you deem sufficient under the circumstances. For sure \$400,000 is enough to carry on until the end of this fiscal year.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I would hope so.

MR. WHELAN: Yeah. Then you would only be dealing with any surplus that may be required for the '96-97 fiscal year.

MR. WOLOSHYN: For the basis of focusing the discussion, I would move that we allocate \$150,000 as a start-up sum to the commission with the provision that if there is a financial difficulty, Members' Services convenes at the chairman's call for an emergency meeting to discuss at that point. In the meantime we could look at

some finer directions as to where the commission is going and what they feel their needs may be with respect to staff, travel, and everything else. This would give them sufficient money for the next two or three months to get started, I feel. They would not be inhibited, and we would be able to look at the budget in greater detail.

THE CHAIRMAN: The motion before the committee, then, is for \$150,000 on an interim basis until the commission has had a chance to develop a more complete budget, at which time the committee will meet again to consider the commission's request.

MR. BRUSEKER: Then I guess what you're saying is that you would anticipate a meeting in September, I presume, or thereabouts, whenever the five members have met.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Probably before the House reconvenes in October. I would assume the Chief Electoral Officer would be involved in it. We would have the budget come back to this committee for final approval, which would cover their total activities or hope to cover their total activities.

MR. BRUSEKER: I guess I agree with the intent of that. I was thinking that it might be worth while, since we have the Chief Electoral Officer here, who has prepared a budget that is admittedly theoretical, if we could have him sort of go through that budget and just review the numbers that he's come up with and sort of the rationale. I've skimmed through it fairly quickly, but I wonder if it might be worth while doing that, Mr. Chairman, at some point as well. I don't know whether it would be appropriate to do it now or after a vote is taken on Mr. Woloshyn's motion.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think it can be done on the basis of discussion of the motion. You're getting more information. So you can proceed with your questions on it.

MR. BRUSEKER: You know, if we just spend five minutes on it. It doesn't need to be lengthy, but if we could just sort of go through how he's arrived at the \$500,000 figure that he has.

MR. WHELAN: Mr. Chairman, I should introduce Bill Sage, the gentleman to my right, who is the director of financial operations in the electoral office and who really has prepared and done the research for this particular budget. I should apologize too. I have a terrible cold. That was perhaps the main reason why I asked, Mr. Chairman, if the summer was finished. The cold was caught over the weekend in the rain.

At any rate, under wages we thought that because many of our staff would be involved with the new commission, the need for outside support staff would be reduced. Moreover, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada has offered us two experts from his office to assist Elections Alberta, Maps Alberta, and Statistics Alberta as they go about this work of serving the commission as they consider the boundaries question. So with these factors in mind an amount of \$50,000 was included. The experiential data was looked at; in other words, what was spent with the previous commission was considered.

The second item: the employee contributions are roughly 10 percent, covering Canada pension, unemployment insurance, and so on.

Travel again is very variable, but these are historical costs. They include travel for the *Hansard* team that would produce a verbatim of the committee meetings, which is customarily the practice not only in Alberta but in other provinces with respect to public

meetings of a commission that's serving the Legislature. So the travel for commission members historically was roughly this amount, \$21,000, a small amount for aircraft rental charter, the commission staff, and the *Hansard* staff travel. So it's approximately \$32,000, and it's based on experiential data from the work and the cost of the previous commission.

On page 3 advertising is based on the history of the 1991-92 commission. Generally three advertisements were placed in 144 daily and weekly newspapers throughout the province. The first ad announced the commission, sort of introduced the commission. The second dealt with public hearings: the scheduling, the time, the place. The third provided more details on the same subject. The Public Affairs Bureau provided the rough costs of a similar advertising program for this commission. So again roughly \$89,000 for advertising, \$6,000 for production and distribution, for a total of approximately \$95,000.

The freight and postage item is the actual expenditure from the commission last appointed, and it's in the amount of \$3,000. So this would be mailing out copies of the report, courier services. Because the commission members live in every part of Alberta, there will be a need to courier and to indeed mail or otherwise deliver different materials between members.

12:10

On page 4, rentals. Between February of '91 and May of 1992 rentals were required for public hearings, and indeed some rental of additional sound equipment was required when the room being used was very large. In other words, the need for microphones in a larger room was greater, and it had to be supplemented. So again, roughly \$10,000.

Under contract services, there really is a wide range of services that might be covered here including the production of maps, the generation of statistical figures, other parameters related to county boundaries, municipal boundaries, and so on. We'd certainly hope that with the assistance of a geographer and a statistician from Elections Canada, if this is approved by the commission – I know that the chairman has indicated already that he has very positive feelings about that particular proposal – this cost may be trimmed by a certain amount. At any rate, we put up the figure of \$238,650 to cover these contract services. They may also include the design and printing of maps for enclosure in packages that outline the boundaries. Indeed it may include some professional review of the final report or the preliminary reports of the commission.

Fees and honoraria, which is the first in the subset here, are based on the experiential data from the last commission, that held 23 public hearings and 49 private commission meetings, for a total of 72. Now, at that time the former Chief Electoral Officer was a member of the commission. It was also chaired by a judge. These two individuals were not paid. So the figures are based upon the payment of the other members of the commission. They averaged 70.5 days, these days being more than eight hours, and at the current rate of pay that would be an amount of \$69,500. The inference is that they will meet at least 70 and a half days, that the four members will attend, and that gives the total of \$69,500.

The second subset under professional services is *Hansard*, at the top of page 5. We estimate 23 meetings at two hours per meeting: \$400. That's very optimistic. I hope that we can deliver that.

Legal services. We've discussed the possibility of using – and I hope this will not be a big surprise – Parliamentary Counsel for this purpose. I think members will understand that if there's any litigation or difficulty, it may indeed be necessary to go to the private sector for legal counsel, and that will tend to increase this figure.

Consulting services. This is a straightforward estimate for mapping and for engineering services, surveying, whatever it may be. Maps of Alberta: they did two sets of maps the last time around, and we hope that they will do it again. Anyway, from this we get the total for mapping and consulting services at approximately \$70,000. I'm putting 4 and 5 together here.

Number 6 on page 6: the reports. Well, as you know, the cost of paper has increased. There has been about a 40 percent increase in the cost of paper. So we're estimating that the printing of the reports in sufficient numbers will cost \$70,000.

Data processing, the use of geographical information systems to design maps in districts: we've estimated \$10,000. Now, if the people from Elections Canada are acceptable to the commission, they have generated their own software for every federal district in Alberta, which can be broken down into block faces and census tracks on a provincial electoral basis as well. So again, it very much depends on whether or not the commission decides to avail itself of this offer which I've arranged with the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. That will determine whether or not the \$10,000 estimate may be kept.

Hosting is to cover the cost of coffee at public hearings, working lunches for commission members and staff.

Finally, materials and supplies, on page 7. This would be the paper required for maps, and included in this under materials and supplies we've put a contingency of 10 percent of the total cost of the earlier mentioned items. So when that \$46,000 is added in, we come to the \$506,400.

When this was prepared, we had in view suggesting to the commission that they should try to live within these financial parameters. However, you know, I'm just to advise and serve the commission; I cannot impose anything. The commission is certainly free to choose its own process. I know that you're very much concerned with knowing what you're approving, but this figure has in mind the total cost. What the Clerk and I are saying is that because of the uncertainty with respect to how the commission will proceed, there may be a need to come back for supplementary funding.

I think I've covered, Bill, pretty well everything. Anything to add?

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. I was going to say that the budget's been put together very, very well, a lot of thought into it and so on and so forth, probably not too far wrong in the final thing. Nevertheless, I'm going to support the motion that's in front of us. I think one of the key things said was when the Chief Electoral Officer agreed that it would enhance the process to have commission members participate in the finalizing of the budget rather than them feeling that, "This is what you have; now you've got to work with this." So I think it's a good motion.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just a couple of questions too. Looking at the last page, Derm, when you look at the salary and wages together, the last time around they were \$189,000, and this time you're proposing a significant reduction. I'm wondering how realistic that \$50,000 figure is, which I guess is part of why Stan's making the motion. I, too, will be supporting the motion, but I wanted to flag that one.

The other one I'm wondering about is with respect to the issue of contract services. Again quite a change there: \$308,000 versus \$238,000. I noticed you hadn't made any allowance for the commission chairman. Is it anticipated the commission chairman will be receiving honoraria? No?

MR. WHELAN: Yes. Well, Mr. Chairman, I should answer these questions. With respect to the salaries and wages, we built this pro forma budget on the assumption that the expertise within the public sector both here in Alberta and also within Elections Canada would be used by the commission. If that's acceptable to the commission, the need to contract out the work to engineering firms, to surveyors, to people with expertise in statistics will be eliminated, precluded. We feel that between the office of the Clerk and the office of the Chief Electoral Officer and given that the arrangement is acceptable to the commission, this type of saving can be achieved. The \$50,000 is only there because the commission may decide in its wisdom to contract out items that we have not contemplated. So it's there as a safeguard and does not have in mind specific wages or salaries for any particular person. So what is being suggested in this budget and what will be suggested to the commission is that you utilize the expertise in-house and not employ people for this purpose when they are already on the staff either in the Legislative Assembly Office or in the office of the Chief Electoral Officer.

12:20

The second item, contracting services. We feel that if the staff from Elections Canada are used, their expertise in mapping and their computer expertise with GIS, or geographical information system, software will make it possible to reduce the cost of contract services by some \$80,000. I think that would be roughly right.

The third-party request was with respect to the chairman. I think that I can say this publicly: the chairman is already being paid by the Treasury of Alberta, and I think he would be the last person to suggest that he should be paid further. However, there is a provision for payment when people are working really extraordinary hours. That subject was broached, but no real decision was made with respect to it. So my conclusion is that you may not expect to pay, and I'm sure that the Chief Judge does not wish to be paid any remuneration with respect to this work.

I think those were the three questions?

MR. BRUSEKER: Yup.

Mr. Chairman, just going back to Stan's motion, I'm wondering if you might just want to put a date in there of September 30, for example, saying to the commission, "Come back to us no later than September 30 with a final budget proposal," just to give them a target date. Otherwise it might drag on.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to suggest that that be no later than September 22, because it happens I'm going to be leaving the jurisdiction close to the end of September. For the opportunity for the committee to meet, it would have to be on the 25th, 26th, or 27th.

MR. BRUSEKER: I just thought it might give the commission a bit more direction.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I'm quite flexible. My intent is twofold in my motion. One is to ensure that they have finances to get started. That's the paramount one. The other one is to make sure that they have had the opportunity to discuss what direction they're going to take according to the legislation, because it's a review and/or redistribution depending upon, if I recall correctly, the legislation and also have their input into it. So September 30, October 15, or whatever date, I'm quite comfortable with whatever the committee agrees to or whatever the chairman wants.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, could I make a friendly amendment, then, and suggest that the September 22 date be added to the motion, the \$150,000?

MR. WOLOSHYN: I'll accept that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Now on the motion as amended, is there any further discussion?

MR. STELMACH: Question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Call for the question. All those in favour, please indicate. Opposed? Carried. Thank you very much.

Then we'll at this time provide to members, if they haven't already received them, the March 1, 1995, project report entitled, 1994 MLA Total Compensation Study. This has been tabled as a matter of information. I don't believe the committee has any . . .

Yes, Mr. Whelan.

MR. WHELAN: Mr. Chairman, we're going to take our leave, with your permission.

THE CHAIRMAN: You certainly may, with the committee's thanks and appreciation for your assistance to us today.

MR. WHELAN: You're very welcome. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Sage, as well.

I hope your cold gets better soon and that summer can resume.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Chairman, will a copy of this report be distributed to other members of the committee that are not in attendance today?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MRS. DACYSHYN: It's standard procedure.

MR. BRUSEKER: In comparing MLA salaries to other jurisdictions, as they compare to the Japanese average, which you may have read about in the newspaper today . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: No. What was that, Frank? Are they higher than us too?

MR. BRUSEKER: The average in comparison in Canadian dollars was \$480,000.

THE CHAIRMAN: The cost of living is substantially higher.

MR. BRUSEKER: I just wondered if they factored that one in. Cabinet ministers were higher of course.

DR. McNEIL: Yeah, but they have a greater yen for politics.

MR. BRUSEKER: I guess that's it.

THE CHAIRMAN: We're falling further behind in comparison to the public sector. Page 10. I think we have to look on this as being

for information only. I don't think there's any action this committee can take on this report at this time.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Chairman, there is one portion that we could take into consideration. You may want to in fact do that at the next meeting, have a motion drafted. That would be on page 26, where they state very clearly the recognition for an "independent committee [being] established once every three to five years, to review and recommend members' remuneration." This whole process started as a result of motions put forward by a number of the MLAs asking for such an independent committee to be established. The former Premier in fact was one of those that advocated such a mechanism, and that's what brought about the original report in the first place. So to just leave this as information without any follow-up I don't think is serving Albertans well. I think this gives us an opportunity to develop a mechanism that once and for all is there in place, and every three to five years the process is repeated. Those types of matters are left out of the hands of elected representatives.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before calling on Mr. Woloshyn, it appears that Mr. Wickman did make a motion at our January 4 meeting that Committee recommend to the Legislative Assembly the establishment of an independent commission to review pay, benefits, and allowances of Members of the Legislative Assembly.

This was tabled pending an update of the report. Now we do have the update of the report, so there is the matter of Mr. Wickman's motion.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I think perhaps we should not make any decisions about or from this report at this meeting because it was presented for information. Perhaps this report could come back for discussion in greater detail at the following meeting, as we go through and browse it very quickly. The other aspect also is that I think other members would feel, I would feel, a lot more comfortable having a discussion in their own caucus with respect to this, because it does impact on every individual member. So I'd like to see if Mr. Wickman is willing to just take it for information today and then at some other point down the road have further discussion on it.

12:30

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I gather that you would rather have Mr. Wickman's motion return for discussion when all of the members are here at our next meeting.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I would prefer that, yes, if he's comfortable with it.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I have no difficulty with that. There is benefit, in doing that, to our caucus as well. It gives our caucus the opportunity to make suggestions that we could then bring back. My understanding of the process is such that because this has now been tabled, my motion automatically is lifted from the table. We simply would move to table my motion till the next meeting, just to have it on the table.

THE CHAIRMAN: So the motion before the committee is that Mr. Wickman's January 4 motion continue to be tabled until our next meeting, at which time it will be discussed and voted upon. Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I didn't hear the response to Frank as to how widely this was going to be circulated.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, certainly to all members of our committee. I suppose, then, the committee members can be responsible for . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: I would think that would be proper. I wouldn't have any difficulty. As a matter of fact, I would encourage that each caucus look after distributing to their own members. Are you comfortable with that, Frank?

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah, I think that's the way to go.

MR. WICKMAN: Because, Mr. Chairman, this is a public meeting, and it's now public record.

MR. WOLOSHYN: We should distribute it so that all the members have a copy, but if you look after your caucus, we'll look after ours.

MR. WICKMAN: I will. Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. Now, 5(c) is an item that I've asked to be put on the agenda. It relates to amendments to the Government Organization Act. On June 19 I received a memo from the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services indicating that the amendments recommended by this committee to the Government Organization Act did not proceed in the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act. I guess the chair would like to inquire of Mr. Bruseker as to what was the problem with the recommendation of this committee with his caucus that prevented that from happening. For example, under the existing situation under the Government Organization Act, which applies both to the government caucus and the opposition caucus, constituency records are under the control of Executive Council. That being the case, you never know when an order in council could be passed by that esteemed body saying that maybe there should be annual or semiannual or whatever movement of those records to the Provincial Archives or whatever. They are in fact under the control of the executive, not the Legislature. I for one would like to know what the trouble was in the opposition caucus that this couldn't be corrected, because I think we should at all times be trying to separate the legislative side of things from the government side or the executive side.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, in terms of the specific detail, Mr. Chairman, I don't recall exactly what the detail of the concern was. I know it was discussed with Mr. Dickson, who was particularly concerned about it I guess under the section of freedom of information legislation as well. In terms of the particular details of the concern I don't recall exactly. Do you?

MR. WICKMAN: I had requested a memo, Frank, that we could bring back to the committee, but it hasn't come. The original person that was, you know – it wasn't Gary in our caucus; it was Al that was kind of guiding through the legislation.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, what happens with miscellaneous statutes is that typically they go from your Justice minister to the Justice critic, who then sort of parcels out, if you will, the different subsets, because it often covers very small slivers of different pieces of legislation. This particular one I know ended up on Gary Dickson's desk. In terms of the detail, I don't recall. So what I can do, Mr. Chairman, is commit to reviewing that with him and bringing it back to the next committee meeting.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think we shouldn't be missing opportunities along this line, because it really shouldn't be under the control of the executive branch. I think whoever doesn't understand this should be talked to or educated.

Mr. Woloshyn wanted to . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: If Mr. Bruseker is done, I would appreciate then having an opportunity, now that all the hype is gone from around the discussion and the debate of that Act itself, to discuss that with your caucus or whomever, Frank. If you can bring back an acceptable position, maybe we'll look at reintroduction for amendment this fall.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah. I'll raise it with Mr. Dickson, Mr. Chairman. From the sounds of it we're going to be having a meeting I anticipate sometime in September, and I'll try to get a response for the committee by then.

THE CHAIRMAN: Great.

MR. WICKMAN: I was just going to say, Mr. Chairman, that when it comes to our Member for Calgary-Buffalo, as everybody is aware, he's an extremely competent member. He'll have some rationale, and he'll satisfy the committee. There's no question about it.

DR. McNEIL: Just to refresh everyone's memory, what the amendments proposed was that in the case of the Legislative Assembly Office this committee have the authority to set policy with respect to records management in the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Offices Committee have the authority to approve policy with respect to the legislative officers: the Ombudsman, the CEO, and so on.

MR. BRUSEKER: Could you perhaps provide me with a copy of that draft? Then I can put that with this as well and send it off.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I guess, Frank, what we're really talking about with that amendment is that the committee would be determining what happens with members. Right now, without the amendment, it's cabinet, which I have no difficulty with.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah, but I would have thought that the opposition at least would be sensitive to these things.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, I'll raise it with Gary.

MR. WICKMAN: Hey, Stan, we're optimistic. The opposition could be cabinet next time round.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Hell hasn't frozen over yet, and the temperature's not going down.

MR. BRUSEKER: Never say never.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I didn't say never. I just said that hell hasn't frozen over.

MR. BRUSEKER: These are the proposed amendments right here; are they?

DR. McNEIL: Uh-huh.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay. So they're already here.

THE CHAIRMAN: What about this follow-up item, the matter of offering the extended benefits options program to former members to age 70? This was tabled at our meeting of January 4 pending information on a flexible benefits proposal being considered by the government. Is there anything . . .

DR. McNEIL: Not yet.

THE CHAIRMAN: Nothing has happened on that?

DR. McNEIL: In terms of the government program, we're not in a position to advise as yet. I would think that by September we'd have a better grasp of what the government's proposal is.

THE CHAIRMAN: So we'll bring that back for our possible September meeting.

Is there any other business?

So if we do receive a real budget after the commission's had a chance to consider their activities and operations, would you like to consider September? What would you like: a Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday in the last week of September?

MR. WOLOSHYN: I'll have to check the calendar, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Well, after consultations we will consider the date of the next meeting.

MR. WOLOSHYN: You're suggesting at this point that we have one either the 25th . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, it could be before because they could bring it in on September 9 or August 28 or something. The chair will undertake consultations as soon as this proposed budget . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: Sounds reasonable to me.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. If there's no other business, then there isn't much else to do. We've completed our agenda.

MR. BRUSEKER: I move we adjourn.

THE CHAIRMAN: Having heard a motion to adjourn, all those in favour, indicate. Opposed? Carried.

[The committee adjourned at 12:40 p.m.]