

**Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

9:03 a.m.

[Chairman: Mr. Schumacher]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good morning, members of the committee and guests. I guess the first item to deal with is the approval of the agenda. Is that in order or are there any additions?

Mr. Stelmach moved that the agenda be accepted. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Now, item 3, Business Arising from the Minutes. The first item under that heading would be Update on Legislative Assembly Information System – Mr. Gano.

Bill.

MR. GANO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As you're all aware, we have been working for the last year or so on implementing an accounts payable/payroll system for the Legislative Assembly. We have now come to the point where we've chosen a name for it. It's now called LAMIS. It stands for Legislative Assembly management information system. Anyone that can come up with a better name for us is certainly welcome to. We'll run a contest at some point, and I'm sure we'll have some good prizes.

As far as the present status of the project, as indicated last time, the hardware and software have been acquired and implemented, and we have entered into an agreement with Deloitte & Touche to assist us with implementing the system.

What's happened since then: we have downloaded the chart of accounts from PSC, refined the chart of accounts somewhat and loaded them on to the new system. We have downloaded the vendor information system, and it is now sitting on the new system as well. Pay information has been defined, and we are currently entering that into the new system. We've had numerous meetings with all of the players in the project, which include Treasury, PSC, Deloitte & Touche, Public Works, Supply and Services, and PAO. All parties are particularly co-operative, and that's appreciated. It certainly makes our life a little easier if we can just go ahead with each step as we need to.

Negotiations are currently under way with Treasury to determine the responsibility areas as far as legislative reporting requirements, and we've commenced some weekly staff meetings. Tomorrow we've scheduled training for the staff on the new system, and they'll be trained tomorrow and Wednesday. Basically the project is proceeding on track. We plan to begin parallel runs on January 1. We plan to run for three months and do the cutover on March 31.

Are there any questions?

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Bill.

Is everyone satisfied with this comprehensive report?

MR. STELMACH: I move acceptance of the progress report.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any discussion? All those in favour? Carried. Thank you very much, Bill.

Now item (b). There are four subsets to that one. We've had a motion coming before us for some time.

MR. WICKMAN: First of all, I'll move that the item be lifted from the table.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is there agreement in the committee to have the matter brought forward from the table?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. WICKMAN: Secondly, Mr. Chairman, speaking to the motion. This whole question of remuneration for elected representatives is a difficult one. Whether it's at the civic level, the provincial level, the federal level, the same arguments are heard at all four levels of government including the trustees. It's a question of perception. I guess it's a question of reality. The public, particularly now, in a lot of cases are going to be convinced, no matter what, that we are overpaid. It's a lose/lose situation. There's absolutely no question about that. Thus the need for an independent commission to take it out of our hands and put it in the hands of a body that will make those decisions that the public, I feel, then would be more willing to accept.

I commend the administration for the questionnaire they prepared with 50 questions plus a space for comments seeking information from previous Members of the Legislative Assembly as to the difficulties they had during the transition period from public life to private life. Yes, I can imagine there are some that have had extreme difficulties. Others, of course, haven't had any problems at all. Others have benefited substantially by their experience in serving the public as an elected representative.

My concern with the questionnaire, however, is that again it's part of a process that tends to stall getting down to the bottom line. I think it's time we cut to the bottom line and we set up the independent commission, allow them to make the decision do they want to send out the questionnaire to former members, and allow them to gather whatever other type of research they want to gather.

This whole process was delayed once previously because we understood that the Premier was seeking further information from Peat Marwick. That was on top of the information that the previous Members' Services Committee had sought from Peat Marwick. We have dillydallied with decisions for a good number of years now. I think it's time that we cut debate and that we go ahead, we proceed, we set up that independent commission as we've talked about in the past, and we allow them to come forward with their recommendations, which I would hope would be binding on all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

MR. STELMACH: A question to Mr. Wickman: are you saying that Members' Services would not be making the decision based on the recommendations, that you're leaving it up to an independent?

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, my preference would be to have the independent commission actually make the decision and we live with that decision. I really don't expect that to fly, however. That's an individual opinion. Even within our own caucus I would gather there's probably some difference of opinion as to whether it should just be a recommendation or whether it should just be firm. But if you set up an independent commission, if they were to come forward and recommend something that the public doesn't like, the public isn't going to go to that independent commission and try and convince them to change their minds. They're going to come back to the elected representatives and say: "Well, you people don't have to abide by those recommendations. They're only recommendations." So you're back in that same situation again where you're being lobbied by the public, because the perception still is: you are still setting your own level of salary, pay, and perks, because they're only recommendations. They're not final and binding. To deal with the issue, I believe it has to be final and binding.

MR. STELMACH: I just wanted to mention that this Members' Services Committee meets in public. We're probably very rare in that arena. Certainly Parliament's members' services committees meet behind closed doors. These are all public meetings, which I

think is quite unique amongst the provinces. I'd like to keep it that way so that these decisions are made in a public sense as opposed to some authority other than Members' Services.

9:13

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion? Ms Haley.

MS HALEY: Thank you. I'd just like to make a couple of comments. You've tied two of these items together, Percy: the former member survey along with your particular motion. While I don't necessarily disagree with the intent of what you're trying to do, I would have to disagree with the timing of it. We spent the last two and a half years trying to get this province back on its feet. I really don't think now is the time to be looking at any type of compensation changes. The former member survey I think would be a very good idea, but I would prefer it to be tied in after the next election, when I think this issue could be reviewed, have it tied in with that, and also you would have the first group of people that won't be here without the pension plan. Also, when you actually did the survey, you would get a much broader picture of the ramifications of that particular decision as well. I couldn't support it at this time.

MR. HENRY: Just a question to administration in terms of Ms Haley's comments about the timing. Percy Wickman alluded to some of the municipal governments, and I understand – and I don't have all the facts, but I'm wondering if you do – that in some municipal jurisdictions they have a process whereby the retiring council essentially sets up a review so that the new body coming in has the information. The process is started by the old and then implemented by the new. I may be wrong in this, but I understood at one point the old council, the retiring council, would actually make the decision binding on a new council. Do we have any information on that?

DR. McNEIL: I'm not familiar with any specifics. We could check that out though, but I think various jurisdictions across the country handle it in different ways.

MR. HENRY: If I may. I'm somewhat sympathetic to Mr. Stelmach's comments about the nature of the Members' Services Committee being open. At one time these decisions were made by the entire Legislature. It's only been in the last two terms, this term and the previous one, where it was delegated to the Members' Services Committee and not the entire Assembly making those decisions.

MS HALEY: It goes from here to there.

MR. HENRY: Uh-huh. It was a recommendation made by the Members' Services Committee, but right now the Members' Services Committee, as I understand it, has jurisdiction because of a motion by the Legislative Assembly back in 1989 to delegate that.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair stands to be corrected, but didn't they take the formal report to the Assembly?

DR. McNEIL: No. The committee reports to the Assembly on what decision they've made. There's no requirement for the Assembly to ratify their recommendations.

MR. HENRY: So I'm correct in my understanding here that this body makes the decision and reports what decision was made to the

Legislative Assembly, and that was changed in mid-89, if I recall. Prior to that, this committee made a recommendation to the Legislative Assembly and a vote was made in the entire Assembly. I'm not sure that was the best move, to delegate that kind of authority. Perhaps it should have been in the entire Assembly, so I'm sympathetic to the comments.

Also in terms of Ms Haley's comments, I think we get into a bind here. I'm again sympathetic to those comments. I think all throughout this province – certainly in the public sector, but it has impacted, certainly in my riding, on the private sector – there have been substantial numbers of people taking rollbacks of salaries, taking less time, part-time as opposed to full-time work, having jobs at all, where they could just say, "We're employed." Of course, that impacts on every small business, certainly in my riding, which has a high number of public servants in the riding, federal and provincial and municipal. So there is a real feeling out there, I think, in the public that they don't want MLAs, they don't want elected officials generally, in this era to be increasing their salaries and to be increasing the benefits and that kind of thing.

Having said that, I think that presumes the outcome of a review. An independent review might tell us that our entire package is too high and should be lowered, given what's happening out there in the general public. So, you know, that could very well happen. And depending on who's on that independent review and whom they consult, I think there's a feeling out there in the public that perhaps we are, given the times – we have taken the 5 percent rollback, and there are some who would like to see us take a larger rollback than that. So I think we can't presuppose the outcome of the review.

The point I wanted to lead to finally was that I strongly support the notion of an independent review. But I think if we aren't going to do it at this point – and I sense from the government members that we're not going to do it at this point – then I think we need to really examine a process about how often and, if this is not the appropriate time, when the appropriate time is and look at some other models that are used, as I suggested, in other jurisdictions, perhaps at the end of our term because many of us won't be returning for various reasons. Perhaps we should be looking at remuneration and making recommendations or in fact implementing them for the next group of people who are elected. If we're having to make the decision, perhaps that's the cleanest way of doing it.

MR. WOLOSHYN: With respect to reviews, we've had two reviews since '92 or '93. One review from a private consulting firm indicated that there was some fine-tuning that should have been done, shall we say, with pensions and whatnot. For whatever reasons – a few things have happened – the pension plan has gone out of it. In the interim we imposed upon ourselves a 5 percent further reduction. There was another review held by Peat Marwick just very recently, and I think the bottom line on that review was that compared to whatever comparisons you want to make, the MLAs in this province are not being remunerated to levels that independent groups think they should be.

With the inflammatory comments that were published in the *ATA News* – and I do commend you, Mr. Chairman, for your response. I think if members look at that, that's one more review of realities. But, quite frankly, with what is before this province at this moment in terms of restructuring and redoing the thing, I don't see any advantage in putting this issue on the table and basically saying to a group of independents or whatever they might be that if you go out there and decide that we are underpaid, we won't accept your recommendation anyhow. Then it begs a question: how many reviews do we get until we take the issue and decide where it must ultimately be decided?

Now, if the Legislative Assembly delegated the responsibility for its decisions to this committee, which it has, the Leg. Assembly can equally remove them and take them back, but nothing happens in any elected body where you can hide by a commission that you establish. I would say that the issue of remuneration is going to come up again and again and again, and perhaps we could put our heads together and look at a process that would be more ongoing. I wouldn't have any objection to that. But certainly at this time I don't think we'd serve any member of this Assembly any good by saying that we are going to suddenly have another commission to review the remuneration one more time. I mean, at some point we have to make a decision. I'm not so sure that this independent commission is the way to go. One thing I am sure of at this particular juncture and in view of the number of reviews, the frequency – they've been there since 1989 – is that it's time to get on with our jobs. And when a group, whether it be this group or some other group, decides that it's time to revisit the issue, we'll revisit it then. Whether it's before or after the election – I wouldn't put time lines on it – certainly this is not the time. I would say, for those reasons, that we just put it to rest.

Thank you.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, I think there are few issues that are as important in the eyes of the electorate as compensation for members. As a matter of fact, I don't think I'm going too far to say that when the Premier removed the pension, at least of the younger members, he got himself and his caucus elected. So this is something that we should not lose track of, that it's a very important issue, along with another one, by the way, that we have just referred to an independent commission, and that is the boundary matter. So it seems to me that we ought to do the same thing with compensation and let that outside body make a recommendation to us, which we'd better accept at our peril I would imagine. I think we can talk about timing being off. I think we can talk about how there still has to be further restructuring and whatnot. We've seen restructuring in almost every aspect of this province, so why not in this matter? That simply is an old argument. I think it's important that we go for it.

9:23

MR. WICKMAN: I'm going to close debate.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, Mr. Henry, did you have . . .

MR. HENRY: No. I said my piece.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, to close debate, I recognize it's a very, very difficult time. I don't anticipate that any Member of the Legislative Assembly is going to be that foolhardy that they're going to go out there and seek additional dollars, not at this particular time. If they did, I would suggest they would be hung in no time. However, one can't look at an independent commission simply coming forward with recommendations, whether they're binding or nonbinding, talking in terms of additional benefits.

For example, in Manitoba one of the things that an independent commission did was recommend – and it was followed through on – the elimination of the one-third tax-free allowance, and there was compensation given in the other direction. Again, that's an issue that the public has deemed to be very unfair. If you look at that, going years back, it was set up to counter those expenses that were incurred. Nowadays in basically all levels of government most expenses are covered independently of the basic remuneration that's

paid. So the question is now outdated. Those are the types of things that an independent commission would look at. But, again, I recognize as an elected representative that, in public life, perception is reality.

Mr. Woloshyn has raised a very good point. Ms Haley has raised a good point that whatever we do right now, it could be perceived the wrong way, could be perceived as a grab for additional dollars, and from my point of view, no, that would be entirely wrong. If members of this committee feel now is not the timing, rather than throw out the baby with the bathwater I would sooner see a motion tabling this until such time as the matter of remuneration is to be considered, whether it be the next term, the term after. At least that would allow this to remain on the table so that when that whole thing was considered again, the concept of the independent commission would automatically be given consideration.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is the committee willing to hear more on this, or does the committee wish to have the matter dealt with?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Call the question.

THE CHAIRMAN: The question is on Mr. Wickman's motion. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion fails.

Just in this connection, the chair should point out for further reference that if what Mr. Wickman is proposing is a binding mechanism, I'd suggest that perhaps it would look good for the committee to make that decision, because that really means that the committee doesn't want to be the delegate of the Assembly anymore in this matter. It seems to me that if that was what was wanted, the committee should report back to the Assembly that it no longer wants to be its delegate, and the Assembly should make the decision about the mechanism for setting remuneration.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Right at the moment the only thing that I understand this committee has done is listened to members' views and dealt with a motion that's been on the table for a long time. If the issue of how we're going to look at future remuneration becomes in fact an issue, then we should go through the proper process and put it on an agenda. Mr. Chairman, quite frankly, if it became a report back to the Assembly, fine. But at this particular juncture I would say that that motion has been on there for quite some time and has been dealt with. In my mind, the case is closed on this particular topic.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair certainly accepts that and made its comments in that sense, that this matter is complete, but just for further reference, if the question of a binding mechanism comes back, that seems to me to be beyond what the Assembly gave the committee in the first place, which was the power to make those things itself. If the committee does not want to do it itself, I think then the proper route would be to have the Assembly decide who's going to do it if the committee doesn't want to do it.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Extended Benefits Program. The background on this has been that several former members have been in touch with the chair about their imminent loss of benefits under the group program. The existing situation is that for five years after a member ceases to be a member up to the age of 65, whichever comes first, the former member can retain certain benefits under this program. Some have been asking the chair if there is some way in which they can continue past 65 and the five years if it doesn't interfere with the economic program. So that is how the chair understands the background.

Mrs. Scarlett, would you like to carry on from there.

MRS. SCARLETT: A copy of the decision item has just been passed around, basically the issues being: can we extend benefit programs to former members past the age of 65, and what are the cost implications of doing that? This issue was discussed by this committee in January of 1995. It was tabled at that time until we received more information relative to a potential government flexible benefits program being discussed, because that benefit program can impact and will impact the complexion of your MLA benefit plan as a whole. It appears that the government is still proceeding in that direction. However, that's not something that's going to happen in the very immediate future, and as Mr. Schumacher indicated, there are retired members that keep coming back and asking the question, so we're bringing it up again.

As was presented in January, the extended benefits option program is for retired members. For the first five years they participate in the MLA benefit plan on the same cost-share arrangement that you presently enjoy. That means that the Legislative Assembly, as the employer, is paying their employer share towards those, and right now the contribution on behalf of the Legislative Assembly is about \$70,000. In terms of that plan itself, we have to look potentially at the next election, at how many members might also be eligible to participate in the EBO program, and the potential possibility of those employer costs going up.

Now, aside from that, after the first five years in the program retired members can choose to continue participating in your group benefit plans as long as they pay the total cost of coverage. That's referred to as the EBO plus plan. The ability to extend benefit coverage to retired members past the age of 65 may not be a problem relative to the negotiated plans themselves, but we see it as a significant problem relative to cost impact to the Legislative Assembly. Just to reiterate, the four benefits that we're talking about are the Alberta health care, the MLA Blue Cross, the MLA dental plan, and the MLA group life insurance coverages.

To back up a little bit, coverage is presently maintained for current members over the age of 65, but it's been negotiated on a modified cost-share arrangement than that of those members who are under 65. There are significant differences in terms of cost, significant in terms of increased costs for maintaining current members over 65. The two major examples to outline this to you are for current members over the age of 65. The way the plans and the direction from Members' Services have been given to us is that members continue to maintain for life insurance the same premium price that they had before they turned 65. So a current member with three times basic life insurance continues to pay \$6.56 every month for their life insurance. The Legislative Assembly as the employer matches that in terms of a contribution of \$365 every month. If that member was over 70, we would match that in terms of \$577 every month. So there are some significant cost impacts in terms of maintaining benefit coverage for current members over 65.

9:33

The same holds true in terms of the MLA Blue Cross plan, where the plan itself is designed in that there's a basic and a top-up component. Once a current member reaches the age of 65, any of the costs for Blue Cross coverage go strictly to the top-up component, which is self-funded by the member and Leg. Assembly premiums. If there's significant cost there, it's impacting directly on your premiums.

Now, those are the kinds of realities in terms of current costs for current MLAs over 65. To look at the issue of extending that kind of coverage to retired members over the age of 65 would significantly build on that. If you took an example of a retired

member who, say, had some serious medical problems – a heart attack, a kidney transplant – over the age of 65 all those medical costs would be borne by the top-up plan. Now, given that the intent is that the full cost of coverage for retired members be paid by them, you're still looking at a very small group of retired members having to make up premium coverage to self-fund those. So it just does not seem realistic the way the present plans are set out. The present plans were negotiated and designed to cover and address the needs of current members.

Some of the other considerations are that once retired members move from the EBO cost-shared plan for the first five years to the EBO plus, our experience so far has shown that those members do not continue the full coverage of all the benefits, as the costs become unreasonable for the coverage that they obtain. An example of that is they would be paying \$900 potentially for dental, and perhaps at that stage of their life it doesn't make sense to pay a \$900 premium for dental if perhaps those aren't the major issues.

The one plan that does seem to be important to this group from my conversations so far is the MLA Blue Cross plan because it does give considerably better coverage than a standard group plan and specifically the out-of-Canada coverage that we have negotiated there. Currently that coverage for out-of-Canada travel is negotiated to cover current MLAs over 65. That kind of plan, for the very small premiums that we are paying, was never intended to cover retired members who may be out of the country for significantly more periods than you would be on business. In initial conversations with the carrier I'm not sure we could even get that if we wanted to for our retired members after 65. So it's those kinds of considerations in terms of the experience that a retired member over 65 and a subsequent spouse potentially could add to your plan.

One thing that needs to be pointed out is the age of the group. Presently we have 56 members participating in the EBO and EBO plus programs. Seven of those retired members will be reaching the age of 65 within the next two years, and a total of 19 will be reaching the age of 65 within the next five years. As well, of our current MLAs we have four MLAs who are already over the age of 65. We have another six that will be reaching 65 in the next five years and another 10 that reach 65 within the next eight years. So there are groups of members and former members that are in that range, and the numbers need to be brought out.

Basically in summary, any changes to extend current coverage will have a significant cost impact on the Legislative Assembly and your potential experience against the plan. There may be alternatives or modified group coverage that could be looked at, and further development of the flex benefits program as it relates to MLAs may lead to other creative types of solutions.

Another point that has not been talked about is that there is a significant administrative component presently involved in taking care of our 56 EBOs. Any changes to include a larger group would significantly impact that in terms of the administrative processes.

Alternatives. Continue to maintain present coverage as it is, review the options for coverage over age 65 to retired members as part of looking at the MLA plans relative to flex when that happens, or actually actively investigate and look at options that exist to offer these kinds of things on behalf of Leg. Assembly to this larger group. At this time, given that the cost of extending the coverage to the former members over 65 would be very high to the individual member and could negatively impact the experience of the MLA group as a whole relative to premiums and future insurability opportunities, it's recommended that we maintain the present coverage with no change right now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any questions on this matter? Mr. Henry.

MR. HENRY: I was listening attentively, but I'd like you to just go over, if you would, the present coverage for current members over 65. What are people actually using? Is it a modified cost-shared arrangement? Could you walk us through that again?

MRS. SCARLETT: Uh-huh. Our present members over 65 participate in the seniors' health care, so Alberta health care is not the issue. With the seniors' health care there is no longer a standard Blue Cross component, but what is not covered by the seniors' health care/Blue Cross package, any of those top-up costs then flow automatically to the MLA self-funded coverage. So with current members there is the risk that if there are significant costs, the plan will bear that. That has been designed so that we take care of our current members.

With the life insurance the decision was made by the committee that when a member turns 65, because the premiums for life insurance increase significantly, they do not have to pay that price, that their premiums continue to be what they were before age 65, which is \$6.56, that the Legislative Assembly make up that difference. That difference for a member who turns 65 is \$365 a month that the Leg. Assembly is paying, and the members pay \$6. Dental is not an issue.

MR. HENRY: Cheryl, I thank you for the report, and I think the recommendation is a good one. I intend to support it. I just want it to be clear that when the government as a whole moves to a flexible benefit package, then that would be our opportunity to revisit this. There have been significant changes in benefits for individual Albertans over 65 since this plan was first put into place. I think the appropriate time to review how it impacts on former members who are over 65 would be when the government implements a full program down the road, which might be a couple of years, I understand.

MRS. SCARLETT: Just to clarify. The impact of the government's flexible benefits program impacts Legislative Assembly members' programs in that for some of those programs we choose to piggyback on the government plan. If they are changing their plans, we have to go back and take a look at what they're now doing with the carrier, what that means for us, and what that presents us with in terms of options to current members. The spin-off of that, then, potentially would be how that impacts on our current EBO program.

MR. HENRY: I'm suggesting that that point might be the appropriate time to review benefits for former members who are over 65 years of age.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I think what Cheryl is trying to tell us is that if we don't make a decision on this, she has trouble implementing it. The recommendation is to maintain what's currently in practice and not expand the program. Is that correct, Cheryl? That's your recommendation?

MRS. SCARLETT: That's the current recommendation. Yes.

MR. WOLOSHYN: That way you'd be able to handle your budgeting. It wouldn't impact on current members in any negative fashion; would it?

MRS. SCARLETT: Not this recommendation. No.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Then I would move that we vote on the recommendation and get it done with.

MR. WICKMAN: Question.

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the recommendation before the committee, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

The next item is the Former Member Survey. There's been some comment on that already, but I'll ask the Clerk, Dr. McNeil, to introduce the matter.

9:43

DR. McNEIL: It's been a concern of mine that one of the issues that is debated quite extensively in the press is the impact that being an MLA and holding political office has on one's future career prospects once the member leaves the Assembly or the Parliament. There have been some fairly subjective kinds of surveys done. There was one done after the last election in the federal House, and that was primarily anecdotal in terms of what happens and the people's feelings and so on but not very objective. So what I thought I would like to do is bring to the committee's attention the possibility of conducting a survey. I think at some point in time it would be a useful set of information for the committee to have and possibly for an independent commission to have, if that is ever set up, that kind of information on which to make judgments about member compensation.

The career interruption is something that Peat Marwick identified should be a factor in MLA compensation in their two reports, yet when you start looking around as to what is the impact of career interruption, there's very little information. So we've designed this survey in-house to try to look at that question. I just brought it before the committee because I thought it related to the member compensation issue, and it's there for your consideration.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any comments?

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Chairman, I had tied it in, as Ms Haley pointed out, to the item on the need for an independent commission and such. I do see it very, very directly related, particularly from two aspects, one being the severance package that an MLA receives upon completion of a term or being ousted, whatever the circumstances may be. Then, secondly, one could draw from here whether the response could be used as an argument by any that may choose to argue that MLAs should be entitled to some type of pension. So there is definitely a relationship between the two items in that the first item was struck down. In other words, the Members' Services Committee has made it very clear that they're content to sit with the status quo for now. To do this at this particular time, I really don't see a benefit, but if that whole question of remuneration and an independent commission comes forward again somewhere down the road, then this type of survey could be of some benefit. Unless the Clerk is saying that in-house it gives them some direction or is of some benefit, I just don't see the benefit to us as elected representatives at this time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anything further? Well, then, we'll take this matter as information for the committee, and there will be no action on it at this time.

The final item under 3(b) is two letters that the chair received earlier in the year, one from Sun Life of Canada and the other from the Investors Group wanting to become involved in retirement programs for members in view of the pension gap. The chair just undertook to those people that it would bring these matters to the committee's attention.

MS HALEY: How about we just receive them for information?

MR. HENRY: I'll move that. I'll move that we receive them for information.

THE CHAIRMAN: So there's agreement in the committee to receive these matters for information. Well, thank you. We'll just take those matters as matters for information. Hon. members have the names and the personnel involved if they wish to pursue that.

Item 3(c), Broadcast of Question Period. There was a matter of camera coverage and angles. The chair has asked the Clerk to report on this matter.

DR. McNEIL: Yeah. The question arose at the last meeting in July as to the camera positioning during session and, with the new cameras in there, the impact that moving the cameras had on what the picture looked like. We undertook to make some changes in the coverage so that there would be more people included in the camera shot. People in the back row weren't included in the previous situation. I thought it was important for you to look at sort of the before and after so you could see visually what impact this change had and whether or not it's satisfactory to you.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Did you say more people or more of the people?

DR. McNEIL: Both.

Gary, do you want to address this?

DR. GARRISON: Somebody might recognize this fellow, and the fellow behind him too. This is from May 1. This is what the picture looked like last spring when we had the cameras – well, the cameras are still up high, in these boxes here. As you can see, we've got a fairly close view of the member speaking. The members in the row behind you can see fairly clearly, but the members behind that, in the back row, you can only see part of them. I don't know how much of this you want to see.

MS HALEY: That's enough. We get the message.

DR. GARRISON: Okay.

Then I can show you what the other one looked like when we changed it. We changed it this fall, and this is the result. We ended up with a much wider shot, and although the member speaking is quite a bit smaller, you get a whole view of everybody who's behind them. I'm going to just fast-forward you a bit. I assume you don't want to hear the sound.

MS HALEY: No. Once was enough.

DR. GARRISON: The Premier wasn't there this day, but this is virtually the same angle, because Mr. Dinning is right next to him. That gives you the before and after, so I think you have a pretty good idea of what's been happening. Is that enough?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Yeah. Good job, David. I think you've cured the problem well.

THE CHAIRMAN: So the consensus is that the after is better than the before?

MR. HENRY: How has it affected our ratings?

DR. McNEIL: I can tell you they're still negligible.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Dr. Garrison.

DR. GARRISON: You're welcome.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next item will be Future Broadcast Options. This has to do with question period and what time of the day it should or could be made available to Albertans. I guess the background on this is that the chair at least has received a fair number of communications from people who don't like change. It seems no matter what you do, if there's any change, somebody is complaining about it.

9:53

DR. GARRISON: Okay. I'll just run through the sheet that you've got there before you to highlight a bit. Before this past February the daily routine – that's the whole opening from the procession in to the end of question period – was broadcast live in Edmonton on the cable system, and then question period only was rebroadcast provincially at 11 o'clock at night. With the spring sittings in February the whole daily routine, from the beginning to the end of question period again, was carried live on Access provincially.

Access was privatized in September, and starting in April Access, which used to be a Crown corporation, started to charge government users for airtime. The departments of Education and advanced education actually had bought a fair bit of time. I believe it was 47 hours a week over the whole course of the year. So 47 times 52, whatever that is. Education agreed to let the Assembly use the time that they had purchased for their educational programming so that question period could be seen live provincially. This arrangement was for 1995, although they did agree that we could have some time for the future. It's useful to note, under your fourth bullet there, that the approximate value of broadcast time used by the Assembly in 1995 was \$127,750, and this is the time that was purchased by the Department of Education. During this past session the daily routine varied from 62 minutes to 99 minutes. So when you consider that time on the air is sold in one-hour blocks, we didn't fit very neatly into a one-hour block most of the time.

Now, for 1996 the arrangement that we have made with Education is to continue using their airtime, but because they're always getting new educational programming – and the main purpose of their buying the time was to show educational programming – our program will be shortened to include only question period itself. We could include Ministerial Statements and Members' Statements up to a maximum of 60 minutes per day. So with question period at 50 minutes – quite often it goes beyond just a couple of minutes to wrap up the last question – if you add on Members' Statements and maybe Ministerial Statements, some days you wouldn't even be able to get all that in. This fall, for example, we had some days where we had two Ministerial Statements and then Members' Statements at the end on the same day. As well, the arrangement that we've made with Education and CFRN for next spring is that it would not be live, but it would be delayed and broadcast at 2 p.m. So it would be delayed only half an hour or less, and it would be shown between 2 and 3 p.m.

Now, one of the concerns that we saw with this was that there's a need in-house for people like *Hansard* staff or anybody in a minister's office or any members' offices to have access to what's going on in the House right now. They have the loudspeakers, of course, but we discovered that we could get a closed circuit TV system on the Leg. Grounds for a fairly nominal cost of \$2,000.

One of the other angles of this is that since the throne speech and the Budget Address don't fit within the time that Education has made available to us, if we want to broadcast them, we would either have to rely on the parliamentary channel to broadcast them when they could fit them in or we could buy airtime ourselves on Access. The price, as you can see towards the bottom of the page, for the throne

speech would be about \$2,000 and about \$3,000 for the Budget Address. That's for 1996.

After that Education has indicated that they would be willing to continue for the spring of 1997, to carry on with the same arrangement, the one-hour delayed broadcast, but at the present time they're unable to say they would continue that for the following school year.

The final note. If we were to buy our own broadcast time, it would cost \$1,750 per hour. Based on the number of sitting days this past year, that would come to \$105,000. So that's the value of the airtime that we're getting from Education.

At this point I don't believe we're asking the committee to make a decision. We're just bringing you up to date on everything that's going on and fielding any questions you might have.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: I think we should re-enter talks with CFRN. They have, I'd say, a bit of an obligation with Access out of the picture to be providing that time at no additional cost, or maybe we should be looking at getting a different arrangement with another carrier, shall we say.

Secondly, I have a large degree of discomfort with the arrangement, although it's a good one, with Education. The reverse should be true. We should be buying the airtime and giving the surplus back to education programming, or is there a transfer of funds?

DR. GARRISON: Well, there could be, I suppose, if we budgeted the funds here.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: No. What I'm looking at is: this is the ultimate authority in the province, the Leg. Assembly, and to have its activities subsidized by any department gives me a degree of discomfort, so there should be some sort of an arrangement made. Also, to keep our accounting more accurate on what TV broadcasting really does cost, because if we get the final numbers, it may be the question of whether we should continue at all.

DR. McNEIL: One of the reasons we want to get this information on the table today is so that when we get to the budget discussion, whenever we consider the budget, we'll have this context within which to look at the numbers for TV broadcasting.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: It's valuable information, Dave. I think it's just excellent.

DR. McNEIL: So that's the purpose: so it wasn't a total surprise at that time. You'd have an opportunity to consult with your colleagues and just get a feel for coverage and some of the problems and so on.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Dr. Garrison, did you say you weren't sure whether there was money transferred between Education and ourselves?

DR. GARRISON: No. There is no money transferred. They buy the time. They pay for it. We pay nothing.

MR. WICKMAN: Just a question on the coverage. I guess it would be interesting as to how many Albertans actually view question period, although my feeling is that it is quite substantial, because if something really, really controversial is brought up during question period, I get calls in my constituency office immediately commenting on it, particularly when Michael Percy asks one of his thorny questions and people confuse it with me and they phone me to congratulate me with "Good question."

Mr. Chairman, just a couple of questions. The CFRN thing, then, in comparison to the education channel in terms of coverage: what's the difference? Like, CFRN is not on cable; CFRN is just a private network. Access is not to all Albertans.

DR. GARRISON: Well, CFRN just produces the program. They only show it at 4 a.m., at the end of the broadcast day.

MR. WICKMAN: Just at 4 a.m.

DR. GARRISON: That's right.

MR. WICKMAN: Then it's shown through Access at the present time.

DR. GARRISON: That's right.

MR. WICKMAN: And the educational channel would have the same exposure to Albertans as Access does at the present time.

DR. GARRISON: Well, they're still calling the channel Access, even though it's not the same company.

MR. WICKMAN: No, it's not Access anymore.

There are no plans to diminish the programming or reduce the programming, whatever?

DR. GARRISON: Not that I'm aware of, no.

MR. WICKMAN: Okay. So the bottom line is that it gives us an opportunity to save some substantial amounts of dollars.

DR. GARRISON: You mean if we use the time Education has already bought.

MR. WICKMAN: Right.

DR. McNEIL: I mean, they have considered it in the past and I think consider it now educational programming. You know, the broadcast of question period is educational programming. I think the issue becomes: will they have higher priorities for educational programming than question period a couple of years down the road because of their focus on producing more educational television? So that's where the issue becomes one of: is question period as good as some other educational programming at some point in time? I think that's the issue we face.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, when I say save substantial amounts of money, I'm talking in terms of if we actually had to pay for that. If we had to pay for it, in view of the CFRN situation I would gather we wouldn't be paying for it because it simply would not be available.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, the chair would say that I think the issue here, Mr. Wickman, is that there's no free lunch. Somebody is paying for this, and the question is whether it should be a government agency or whether it should be the Legislative Assembly, seeing as it's reporting on Legislative Assembly business. For sure there's no saving to the taxpayer.

MR. WICKMAN: It's just a different department that's paying for it, yeah.

DR. McNEIL: I think what this is pointing towards is that in 1997 if the Assembly decides they want to continue broadcasting question period, then we would have to have an item in our budget of X thousand dollars to buy that time, whatever time is available, that hour or whatever, to do that. We're in a transition period now, and I think we're just trying to advise you that we're in that period and I guess prepare the committee for future decisions in that regard.

10:03

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, before we can make a decision like that, as to what we want to do eventually, it seems to me we have to know how many people are watching. Is there some way that you could find that out? Do you have ways and means of canvassing?

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the Bureau of Broadcast Measurement cover programs like that? I know commercial programs are all rated.

DR. GARRISON: Well, there are surveys done, but they could be done anytime of the year. For them to survey what our audience is, they'd have to be done while we were in session. One of things we could do is: next February or March we could commission a survey of our own and determine on our own exactly what our audience is at that time. So we could have that for a future decision.

MR. HENRY: I suspect the problem, Mr. Chairman, with the BBM ratings is that if we were compared to *As the World Turns* or *Guiding Light*, we probably wouldn't even show up on the scale, if the truth be known. I doubt we'd get any information unless we did it ourselves, and that's problematic in terms of survey design and how do you get something that's accurate in terms of who watches this.

MR. JACQUES: It's interesting if you look at the perspective of why it's even being televised and the brief history. Originally, the government owned Access TV and the government literally dictated that they wanted to show question period live at a certain time and they also wanted to do a repeat at 11 p.m. on Access channel. We've now moved to the situation where Access has been privatized, but Education apparently has made the decision that they consider that as part of their education component. So literally they are paying for it as opposed to perhaps us paying for it and then charging them. I think it's six of one and half a dozen of the other.

But the real issue, then, goes beyond that in saying: is there a component of question period that we want to make available for the citizens of Alberta? That's the real issue, and I'm not sure we're really addressing that at this time. It's convenient because Education happens to be picking it up, but it really doesn't address the basic question of whether we as a Legislature want to have question period made available to the citizens of this province either on a live or a delayed basis. It seems to me that's ultimately the fundamental question we have to address.

DR. GARRISON: There is one other angle I could just bring up briefly, and that is that question period had been broadcast live within the Edmonton area on cable stations. Before this year Videotron did the production and they carried it live on their network. I've talked to Shaw and Videotron, and Shaw says that they would be glad to carry it at least within the Edmonton area for nothing on their system, but the problem is that Videotron has changed their community programming setup and they wouldn't even have space for it. Shaw's community programming apparently is full, but they've got a whole bunch of extra channels, and they

could just put us on a different channel. Videotron technically is more limited, and they don't have that capability, but they may in the future. That may change.

DR. McNEIL: Clearly Mr. Jacques' observation – I think in the final analysis it'll come down to this committee looking at a number in the budget and saying, "Do we want to do this or not?" Whether that question comes this year or next year, it comes back to that issue.

MR. JACQUES: Yeah. That comes back to Duco's question, really, saying: how many Albertans really watch this? I mean, that's part of your decision-making ultimately and then I think deciding what the cost of that would be.

I've been surprised, you know, as an MLA in my constituency by the number of people that complain to me, "Where was question period at 11 o'clock?" I didn't think anybody watched it, but obviously it was more than what I'd ever thought. I guess it was the convenience for them in watching at that point, if they so desired.

MR. STELMACH: I wonder if there'd be much of a problem for the next meeting or whenever we're going to sit down and discuss it to get an appreciation of what some of the other provincial jurisdictions are doing. I don't know how they measure the number of viewers, but we are not going to beat the *As the Stomach Turns* show. It's going to be there, and we just happen to have question period at the same time. So it's going to be a problem. Although I suspect, given the reaction of a number of electors, that are there people watching.

MR. WICKMAN: If you cut it out, we'll know by the phone calls.

MR. JACQUES: I just want a clarification of what's happening on the radio. At one time I think it used to be carried. I don't know what's happening. Is that part of the same arrangement?

DR. GARRISON: It's a separate contract. It is still carried on CKUA radio.

MR. JACQUES: Okay. And that's a contract between the Leg. Assembly and CKUA?

DR. GARRISON: That's right. We pay \$100 a day, I believe it is. Before this year it was free again. We covered this year, but it's pretty cheap.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anything further? If not, we will take this as a matter of background information for our future budget deliberations. Other Business. Speaking of budget deliberations, Dr. McNeil has the 1996-97 budget guidelines and meeting schedule to propose to members.

DR. McNEIL: Further to the direction given last year by the committee, I'm suggesting that the proposal to the Legislative Assembly Office budget continue to be developed on the basis of achieving a further 5 percent reduction in '96-97 in order to achieve the 20 percent reduction from the '92-93 actual expenditures we committed to three years ago and that the subsequent years' budgets should be developed to reflect no further increases over the proposed '96-97 budget expenditure and, further, that we schedule the budget meetings from January 8 to 10, 1996, for the consideration of the budget submission. I must say that our budget review this year has been somewhat delayed because of the focus on LAMIS and the need to get certain things on the road with that system before we devote time to the budget.



MR. JACQUES: I need clarification on what the actual LAO expenditures cover. For example, does that include the constituency offices? Is that all included in that?

DR. McNEIL: The way we've developed the budget is we've divided it into three components: the Legislative Assembly Office proper, the caucus budgets, and then there's another component called MLA administration, which relates to the compensation benefits and so on, including the constituency allowances. We had different targets in those three areas last year. Last year the caucus budgets had been reduced by 14 percent, the Legislative Assembly Office proper by 18, and the MLA administration by about 5.

MR. JACQUES: So this is intended to apply to the total of all of those or just that LAO component?

DR. McNEIL: No. It's intended to apply to that component we have control over.

10:13

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Am I right in assuming that there's one more 5 percent reduction to be applied and that would be the last one?

DR. McNEIL: For '96-97, the upcoming budget. Our target was 10 percent, 5 percent, and 5 percent: 10 and 5 over the last two years and another 5 for '96-97.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Have you already thought as to how you're going to apportion that reduction over those three items? Or is that all part of the numbers that you mentioned, minus 18 percent and minus 14?

DR. McNEIL: Yeah, that's part of it.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Oh, okay.

DR. McNEIL: But both the MLA administration and the caucus I call statutory expenditures. In other words, they're expenditures for the most part reflected primarily in Members' Services orders. But in terms of discretionary expenditure, when I'm talking about 20 percent, I'm talking about the Legislative Assembly Office budget: the Clerk's office, House services, personnel, finance, administration, information systems, and so on.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, then from this submission and discussion so far, if nothing further, would there be a motion with regard to the meeting dates?

MR. WICKMAN: It's Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah, if required. January 8, 9, and 10.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I'll second.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Mr. Henry moves. Mr. Woloshyn seconds. Any discussion? Are you ready for the question? All those in favour, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

Thanks, Dr. McNeil.

The Internet. Mr. Gano.

MR. GANO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. All of you under your tab 4B have a bit of an outline of what's been happening over the last few months in relation to the Internet and the Legislative Assembly.

We have been getting a number of requests lately from the public and from members generally on how can the public access the Internet in order to interact with their member. Because of that, we determined that it was something that should be brought before this committee. So what we've done is provided you with a bit of a background on what the Internet is and what some of the implications may be as we get further into it.

Just going to what the Internet is. Really, it's something that has been around for a number of years; however, it has only come into prominence within the last two years. It's basically a network of computers that are globally interconnected so that you can do basically two things: either do electronic mail or access other installations to gain information from those installations. So there are those two components that are involved.

The government of Alberta through the Public Affairs Bureau has already begun the process of getting into the Internet, and as a result on the Internet there is the budget speech, the Premier's address, and there are some ministerial biographies out there as well. So the process has already begun in the government itself.

The issues that need to be addressed, as I indicated, relate basically to the two different processes, electronic mail being one. People want to be able to send electronic messages to the member, and some members want to be able to send electronic messages out to the Internet. There is nothing preventing that from happening at this point. The technology is in place. The equipment is in place. All that would be required would be for the member to advertise his Internet address, and those messages would begin to flow to that member.

What would actually happen in practice is the message would go to a designate of the member, be that the constituency office or his caucus assistant in the Legislature complex here. That assistant would then read the message, print it off, give it to the member for a response, and once the response had been formulated, the assistant would then key it into the Internet and send it back to the person asking the question.

The other component is the home page. Home pages are what is used to provide information to the public. It's kind of an extension to the whole education process, if you will, where we are providing information out to the public so that they have the ability to look at them, such as *Hansard*, the Order Paper, Bills, even to the extent that we might put the phone directory for the Legislative Assembly on it. So people could go onto the Internet and look up the phone number for their member and so on.

A pilot project has recently been commenced in the research area of each caucus where the researchers have been given access to the Internet so they can go out and do the types of things they need to do in their research duties. We'll be looking at that fairly closely to determine the effectiveness and the impact it will have on the network, because the Internet, although it's powerful, does have an impact on the network in terms of the amount of traffic that we need to contend with.

Some questions that need to be addressed by the members are things like: does the member want access to the E-mail, and if so, who is that member's designate to receive their electronic messages? What standards should the member establish as far as timely responses to anything that is received on the Internet? Thirdly, should the Legislative Assembly home page include such things as members' biographies and pictures?

We do have some proposed policies that we have discussed with the EDP management committee, which is a committee made up of representatives from management in LAO and caucus offices. Those proposed policies are such that as far as electronic mail is concerned, we would provide an Internet address to any member who requested it. As far as the LAO home page is concerned, we would implement

and maintain and support a home page and provide information that is currently available to the public now in written form. As far as a caucus home page, that would be the responsibility of the caucus itself. If they wanted to create a home page, they would do so through a private Internet service provider.

We do have a bit of a demo set up in the lounge. I'd like to take you in and show you a 5- or 10-minute demo just to give you an idea of what the Internet is all about and what the potential possibilities are in relation to it.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Before we go on to the demo, what is it that you're looking for from this committee today? Is it to receive information? You've got a few things going here at the moment, and I for one would caution you very strongly before we start giving out Internet addresses to individual members until we can flesh this thing out a little further. So what decision do you want at the end of the day?

MR. GANO: No. It's being provided basically as information at this point, to indicate to you that we are getting questions on it. We will have to address it, so it's something we felt this committee should be aware of.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I appreciate your looking forward, Bill, because I think this is an area that we have to look at very carefully before we start implementing it so we can identify pitfalls, if any, beforehand and deal with them as we go. One of the major ones would be, for example, the business of "Is it caucus or is it government?" coming out of a constituency office and partisan material, and then, as I said: how do you control if that's going to be in fact one of the criteria, or do you throw it wide open? I think that's a very significant one. Then the other aspects are whether in fact we even need to do it in terms of an individual member in one location of one constituency or another or whether there is a priority of location of constituency offices needing it more than – say, for example, we get back to the urban/rural business, where you have a lot easier access in the city as opposed to outside.

So I certainly appreciate the information, but I'd like to have a fairly significant package before we enter into any decisions. The other one too, the cost implications of both equipment and time, the buying and whatnot, have to be in there: how they will be borne and brought into a budget. This would be part of the Leg. Assembly Office budget. Of the three components, I believe the Leg. Assembly has been the one that's been most prudent in addressing their budget and at the same time as we're getting proposals for a further 5 percent reduction. You've done a good job in updating equipment out in the field and whatnot. Now we're looking at something I see as an expenditure.

So the information I really appreciate, the demonstration and all, but in terms of this committee I would like you to proceed just as information, with a freeze on it till we know where we're going.

10:23

THE CHAIRMAN: Ms Haley.

MS HALEY: Thank you. I just wanted to raise a couple of points. Number one is something that is raised regularly in my constituency: why am I not accessible on the Internet? This is not from people in Airdrie, interestingly enough; it's from a large part of my farming community. The requests through my constituency office as well as my Edmonton office have increased dramatically just in the last three or four months; I've been astounded. We are hooked up on E-mail already to my constituency office and up to here. So if it's something that we can do to accommodate people's requests to get

information to me, then I'd like to know how we go about doing it. I'd also like to know what it costs and everything else.

I have one person offering to give me the software already and I pay a \$10 a month fee in order to be on their Internet. So rather than everybody go off half-cocked and running different systems or something, I think it's important that we have some kind of overall understanding of how it works and how best to implement it. If this is going to take us a year or two years to make a decision on, I'm going to get the software from the chicken producers, because they're already offering it to me.

DR. McNEIL: Can we do the demonstration now? Because I think the demonstration may lead to some questions being answered but may also lead to some other questions, and then we can talk about the cost and so on. We can show you what capability is available right now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Henry, did you have anything before . . .

MR. HENRY: I'll wait until after the demo.

[The committee adjourned from 10:26 a.m. to 10:46 a.m.]

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, Bill, thank you very much for that demonstration. Mr. Jacques has something to . . .

MR. JACQUES: I have a question. Bill, in my constituency office in Grande Prairie, would my constituency assistant there, as part of whatever training she receives, be able to access the Internet today and specifically go to, say, the government, which is already on the Internet, and access information? Would she know that today?

MR. GANO: She would not know that today because she has not had the training to do that yet. You're talking specifically about home pages, and home pages she does not have access to at this point because we have not set up our home page yet. Today she does have the ability to send an electronic message to someone in the government or to someone in British Columbia.

MR. JACQUES: Didn't you say that the government was already set up on the home page?

MR. GANO: Yes, I did. If she were to gain access to the government of Alberta home page, then yes, she could do that. She would have to first get the service through an Internet provider, because we are not that provider yet. So she would have to, for example, contract with Ed Tel or AGT or Compusmart. Those are Internet providers, and it costs about \$10 to \$15 a month to do that through a separate provider. We anticipate that eventually we would become our own provider, and in that way she would be able to access British Columbia or Australia through the Legislative Assembly home page.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Henry and then the Clerk.

MR. HENRY: Yes. I just wonder about some of the comments that were made earlier. I've been working on the Internet I guess for about a year and half now, and I can tell you that I find it immensely helpful in terms of research and also in terms of communicating, not just E-mail but other ways. The latest numbers that I've seen tell us that within four years there's going to be 100 million people connected to the Internet. That's a lot of folks. I would be worried if we spent a year or two studying this issue to see the pros and cons and ups and downs. I think whether we like it or not, whether you're

comfortable with it or not, it's here and it's reality and we need to make use of it.

I can say for the record, Mr. Chairman, interestingly, since the end of the summer, since the end of August, I've had an increasing number of E-mails and requests for information from individuals all around this province. The only reason they would E-mail me is not because I'm such a jolly fellow; it's because they've stumbled onto me on the Internet. In terms of political parties, the party that's much further ahead of anybody, I think, in this country is the Reform Party nationally. In fact, they found me on the Internet and asked me if I wanted to be listed on their page because they have a list of legislators around the country who have E-mail addresses or home pages. They provide links, such as Bill suggested ours, to the national *Hansard*, et cetera.

I connect to the Internet almost every single day. Actually, my major source of E-mail now is not through the Legislative Assembly but the private account that I set up a year and a half ago. Again, I'm receiving E-mail documents – I mean, any of our press releases or the government press releases, for that matter, that we can access and translate to ASCII format. We can send out to people who E-mail and say, "What the heck are you saying on this?" My latest one was, frankly, from Okotoks, people with a community problem. I was simply able to put them in touch with one home page, actually, and some other resources that I think helped them.

So I would encourage us to move ahead. I know that there may be costs down the road, and I would ask us to direct administration to move as they see fit on the Internet and to come back to us if there are going to be cost implications in terms of manpower or other kinds of direct costs for the Legislative Assembly. But I think we need to move. I'm with Ms Haley, that more and more – probably the single most frequent request I get is for a list of MLA E-mail addresses. I get that at least once a week. People say: "You're on the Internet. Where are the other MLAs? Can you provide us with a list of addresses?" I was really excited to see the Leg. Assembly actually move to that, because then we can start providing that. People do want to contact us, and it's a cheap, effective way of doing it.

DR. McNEIL: Just so everybody understands where we're at right now, the network now is capable of every member today having an Internet address for purposes of Internet E-mail: exchanging messages, sending and receiving messages. We made an administrative decision in the past year. In order to get ready for Internet we had to invest funds for the Legislative Assembly Office, regardless of whether the members need it in the future or not. For the Legislative Assembly Office to function, we need to have that capability, because everybody else in the country is doing it.

So we have invested in the equipment to have the home page capability, to provide information on home page as well as to have the capability to access home page. Now, we're not in a position yet to provide that to everybody on the network. Bill's summary there indicated that we are providing that capability to the research area now. So the caucus researchers, the library, and the managers of the Legislative Assembly Office have the capability to access information.

MS HALEY: Basically it's just the MLAs that can't.

DR. McNEIL: The MLAs could use the E-mail now directly if they have a computer but at least through their constituency office. Right now we don't have the capability in the constituency offices or in the caucus offices as a whole to do the home page searching and so on. So that's the status of the situation.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Woloshyn.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thanks. Dr. McNeil answered a couple of my questions. There are two components. There's home page and E-mail basically. With E-mail currently you could sign up all the MLAs.

DR. McNEIL: Correct.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Okay. Then I guess the decision that we would have to come at, whether it be now or in the January meeting – preferably in the January meeting – is (a) whether we should do it and (b) whether it should be at the constituency office or at the Leg. Assembly. That should be right across the board. My personal preference, unless it's a tie-in somehow with both, would be the constituency office. That would be my personal preference off the top of my head without having thought about it too much.

Bill, any comment on that before I go to another question?

MR. GANO: Yeah. It doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing thing. We could have some members that . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: I think, though, in the interest of fairness, if there's a time line for putting it through, the information has to go out to all members, because they're not familiar with it. As a committee here we have to decide whether it's going to the Leg. Assembly or the constituency offices and be consistent there as to which staff handle it. If you get a flood of 83 requests tomorrow, how long will it take you to put them on? That would be for the E-mail portion. I certainly appreciate what you've gone and done with the researchers with accessing home page. I think that's just excellent.

I guess the other question I'd have is – and I'd tie this together with respect to home page – is there a cost to home page, and what are the ramifications of it? I think I hear people wanting the messaging capability quite strongly, and that seems to be a primary function. The other one is more of a research function; is that it, Bill?

MR. GANO: That's correct. Just in response to cost, as Dr. McNeil indicated, the equipment is currently in place and has been acquired through our present budget. There is no anticipated increase in information systems' budget. The costs would be basically internal, in manpower to put the information on the Internet. As far as *Hansard* is concerned, the information is already available through a public access bulletin board. So providing that on the Internet is not going to be significant. Other types of information, such as Bills and the Order Paper, Bill status, and so on, we are putting on the public access bulletin board as well. Again, the cost to put them on the Internet would not be significant.

10:56

MR. HENRY: Just a question. With regard to E-mail addresses for our internal E-mail system, has there been a policy that says how many you can have? Has there been any policy, or is it just on an as-required basis?

MR. GANO: Basically as required. There are some restrictions in terms of we say that only staff are on the electronic mail system. We have made some exceptions if the person was willing to take the oath. So a couple of volunteers did go on. Although they're not specifically staff, they are around.

MR. HENRY: So I guess my comment would be that I fail to see why we needed to regulate. Internet E-mail addresses should be

accessible at the Legislature or at the constituency office. I think that's an administrative decision. I would hope that if there was a problem there, the EDP management committee would come forward with a recommendation to us.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anything further?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, is a motion in order here?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I guess it depends what the motion would be.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Well, I'd like to move that we proceed with the electronic mail, that we ask that this electronic mail be provided to all the members as proposed here by Bill Gano.

THE CHAIRMAN: The first item under Proposed Policies: Electronic Mail.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Yeah. I'd like to do all three actually, but I'd like to find out first how much the cost will be with the LAO home page.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, that's the question, Mr. Gano: the cost for the LAO home page.

MR. GANO: The cost would basically be internal, simply the manpower to create the home page. As I indicated, the home page that I demonstrated today took me about two days to create. I would expect that there are probably about another two weeks of work there to fill it out and provide a home page on the Internet. All of the equipment, hardware and software, is currently in place.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Nevertheless, that is a cost.

MR. GANO: That's a cost, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does that have budget implications, Dr. McNeil?

DR. McNEIL: I believe that with respect to the Legislative Assembly home page, we really have an obligation to provide that information to the public in the form that is au courant, if you will, that people are expecting these days. I think we've made a decision within the Legislative Assembly, with the Speaker's support, to proceed to develop a home page so that information that is now public, that you can get, pick up in paper form should be available in electronic form, just as a matter of our obligation to the public to provide that information. So we're proceeding on that basis.

MR. HENRY: Just a clarification. So are you telling us that the kinds of costs that Bill has outlined in terms of development time can be absorbed in the current budget?

DR. McNEIL: Yes. It's our plan to do that.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Can I, then, move the proposed policies, all three, Mr. Chairman?

MR. JACQUES: I'm just wondering, for the question of expediency more than anything, whether it would be better if we could deal perhaps with each policy. There is a question, even on the last one, as to whether we need that, whether it even should be at the table, or whether that's another item.

With regard to the issue of members in particular, I'm assuming that there may be a cost implication with regard to the hardware down the line as members themselves want to have the ability for hands-on access through a terminal. Probably most MLAs today don't. Mike, I assume you do. You actually physically either go to your assistant's terminal or you have one already set up. No matter how you cut it, it's part of the constituency allowance, I assume, at some point. So there may be some questions there as to whether that would fit in with the existing budgets or whether that's something, again, beyond that. I'm assuming it would fit in with the existing budgets.

DR. McNEIL: Just to respond to that specifically, although it hasn't related to access to Internet, a number of members have purchased laptop computers from their constituency office budget, which is a legitimate expense under that budget, just so as to have that capability to hook up to the network or buy their own service access to Internet or Compuserve or whatever. So it has never been handled in the Legislative Assembly Office budget in terms of providing equipment to individual members, but the constituency office budget has handled that need for quite a few members.

THE CHAIRMAN: Ms Haley?

MS HALEY: Well, I think Dr. McNeil just answered it. I purchased a laptop this summer out of my constituency funds so that I can do things like access Internet. That was the whole point.

THE CHAIRMAN: So the chair understands that there would be agreement to Mr. Van Binsbergen's motion as to the first two items, Electronic Mail and LAO Home Page. I gather that Mr. Jacques feels that maybe the caucus matter should be a matter for the caucus but not this committee.

MR. JACQUES: Yeah. I don't think that one would be here. I think Bill outlined it saying that if it was to be handled, it would be within the caucus.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion?

MR. WOLOSHYN: So to make it clear, as printed here, there are two.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, as printed under Proposed Policies. The question is whether the committee is willing to accept those proposed policies for the first two items, Electronic Mail and LAO Home Page. Any further discussion? All those in favour, please indicate. Contrary? Carried. Thank you.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, I'm just wondering if it is worth passing the third item just for the record to make it very clear that caucuses now or in the future should not expect information systems to develop home pages for individual caucuses. I think that's the intent of that, that it is to come out of caucus budgets, and not an expectation that it would be part of the EDP service provided. That's how I interpret that, and I think it might be worth having that on the record for at least the future. So I'm asking that we actually move recommendation 3 as a separate recommendation and accept it as policy.

It still doesn't take any independence away from caucus budgets. What it does say to caucuses is that if you choose to develop a home page, you're on your own with your own funds, that you go out and purchase those contracting services, that you don't expect Dr. McNeil and Bill Gano to provide that service for you.

THE CHAIRMAN: That would be a motion then?

MR. HENRY: That's a motion, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any discussion or questions about that?

MS HALEY: We've already covered it in the second one, so why would you need to do it again?

MR. HENRY: If I can respond to that, the second one deals specifically with a home page for the Leg. Assembly.

MS HALEY: It says: "in some other form but would not relate to caucus or partisan activities." How much more clear can it get?

MR. HENRY: That's again talking about the Legislative Assembly home page. Just for clarity I want to make sure that another caucus can't come to Leg. Assembly administration and ask that a separate home page be developed.

MR. JACQUES: I just am a little puzzled. I mean, under normal circumstances or any circumstances the Leg. office is very clear in terms of what their mandate is vis-à-vis caucuses. I think it's clear that caucuses decide on their own with regard to what they want to spend their funds on. I just don't understand the relevance at the table.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Now, this is the point that I was trying to make earlier, and, Mike, you said: oh, it doesn't matter. That's why I think it's so abundantly important that with the first motion we have in there, that address is designated to be the constituency office. That is the portion that Leg. Assembly looks after through Bill and company. When we get into the offices in this building, the salaries come out of something called a caucus budget, and there are a lot of things that go into caucus. So if we're dealing with individual members as such, aside from the caucus, to do the E-mail, we should restrict that to the constituency level. I'd like to see the first one with the understanding that it goes to the constituency offices. Then, Wayne, what you're indicating – and I certainly agree with both you and Mike. Mike is saying: let's make it abundantly clear that the caucuses are not going to use this process to have an access to moneys that are intended to be directed to the members as a whole as opposed to the political caucus, if you will.

So both of you are basically on the same vent. I think either way, whether you pass that or not, the understanding is quite clear and has been maintained, but when it becomes a political or a caucus aspect – they're very good at it – I don't see any difficulty in outlining that. I would like to maybe have it clearly understood that the E-mail that we just agreed to was going to go to the constituency offices for the very business there. What you put out in terms of your caucus, Mike, for example, can be very, very political. That's a part of your function there, whereas in the constituency office, you being in opposition, you have to be a lot more cognizant of what you put out on it because it then becomes a part of government information, if you will.

So if you wouldn't mind revisiting that and making (a) constituency specific; (b) is okay as it stands; and with (c), whether we pass it or not, the understanding remains that we don't access members' funds for political caucuses. Do you guys agree with that? So we change (a) by deleting "person or" and just say "constituency office."

11:06

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I think before we do that, we do have a motion relating to the caucus home page, and the chair feels that that matter should be dealt with before we revert to electronic mail.

MS HALEY: I thought we passed the first two.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we did, but Mr. Woloshyn has made a suggestion that there might an adjustment to the first one. But before doing that, I think we should deal with the question and the motion relating to the caucus home page. Is there agreement to the motion as proposed by Mr. Henry?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Now, Mr. Woloshyn, do you wish to . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: I think we have to be very careful. We've gone into this quite quickly, and I've got some concerns that down the road, if we don't set some proper guidelines, we're going to create problems amongst ourselves as to what's happening on this. I don't have any difficulty with the E-mail messaging as it pertains to members of the Assembly. I do want to see that choice of the address being limited to the constituency office. The matter is that that is the person that is directly involved, that has all the dealings with the member on an ongoing basis. Further down the road when they get it set up, I don't have any great difficulty with it.

If you look at what's going to happen out of this automatically, the caucuses are going to do their own, which functions out of here, and certainly that is going to happen whether we've said it is or it isn't. So for the sake of being able to look at issues that may come up and to put them into a proper spot, shall we say, and to add for staffing aspects – for example, among both caucuses there's no guarantee that the Leg. assistant that's here today for any member on either side of the House is not going to be reassigned tomorrow, given that budget numbers increase or decrease. I really feel strongly that if we're going to do this and it's going to be a service to the public, we have that access continue to be maintained through our constituency offices. If down the line it should be expanded, if we had a little visit with it, then I certainly wouldn't have any problem, but for starters anyhow let's just leave it limited to the constituency office.

MR. HENRY: I'd like to speak against that motion. With respect I think one of the flexibilities we have given members – in terms of things like correspondence some members I think in both caucuses have their personal MLA-related correspondence dealt with exclusively at the constituency. Some use the services of the caucus office or a combination. If we're talking about a request for information or following up on essentially what is correspondence here, you know, we don't regulate who does correspondence; we don't regulate which phone calls go to constituencies.

We all know that we have a caucus office here. We all know the constituents call us here on constituency matters. We all know that we have constituency offices, and people will phone us on matters related to our legislative duties and not specifically our constituency duties. I think to try to restrict this in this way is a dangerous precedent for us. So I'd like to see us be a bit more flexible in terms of that, whether we want our constituency assistant to sign on to a network on the RITE line, which is what would have to happen, or whether we want a support staff person here in the Legislature Building sign on directly to check our mail for us.

DR. McNEIL: I think when we're talking about electronic mail to members as MLAs, we're talking about MLAs in their nonpartisan

role. As well, we're talking about the home page again in a nonpartisan aspect. In order to maintain that in terms of ensuring that the funds that are being utilized in these two instances are from the appropriate budgets, either from the Legislative Assembly Office budget or the constituency office budget, that any electronic mail go to the MLA in his or her constituency office, then that member can decide, he or she, how they want that handled there.

Once it's there it can be sent through the electronic mail system here, but I think in terms of the objective of ensuring that that MLA's address – let's say, you know, c.haley@assembly.ab.ca, that anybody who's corresponding with C. Haley has that information going to her constituency, because that's at least the appropriate spot for the initial correspondence to go. How C. Haley wants to manage that information after that is up to her and up to each individual member, but I think it maintains the integrity of the network for this purpose. If it starts going to the caucus office as a matter of course, then there may be some difficulties down the road in terms of whether it's partisan or not. We can set it up so that c.haley@assembly.ab.ca goes to her constituency and every other member's electronic mail goes to their constituency, and then it can be handled out of their office however they feel is appropriate. Because of the electronic mail system you have the capability from the constituency to send it wherever you want. Either by Internet or by internal mail you still have the capability to manage it. That's not being removed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Van Binsbergen?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: All taken care of.

THE CHAIRMAN: So I guess the problem for the chair now is: is there an amendment to be made to the original motion regarding electronic mail?

MS HALEY: Yes, to have the hookup at the constituency office level.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Make that clear.

MS HALEY: Yes.

MR. WICKMAN: A friendly amendment.

MR. WOLOSHYN: It's a friendly one. If you accept it, Duco, we'll just delete that.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Absolutely.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee agree to this clarification?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried. Thank you very much.

Now, the next item is Subscription Rate Review with regard to *Hansard*. The Editor of *Hansard* is here in the person of Dr. Garrison. Would you like to review this for the committee, please?

DR. GARRISON: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As you can see from the item in your book, I've broken this into two parts. The first part deals with combining the evening and afternoon issues of *Hansard*. As you know, we've published a separate issue for the evening issue since about 1987. Before that we didn't even publish the next day. We waited two days and published it then.

One of the reasons I'm proposing this is that, as you know, there's been a big increase in the cost of paper. As I've noted in the

background note, we could save about \$9,500 just by combining the day and night issues. It reduces our number of print runs from seven to four. It reduces the total number of pages because we don't have to print all those extra cover pages. It seems to me that if it's managed properly, the members would still have virtually the same access or even better access to the material than they did before.

What I'm proposing as well is that the night issues would be available in photocopied form in the library and in the members' lounges shortly after noon. For the last several years, ever since we've been doing separate night issues, we've had the night text ready to go to the printer by noon. That's been our printer deadline. So what I'm suggesting is that instead of rushing the stuff to the printer and getting it back here and delivered into the House by 4:30 in the afternoon, we make available shortly after noon these photocopied *Hansards*. So the members can have them even four hours earlier than they did before. It would also be loaded onto the bulletin board, which has happened in the past anyway, and it would save us money.

So I guess that's it for the first part. If anybody has any questions, fire away.

11:16

MS HALEY: I want to just be clear on when it is I would get this photocopy. If it's Tuesday and we've sat here all day Monday and Monday night, do I get anything on Tuesday, or am I waiting till Wednesday for this stuff?

DR. GARRISON: For your own individual copy you'd be waiting till Wednesday. So the Monday night issue would be published together with the Tuesday afternoon issue, and the Tuesday afternoon/Monday night issue would be delivered to you on Wednesday morning.

THE CHAIRMAN: But there'd be a photocopied version earlier?

DR. GARRISON: That's right. There would be a photocopied version earlier.

MS HALEY: One copy, like, stuck in the middle of this room or 83 copies?

DR. GARRISON: We could make more if more were needed, but my suggestion was that we make them available in the members' lounges and in the library and in electronic memory.

MR. JACQUES: Well, I guess as clarification on Carol's question, she would get, presumably, Monday afternoon at some time on Tuesday.

DR. GARRISON: She'd get that Tuesday morning, as she does now.

MR. JACQUES: Okay. So she would get that, but then would wait until Wednesday morning, another 24 hours, and then she would get Monday night and Tuesday afternoon.

DR. GARRISON: That's right.

MS HALEY: I'd get that Wednesday.

THE CHAIRMAN: Except for the photocopied version on Tuesday, if you wish.

MS HALEY: Well, okay. So if we're trying to save money, the idea is, just for clarification, that the one copy of it would be available.

If we wanted 83 copies of it so that everybody had that photocopied sheet – right? You can't have it till Wednesday now, so if you wanted to have access to it on Tuesday, you'd have to have a photocopy – how much money would we be saving then?

DR. GARRISON: Well, that would obviously cut into our savings. One rationale behind this is that sitting in the gallery in the late afternoon or in the evening after the night issue has been delivered, my impression and I think the impression of several other people is that most members don't look at it.

MS HALEY: I appreciate that. I really do. Stan and I had this conversation last year when it wasn't being circulated inside the House. There are some of us who want it, and I don't want it 48 hours later. My options are?

DR. GARRISON: You're speaking specifically of the night issue.

MS HALEY: Speaking of being able to access either the afternoon or the evening on the following day.

DR. GARRISON: Okay. This proposal wouldn't affect the availability of the afternoon. It would still be the same as it has been. It would only affect the delivery of the night issue.

MS HALEY: Okay.

DR. McNEIL: Just to clarify, those individuals in the caucus who want a copy related to their role in the House, we could, you know, develop a mailing list so that we would ensure that those people who needed one each day, wanted one each day would receive that. It would be the option of other members to get it here or have their staff member take it off the network.

MR. JACQUES: Mr. Chairman, if we had the appropriate computer hookups on our desk in the Assembly . . .

MS HALEY: Which we can't have at our desks.

MR. JACQUES: We could move into the 20th century, let alone the 21st century. I say that perhaps with some tongue in cheek, but I think ultimately it does raise the question that, I mean, we are handicapped, quite frankly, sitting there in the House in the sense that we cannot use the more modern connections. I have a certain amount of sympathy in being able at some point in time to refer electronically to *Hansard* from my particular desk as opposed to having to constantly use paper. I know that doesn't solve this particular issue today, but I would hope that in time there would be a mind-set perhaps that we could explore some of those options.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I think in view of the fact that we pay such diligent attention to the speakers, having any other electronic gadgetry on our desks in the House would take away from that substantially, so that wasn't even up for discussion. However, having said that, I think your proposals are very good, and as long as you're prepared, as you obviously are, David, to work out the wrinkles for either the caucuses or individuals, I think we should go for it, because you can cut your printing runs down from seven to four. Again, if problems arise, we bring them to your attention and sort out as we go. Let's face it; *Hansard* becomes very interesting reading material to different members at different times depending upon issues and topics. So there has to be some flexibility, as long as you have sufficient copies floating around. If you go one step further, besides the members' lounge, throw some into the opposition

lounge and this one – three or four I think would cover it – as well as whatever contact people you had in mind. I'm just agreeing with his position to help him out there.

DR. McNEIL: Just further to Mr. Jacques' comments. You know, we are keeping apprised of what's happening in other jurisdictions with respect to electronic devices in the Chamber. It's not that we're ignoring that possibility. The big factor there would be wireless communication and the security of wireless communication, which will impact, I guess, the rate at which that kind of thing can be done, and that it be done unobtrusively. It's not that we're ignoring that possibility.

MR. HENRY: If I may, Mr. Chairman. I think in the original discussions about the EDP management plan back in '89 or so that was one of the dreams, that eventually each member would have a little console set into their desk and be able to catch a member like the Member for Stony Plain reversing his words on the subject and be able to pull that out. I didn't think he was listening, Mr. Chairman. Certainly I'd like to see that. I'm glad Mr. Jacques brought it forward. It is something we're going to see, I daresay sooner than later.

THE CHAIRMAN: Then the chair takes it the committee agrees with item 1, concerning the combining of *Hansard* evening and afternoon issues?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? [interjection] Oh, it's suggested that perhaps we should have a motion. Accepting that, Mr. Henry moves and Mr. Woloshyn seconds. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Two, subscription rates for *Hansard*, Votes, and Bills.

DR. GARRISON: Okay. You can see this is a lot more complex than the previous item. Just as a matter of background. For those of you who have been around a while, before 1987 the *Hansard* subscription rate was \$15 a year and subscriptions for Votes, Orders, and Bills cost only \$2. This committee raised the rates to the present level of that time, and they've stayed there since then. These rates are totally unrelated to costs, and what I did when developing this proposal was to incorporate the principle that subscription rates should cover the printing and distribution costs and at the same time that the public should have maximum access to these documents: *Hansard*, Votes and Proceedings, and the Bills.

MS HALEY: Agreed.

DR. GARRISON: A couple of items of information. By early 1996 Nova Scotia, the House of Commons, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and B.C. will have most of their Assembly publications available free on the Internet. Starting in 1996, one thing that we haven't done previously, we'll be making all of these publications available free to the 18 depository libraries within Alberta. These are 18 libraries throughout the province that the government uses for all government documents. They charge for government documents going everywhere else, but for these 18 depository libraries it's free.

11:26

MS HALEY: Agreed. Come on, you guys.

DR. GARRISON: I have an item here which I'd like to pass around. There are two pages, and they're not clipped or anything. It's actually two pages on two sides. It's a cross-Canada survey that I

did this fall of subscription rates and of availability of the materials on the Internet. That's basically for background information.

MS HALEY: So moved.

MR. HENRY: I'll second it.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: The motion to accept the proposed new subscription rate schedule on the back is moved by Ms Haley, seconded by Mr. Henry. Any questions or comments? Before calling for the question, I'll let Dr. McNeil finish distributing and see if this has any adverse effect on people. So there is a motion with regard to the proposed rates. All those in favour, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

Thank you for that valuable information.

DR. GARRISON: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: There's no paper on the next item. In the downsizing so far, as has been noted, some areas have taken larger hits than others, and as a result of the last couple of years' budgets it's got to the point where there's really very, very little money allocated for members' travel to parliamentary meetings. The chair has had to on several occasions sort of restrict members, as to who could go, as to who had airline points in order to cover the transportation. The chair feels uncomfortable about that. It feels that all members should have the opportunity to participate. So the chair would like to make a suggestion for consideration by the committee that every year a member might transfer up to \$1,500 from his or her constituency account to the LAO parliamentary association account to cover transportation for that member, if that member had the opportunity to attend such a meeting. Now, that figure is based on the cost of flying as far as St. John's, Newfoundland, which is the farthest point in the country. That is the basis of the proposal.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Chairman, I hate to disagree with you. I don't think that's the right way to go. I would like to see you – because you're in charge of it – put in what your anticipated costs are for that travel, and let's look at the issue head-on, because you may run into the same problem with transferring constituency funds from individual members as you are with air travel miles. You have put forward, I think, a very good point, and I think this committee should endorse you a hundred percent. Let's make it as a budget item, and then if there's some way that there are surplus funds in constituencies to make it up at the end of the year, which draws from everybody evenly or unevenly, whatever, I would do that. But I don't believe in transferring from individual constituency budgets, in case you may be asked, because you'll be placed in the same uncomfortable position down the way as you were recently with respect to: can you fund your own way? So I think we just put in a budget line for you that's representative of the needs.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm caught in between two Stans here, but I have to in this particular case side with the Stan over here. I can see all types of implications involved, even though it may be a proposal you put forward just for some debate. I think it would be unfair to the constituents in the sense that constituency dollars are there to serve those constituents directly. I'm not sure myself if being in St. John's for three days, whatever, is beneficial, as some of those parliamentary conferences can be, if it really is of that much direct benefit to my constituents. Times are tough now.

There is no question about that, and I think we have to make sacrifices. That's one of them.

The other concept, I guess, with pooling – there is a certain disadvantage when air miles have to be used to go to a parliamentary conference in that rural MLAs have probably a great deal more air miles than, let's say, urban.

MR. HENRY: Calgary does.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Some do.

MR. WICKMAN: Some do? Okay. Calgary does. I mean, I'm not saying rural or Calgary, but maybe we should again study that whole concept within the caucuses of being able to pool air miles and transferring air miles to distribute to any such parliamentary conferences on that basis, at the direction of that particular caucus. There have got to be better ways is what I'm saying.

THE CHAIRMAN: Next year perhaps but not too much this year. Any other comments?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Are you looking for completion of this to year-end, Mr. Chairman? Are you looking for assistance for between now and March 31?

THE CHAIRMAN: I was looking for a little assistance there.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Then are you asking on a onetime basis for members specifically without bringing it into constituency names at the moment?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, it could involve about three members before the end of the fiscal year. The reason I looked at that situation was because it seems like a large number of members seem to turn a fair amount of money back at the end of each year from that particular account. Probably it became a source of revenue. The chair certainly appreciates what Mr. Woloshyn is pointing out. I think all members here feel that our budgeting should be more transparent than it has been, particularly with the comments that were made at the very beginning about the broadcast of question period to be charged to the proper account. So there's no deep, fundamental disagreement about the philosophy here. It's just that there is a little problem right now that has come up as a result of our previous budgetary approach to these matters.

MR. JACQUES: I'm really confused with the course of the conversation, because we don't seem to be talking about specifics. I mean, is the issue that there are not sufficient funds available in the budget for the Speaker to . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: No. It has nothing to do with me. It is other members. We get encouraged to send members to meetings. Like, there was one last weekend in Toronto, a regional meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. In particular, there is going to be a short meeting in Monterey, California, in mid-January that's sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislatures. Those are examples of the types of meetings I was referring to.

MR. JACQUES: But the budget did contain some amount of dollars; I'm not sure what they are. I mean, it did identify some dollars for this purpose?

11:36

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, some, greatly reduced in the last two years.



Ms Haley.

MS HALEY: Thank you. Probably an inappropriate comment coming from me on this, because I'm not sure what angle we're trying to come at this from. If we require more money to be set aside for specific travel, then we'd better start clearly indicating it in the budget and asking for it. I would have concern about taking money from my constituency budget to travel on a government function of any kind. The question then could arise in some people's minds as to whether or not I'm willing to run my constituency office properly or I just want to go away on trips and so therefore I'm not going to do that which I should be doing well inside my constituency, which is communicating as well as possible with my riding. I would have trouble with that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Mr. Woloshyn, do you wish to . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: Is your time line such that this has to be nailed down before the 8th of January?

THE CHAIRMAN: No.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Could we give it some thought for a creative solution, and could we bring it back then, Mr. Chairman? When I made my initial comments, I didn't realize you were in a jam for this year. I thought you were talking about budgeting for next year.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, it has two aspects to it.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, it's not really a jam, in all due respect. You know, we either accept the sacrifices that are bestowed upon us today – and that means less travel – or else we try and find ways to undo some of the hardships, if you want to call them hardships, that have been created in the past. I just don't think this is the time to try and look at creativity in terms of sending other than yourself to the parliamentary conferences. I'm quite satisfied to have you represent me there and enjoy that nice weather in California.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Well, we will leave this over till the 8th of January. In the meantime, I would urge all hon. members to consider the item regarding CPA for that budget. Thank you.

This is a very similar matter. You've been provided with a copy of a letter from Tuxis Parliament concerning their request for financial assistance. The chair was going to suggest a similar approach to this problem, because the budget doesn't provide anything for this. The chair felt that some hon. members might wish to do something if they had access to some of their, quote, budgeted funds and therefore wanted to make it possible for the committee to consider some way of supporting this organization through constituency or other similar funds.

Mr. Henry.

MR. HENRY: Just a question. If individual members wanted to support their organization, is it now not possible to transfer funds to the caucus budget by the caucus? Is that a legitimate or would that be an inappropriate use?

DR. McNEIL: It would be possible to do that. The mechanism is available, but it would have to represent a transfer from the member's constituency office, which is allowed under the Members' Services orders, in a caucus decision to utilize those funds for that purpose.

MR. HENRY: My only hesitation, though it's certainly a worthwhile organization and it's done some really good work in the past, is that if you start funding individual groups at this table, do we have the Alberta speech and debate society, who two years ago sponsored the international competitions in Medicine Hat, coming to the table? Then who comes next?

MS HALEY: Well, I'll bring my basketball team, my volleyball team, and my football team.

MR. HENRY: Well, sure. So I would suggest that we decline at this point and make it known to members that there is already a mechanism if they choose as individuals.

THE CHAIRMAN: To use the caucus transfer route.

MR. HENRY: If that's a legitimate way of doing that.

DR. McNEIL: Here's another piece of information to provide. We do provide a grant to Tuxis under our grants budget under CPA each year as well. Among four or five different parliamentary organizations there's a total of about \$2,500 that's granted through a speech competition and through recognition within Tuxis and a couple of other parliamentary organizations to support their activities. So there already are funds that are allocated there in our present budget.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, that's all the chair had.  
Mr. Henry.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, if I may ask for your indulgence. On the next page, Follow-up Items, I have a notice of motion listed that I've consulted with some members on and think there's very little support for. So if it's agreeable to the chair, I'd ask unanimous consent to withdraw that notice of motion at this time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is there consent for the withdrawal of that notice?

MS HALEY: Of what? I'm sorry.

MR. HENRY: There's a notice of motion I made a year ago in January that I don't think there's any support for, and I'd like permission to withdraw that so it doesn't keep appearing.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Agreed. So ordered.

The second item has been dealt with, the chair believes.

MR. WICKMAN: The third item has too.

THE CHAIRMAN: The third item as well. Fourth item: that has been dealt with. The follow-up with respect to cameras: that's been dealt with. Government Organization Act: that has been dealt with at the last. So everything has been dealt with.

Now the date of the next meeting.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: January 8, 1996.

THE CHAIRMAN: Nobody wants one in between?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, then I'll wish everyone a Merry Christmas.

MR. WOLOSHYN: And Merry Christmas to you too.

THE CHAIRMAN: Oh, the time. Will it be 9 o'clock?

MR. WICKMAN: As set by the chair.

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll decide that; okay?

MR. WOLOSHYN: And on a Monday if you make it at 9 o'clock, you might have some disgruntled people. Make it 10 on Monday.

THE CHAIRMAN: Ten o'clock on the 8th.

[The committee adjourned at 11:45 a.m.]