

[Chairman: Mr. Schumacher]

THE CHAIRMAN: It's a pleasure to see a quorum. I think we've got a full attendance. It's nice to have everybody with us this morning for the first meeting of the Members' Services Committee on developing plans for the forthcoming year. Before we get on, I must say it's nice to see all of you this morning. Several of you I haven't seen since half a year ago almost, seeing that I sort of missed the fall session. Anyway, it's nice to see you all again.

I notice from the minutes we'll be dealing with soon that we dealt with the final plans for '96 in one day, on January 8, but I don't expect we will do that all today. We may as well leave some work for tomorrow, but I hope that we can deal with our agenda this week.

Are there any suggestions with regards to the proposed agenda before the chair calls a motion?

MR. WICKMAN: Just two points, Mr. Chairman. First, I'd ask a consideration that we do all items other than the budget. Leave the budget to the end. Any items that we're dealing with in the process that are related to the budget, we can always refer them to the budget. There are so many of the smaller items here that I think we can dispense with and then get down to the nitty-gritty, which is the budget.

THE CHAIRMAN: So you'd suggest we deal with item 4 and then 6 and 7 before dealing with 5.

MR. WICKMAN: Right.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is there any discussion on that suggestion? Everybody agreeable to it? Mr. Clerk?

DR. McNEIL: Mr. Chairman, just to let you know why we structured the budget the way we did. We thought we'd deal first with those budget-related items that impact on the budget and then get right into the budget and deal with the non budget-related items at the end. That was the reason for the structure as it's presented, for your information.

THE CHAIRMAN: So you're suggesting that items 6 and 7 really wouldn't have much implication on the budget in effect.

MR. WICKMAN: Do you want that in the form of a motion, Mr. Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: Your suggestion still is to do items 4, 6, and 7 before 5?

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah, all the non budget-related items first. I'll move that we deal with all the non budget-related items first.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any discussion on that motion?

MR. SEVERTSON: Mr. Chairman, to the mover. When you say you move nonbudget items, well, item 4 is budget related, so does that mean we'd go to 6 and 7 first?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I suppose we could do 6 and 7 and then go to 4 and 5.

MR. SEVERTSON: That's what I'm wondering.

THE CHAIRMAN: What did you envisage, Mr. Wickman?

MR. WICKMAN: I envisaged 4, 6, 7, and then 5, and in the course of the process . . .

MR. BRASSARD: But 4 is all budget related.

MR. WICKMAN: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no. I think what he's suggesting is that the decisions in 4 will have some effect on 5; that's why 4 should be dealt with before 5. I suppose Mr. Wickman's also suggesting that there might be some things that would affect 5 even with our decisions on 6 and 7.

MR. WICKMAN: That's right.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion? Is the committee ready for the question? All those in favour of the motion by Mr. Wickman, please indicate. Those opposed? The motion fails.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, if I could, before we approve the agenda, I'd ask that item 4(j), which I understand was put on the agenda by the Liberal caucus, be deleted at this time, because I understand the work isn't ready yet. I'd just like to move that item 4(j) be deleted until it's brought back by the Liberal caucus at a future date.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any discussion? All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

MR. HENRY: I would then move the agenda be approved as amended.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any discussion on that? Mr. Henry moves that the agenda be approved as amended. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Now, the next matter is the minutes, which I believe have been circulated. Could there be a motion to approve the minutes of January 8, 1996? Mr. Brassard.

MR. BRASSARD: I so move, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Any discussion? All those in favour of approving the minutes of January 8, 1996, please indicate. Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

Now we'll be commencing on the agenda. Item 4(a), Broadcast of Question Period.

DR. McNEIL: I'll start off and then hand it over to Dr. Garrison. This arose from last year's budget meeting, where we had identified a potential problem in the next year, year and a half with respect to losing our access to Access television time. As a result, the committee had requested that we develop alternatives to the broadcasting of question period. This is what this decision item does.

Gary, I'll turn it over to you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Dr. Garrison.

DR. GARRISON: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just briefly on the background. Since Access has been privatized, the Department of Education has bought time from them, and we've been using their time to broadcast question period. The cost of that particular time is \$1,750 per hour. If you figure that out over the current year, 62

sitting days, that comes to about \$108,000 of time from Education that we've used for question period.

In the spring of '97 what we're planning to do is to limit the amount of time of the broadcast to 60 minutes. We'll do that on a delay basis so that only question period and whatever members' statements or ministerial statements will fit in under 60 minutes will be on the air. We have an agreement with Education to continue to use their time only through the '96-97 school year, which means, I guess, that it would continue into the summer if we should sit into the summer. But as of the next school year they would have a problem giving us the time on the same basis.

I should note, too, that we have a closed-circuit TV system in place here at the Legislature so that all of the offices here who now have cable will still be able to see the entire proceedings from the opening until the end of the Routine. They'll be able to see it live without the delay basis.

The present production contract is with CFRN. It goes for one more year. The budget figures are there, and I won't repeat them. There was concern the last time this came up with the audience figures we had, which indicated 6,500 people per week watch the question period broadcast. I don't have anything further to add to that.

I guess I do have one small item. I checked into what the audience figures were when there was a delayed broadcast at 11 p.m. on Access. They tell me that the audience was so small it didn't even register, which I find rather interesting because we got a lot of complaints when it was taken off the 11 o'clock time. It was also surprising because when the House of Commons went to an evening delayed broadcast of question period, their audience tripled. I guess what that tells us is that it confirms what people in the industry have been telling me, that there really isn't a very accurate way of measuring what audiences are.

9:46

If anybody doesn't know, the BBM, Bureau of Broadcast Measurement, survey basically involves handing out a little booklet to selected people and asking them to go through a week and fill out what TV shows they've watched and all this kind of stuff. But there's really no incentive for people to hand them in – at least there's not much – so the return rate is not very great.

I'll just briefly go through the alternatives that are possible. One is that we can purchase Access time ourselves. You can see the different times. During the afternoon we could get it for \$1,750, the same as Education pays now. At 11 o'clock it costs \$2,000 per hour, and at midnight it costs \$1,000 per hour.

The second alternative involves something that was proposed by the Cable Television Association in 1994 when we tendered the production. This would involve delivering our program to the cable systems by satellite and asking them to broadcast it on a delayed basis. I talked to the representatives of all five cable TV systems in the province, and they all have expressed interest in showing it at no charge. There would be a charge for us, however, in getting the signal to them, and that's what's indicated under number 2. Satellite time would cost \$700 per hour, or \$52,500 per year based on 75 sitting days in a year.

The third alternative that I mention here is basically for information. You've probably heard about the new Alberta channel that was just approved. I've been in touch with the people at Craig Broadcasting. They were interested to know that we were interested in them, but this is a regular commercial TV station, and they gave no indication of whether they would be so interested that they would give us free time. I'm a little bit doubtful that they would, because none of the other stations they'd be competing with have indicated

that kind of interest. But, you know, it's still a possibility, although I would say it's fairly remote.

The recommendation that we're proposing is number 2, which involves the use of the cable TV systems as an alternative to broadcast question period.

MR. WICKMAN: Just a comment and two questions. I'm surprised at the number of people over the years that have told me that they actually watch question period on television. Stats may not show it, or maybe those are just people that are keen on politics, but I think it's a valuable service and one that has to be continued.

The two questions I have. One, if we were to opt for recommendation 2, would the agreement be on a year-to-year basis?

DR. GARRISON: You mean with the cable systems?

MR. WICKMAN: Right.

DR. GARRISON: I guess we'd really have to negotiate that with the cable system.

MR. WICKMAN: The reason I ask that is that it leads into the second question. When Craig Broadcasting made their application for their licence, was there not a stipulation that a certain percentage of their programming would be Canadian content? Would they not be anxious to fill in some of the Canadian content requirement? Maybe they would be very receptive to working out something very favourable.

DR. GARRISON: Yeah, I believe that's true, and not just Canadian content but Alberta content. Of course, you couldn't get a more Albertan content.

MR. WICKMAN: The questions really lead to the point: could we as an interim measure opt for recommendation 2, but if things are more favourable in '98 with Craig Broadcasting, could we then switch over?

MR. BRASSARD: The point Mr. Wickman made was the one I was going to raise, this unknown factor with the new channel. It is an issue, but I just wanted more to comment on my dismay with the figures on the number of people that watch this program. It's really unfortunate. When we discussed this last year, as I recall, the figures were even lower than that, and I made the recommendation or suggestion that perhaps we should look at canceling this program altogether for lack of interest. I was absolutely amazed at the number of people that phoned saying that they may not watch it, but because they were discussing public business, they should have the right to watch it. So I guess as much as I'm discouraged by the number of people that watch it, I think it's something that has to be there.

MR. HENRY: I just wonder if the numbers reported by BBM are a typical Alberta phenomenon: when we had a Socred government, nobody admitted they'd voted Socred, but everybody voted Socred. So I'm wondering if people are afraid to admit they actually watch us on television or are embarrassed to admit perhaps that they haven't got anything better to do. But jesting aside . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: It's like nobody watches *Baywatch*.

MR. HENRY: It's like nobody watches *Baywatch*. They all watch it for the content; we know that.

Seriously, number 2. I mean, we're obviously caught between a

desire to provide a public service and be open as legislators and also the fiscal realities. I'd be comfortable with the recommended option if we gave agreement in principle here, subject to negotiations with the cable companies because we don't have a firm commitment. I would want us to have that firm commitment at least for a season or a year, that all the cable companies would indeed commit to broadcasting it at a particular time. You know, they can change that on an annual basis, but I wouldn't want us to get into the situation where one cable in Edmonton – for instance, we have two cable companies that have territories; they don't overlap. You wouldn't want a situation where one would say, "Yes, we'll do it at 11 o'clock," and then we get down to the crunch and the other one says, "Well, we're not going to be able to do it; sorry," where half the city gets it and half doesn't.

It would seem to me that the prudent thing would be to approve recommendation 2 in principle, subject to successful negotiations on administration. So if you're able to get the cable companies onside with this, then it wouldn't need to come back here. We'd just pursue it, and we'd go from there.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Severtson.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I guess there are a couple of questions I'd like to ask. What I read in the background: our contract's till '97 now; is it?

DR. McNEIL: The end of June.

MR. SEVERTSON: Just into June, yes.

DR. GARRISON: Well, our production contract.

MR. SEVERTSON: Yeah, production costs are to the end of '97, and the broadcast is to the end of June.

DR. GARRISON: Basically, yeah.

MR. SEVERTSON: Okay. When you go to your option 2, you have the figure of \$52,500 per year. Is that on the suggestion of a compact time line, that we'd be delayed and you'd just keep it to one hour, like you suggested in your example?

DR. GARRISON: Yes. That's right.

MR. SEVERTSON: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion?

DR. GARRISON: Maybe one thing I should mention in response to Mr. Henry's and Mr. Wickman's comments. The cable industry is really in a state of flux. As you probably know, they've got a whole bunch of new specialty channels that are just coming on. I was told that there's an interest now in broadcasting this, but it seems to me it would be very difficult to get any kind of a longer term agreement with them because they have no idea what they're going to be doing a year from now, you know. That's not just technical capacity; that has to do with what they're going to choose to show.

MR. HENRY: Just in response to Dr. Garrison. My comments were assuming that this would be a year-to-year kind of arrangement, so if we were able to get a commitment for the first season at least, then we may have to renegotiate after that. It may have to come back to this table if we find out that nobody wants to broadcast it, and we'll

have to discuss whether it's worth putting extra dollars in or not to buy the time.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, to get a motion on the floor – there's not a motion on the floor; is there?

THE CHAIRMAN: No.

MR. WICKMAN: I'll move  
that the administration be directed to pursue alternative 2 and report back at the appropriate time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion? All those in favour of the motion proposed by Mr. Wickman, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

Item 4(b), Assessment of Scroll Program.

9:56

DR. McNEIL: This is an item that arose from last January's meeting. Again I'll ask Gary Garrison to elaborate on this issue.

THE CHAIRMAN: Dr. Garrison.

DR. GARRISON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll just briefly walk through the background. We've had a scroll program since 1978. The cost of the scroll package is indicated there. Anniversary scrolls include two pins per scroll, so that's why the cost of them is \$3. instead of \$1.90. We used to have these scrolls hand-lettered by a calligrapher, and that cost \$5 per scroll. That was up until 1993.

Then we started doing them on a laser printer. We changed the format of the scroll. One of the problems we encountered, aside from the fact that at the last committee meeting some members indicated they didn't like the design of the scroll, was that the paper was a bit thick to be running through laser printers very effectively. There were some comments made at the last meeting of this committee that people preferred the thicker paper of the scrolls, but there's a real problem with that thick paper because of the technology of the laser printer. It has to bend the paper through. The later versions of the laser printers: it's even more difficult to get them to do it than the older ones. I guess they're more tightly built or something. I'm not sure what.

Anyway, I wanted to circulate to people a sample of a scroll which we're proposing we would do in place of the one with the green Mace, but it wouldn't be on white paper. I'll give you a sample of the type of paper it would be on. I only have four sheets of the paper, so you may have to have just a quick look and pass it on. This was printed on a laser printer. The colour laser printer won't print on anything but this white paper, so that's why I couldn't print the sample on that speckled paper.

MR. COUTTS: So it wouldn't be in gold?

DR. GARRISON: Excuse me?

MR. COUTTS: It wouldn't be in colour here then?

DR. GARRISON: Yeah. It would be in colour.

MR. COUTTS: I thought you said you couldn't print it on that paper.

DR. GARRISON: Oh, you could but not on a laser printer. What we would do is send this to a print shop. They would print this four-colour process on this paper with the texture on it. Then what you would have is the actual coloured Mace and the coloured crest

on this paper printed as a blank. Then the blanks could be run through the laser printer, where all the particulars would be printed on them. Okay?

I know there was some concern about the thinner paper at the last meeting; it didn't look substantial enough or dignified enough or whatever. I got some scrolls that are sent out by the Premier's office and the Lieutenant Governor's office, and I can just pass them around. The one from the Premier's office is based on the same type of paper that I've just circulated. It's got a coloured crest at the top, and it's the same weight of paper as that particular one. The Lieutenant Governor scrolls are again the same weight of paper. They have coloured printing on them, and they have some shiny foil printing on them as well. So I will pass those around, too, just to give you an idea, so you can see what they feel like and have a good look at them. That's really the weight of the paper that you need to go through a laser printer.

Anyway, what we're recommending is that the scroll program be continued but using a scroll such as I've just circulated on that textured paper and that it be printed in full colour. This would enable us to run these through the laser printers. Members could run them through their own laser printers, whatever they like. We could do it, or they could do it. The cost of printing these blanks would be only slightly higher than what we're already paying.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Brassard.

MR. BRASSARD: Yes. Could I just ask if there's an alternative to this flat gray or white? If you look at the examples of the scrolls that have come around, just a little bit of colour in the paper makes the visual impact of the scroll so much better. I can't think of an example that just passed through here. I would think that there are nicer alternatives to the gray.

In our constituency we make up scrolls for all of the graduating students. We make 300 or 400 through our laser printer, and it works really great. I must admit that the lighter weight paper processes through the laser printer far much more readily, but we have lost something in the process. If we could recapture that by just going to a little bit of colour on the paper, I think it would help a great deal.

MR. WICKMAN: Sort of like a light gray; eh?

MR. BRASSARD: Well, that light green looks very good with the rose, but I would think something that would blend with the Mace – and Carol Haley's name, which is on this example scroll – just something to give it a little more life than what is here in the plain white.

MR. HENRY: Well, I was just wondering if the Edmonton-Centre scrolls had to have Carol Haley's name on them.

MS HALEY: Yes, yes.

MR. HENRY: They do, for the record.

With Mr. Brassard's comments I agree in general. I'd just like to make a motion

that we accept recommendation 2 and that administration take under advisement the comments of Mr. Brassard with regard to the colour of the paper.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion? Is the committee ready for the question? Oh, Ms Haley.

MS HALEY: I guess I just wanted to say that I don't know if I want

green paper, but I sure don't want this gray stuff. The reason we went and bought our own last time was because we felt that the quality of the scroll was beneath the dignity of an MLA's office. If you're going to do a scroll program, then you want to do it right. Otherwise, there's no point to it. We can all send out letters on our own bond paper if that's all we're trying to achieve.

When I do a scroll program for the seniors, the birthdays, the anniversaries, or the kids graduating from my high schools, I want them to have something that when I hand it to them, it's got some ability – a lot of these are handed out in a school gymnasium on graduation day. They're going down a long list of people that they're shaking hands with. They can't have something that just crumples in their hand, or there won't be anything left by the time they get down the receiving line.

So that's why we chose to go outside and order our own. It was because I wanted to do it right, and I still want to do it right.

DR. GARRISON: Could I comment just briefly on Mr. Brassard's point about the different kind of paper? The cost of the paper would be a little bit higher if we went to parchment or to the parchment-type look that you're talking about. I thought I should make that point just so you'd know.

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Chairman, could I ask: is the cost significant then? Is that what you're saying? We're talking about \$100, the cost of the change in our scroll program. I mean, that's not a significant cost. Even if you doubled or tripled that and it became \$300 for a better parchment, I would think that would be worth while.

DR. GARRISON: Well, I don't have that information right here. I don't think it would be more than a few hundred dollars. It wouldn't be great, but it would be a little more than what's shown here.

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Chairman, in fairness, I think that if we're going to do it, as Ms Haley said, I think we should do it right or not do it at all. Consequently, I would go for the more expensive paper because I think it's still very conservative.

10:06

THE CHAIRMAN: With that, is there any further discussion? All those in favour of the motion? Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

Item 4(c). Mr. Clerk.

DR. McNEIL: I can speak to this matter initially anyway. If there are detailed questions, Mr. Buhr can answer them. This item started out as a decision item, but as we gathered more information, it latterly turned into an information item. We thought initially that overall the government was spending more money on Conference Board subscriptions through individual departments in the Assembly than they were previously when the government had a subscription through the department of Treasury. In doing our research, we concluded that the total annual cost to the Alberta government for publication subscriptions for departments and agencies in the Assembly is much less than the approximately \$70,000 annual group membership fee that Alberta would be assessed at the present time.

So our recommendation is that we continue to pay our \$12,000 Conference Board membership and work on some possibilities of cost sharing with the departments, if that's feasible. Really this is an information item now rather than a decision item.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, I was going to move the recommendation,

but if he doesn't need it, if it's only information, then it's not necessary.

THE CHAIRMAN: I guess that's not necessary. So there are no further comments on this item? Thank you.

Item 4(d), Proposal for Constituency Office Security Systems. Where did – he was there a minute ago.

AN HON. MEMBER: Here he comes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sergeant-at-Arms, we're just ready for you. Item 4(d), Colonel Hodgson.

MR. HODGSON: You're being asked to consider a measure that I think would both dramatically improve the level of security for the individuals who work in your constituency offices and protect the assets that are contained therein. By way of background, in 1991 constituency offices were given an option to have a security system installed at the expense of their office budget. Typically these costs run between \$600 and \$1,000 per installation, depending on where you are in the province.

Two aspects to the alarm system. One is an intrusion alarm, a burglar alarm if you like, intended to give warning of an unauthorized intrusion into the office after hours. The second and perhaps the most important aspect is a panic alarm that is designed to protect the staff in the event of an imminent threat to their person.

These two alarm systems are connected to the telephone line, and of course the signal is received at the Department of Justice operations centre here and the appropriate police forces are contacted. In the case of the intrusion alarm a protocol is established with the constituency office as to what should happen, whether the key holder is called or whether the police are called.

There are at present 46 constituency offices that are equipped with these alarm systems. As you know, when I get out and visit the constituency offices in the course of the year I try and sell the value of the system, because I believe it's an appropriate level of protection for both the equipment in the office and the assets therein.

There are three alternatives. One is maintenance of the status quo, where constituency office budgets would again fund the cost of these alarms. It would be a purely voluntary thing. The second is that it would be compulsory, but again the cost would be funded from the constituency office budgets. The third option, the one that I'm recommending, is that the Legislative Assembly Office fund the cost of the alarm systems.

As I mentioned, at present there are 46 offices with systems. To equip the balance of the offices, about \$41,000. In an election year statistically about 25 offices change locations. So assuming that we're heading into an election in the next little while, we anticipate a one-time implementation cost of \$66,000. In any one year there are usually three or four offices that move on average. That's basically what would be the maintenance cost, if you like, per year, with the exception of an election year, when we'd be faced with a cost in the order of about \$25,000 or \$30,000.

THE CHAIRMAN: Ms Haley.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much. There are parts of what you say that I truly agree with. I had an alarm system installed in my office. The reason was because we back on a side street. It's frequently dark in that area, very few people walk by there, and I wanted my assistant to feel safe and comfortable. Having said that, if my office were down at one of the malls, I would not have got the system. The way the system runs now, it's my responsibility as an

MLA to make that determination. If I make that determination, it comes out of my budget. I accept that, and I see no absolutely no reason to change the system.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I disagree with what is being said by the former speaker. Two points of view. My office is in a small indoor mall, Petrolia mall, and since I've been there, there have been six or seven break-ins in that mall. Mainly it's the drugstore that they go after. It's not drugs; they go after cigarettes, of all things. So far our constituency office has never been touched, but it's all glass in the front there, and you can view the computers or whatever in there. I'm surprised, quite frankly, that it hasn't happened. That's a secondary concern.

My main concern is not for myself. In my nine years as an alderman and eight years as an MLA I've never had a serious threat against me. But my staff in the constituency office, there are times they've felt very uncomfortable because some of the people that come in there – you have to wonder. You've got to be concerned. I'm not saying that because I have two girls in my constituency office it makes a difference, but I do at times feel a concern for them. Now, the Sergeant-at-Arms has been at my constituency office. It is probably one of the lesser ones in terms of a risk, and I'm sure others pose a much higher risk. But it's not for our protection so much as for the protection of our staff.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, a question to Brian. If we were to blanket our offices with alarms, would we see a reduction in our insurance costs? Sometimes if you do put in alarm systems, then you'll see a substantial reduction in your premiums.

MR. HODGSON: It's not a question that I can answer. David?

DR. McNEIL: I don't think, because we're covered by . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: It wouldn't be premiums, but it might be losses.

DR. McNEIL: Not on premiums, but I think we could project that our losses would be lower. As the information indicates, we've had 13 break-ins at a cost of – what? – \$45,000. So if we had an alarm system in each office, the probability would be that we'd reduce that. I wouldn't say to zero but significantly reduce it.

MR. STELMACH: Okay. Is there a \$5,000 deductible per break-in or overall?

DR. McNEIL: Per break-in.

MR. STELMACH: Per break-in. Okay.

MS HALEY: That's more than my furniture's worth.

DR. McNEIL: The computer is usually the thing that's the most expensive.

MR. STELMACH: The fact that the office is alarmed is not going to deter any – well, maybe if they have a look at it, they may decide not to break in. But it would be nice to see some reciprocal saving on the insurance side if we were to blanket all the offices. I suspect there were savings in the cost of insurance to those school boards that alarmed all of the school buildings, et cetera, a substantial saving.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Chairman, I support the concept of alarm

systems. We have recently shifted location, two years ago. Part of the reason we did so was because we were broken into three times in the previous location. The first time they twisted the doorknob off. The next two times they came through the wall, literally hacking a hole through two layers of drywall and coming straight through the wall to reach around and open the dead bolt and the lock that was installed. The first time they were looking for cash and drugs. We were located at that time in a mall with a number of medical offices, and they were breaking into all of the offices. Once we put the alarm system in, we did not have a subsequent break-in. We have now moved location because I still was not comfortable with that location for the staff.

We haven't had any problem right now, partly because we're located directly above the police office, which may be the best security system one could have.

10:16

Having said that, I think what might be worth while to do would be to propose a motion

that the constituency offices be equipped following the election rather than redoing them.

It seems to me there's a potential of \$25,000 of duplicated expenses here. So I would like to see perhaps a modified position 3, that perhaps we go with it as it is until new constituency offices are created. We know we must have an election no later than June of 1998; that's the five-year maximum. Then perhaps we can avoid the 25 constituency office changes, if that's what occurs.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to speak against the motion. As was pointed out, this member's office now is located over top of a police office. Ms Haley pointed out that she's moved her office to a location where she feels concerned about an alarm system. My office is part of an insurance agency, and we have a lot of people around. We have ample security built in. Albeit there's no one there in the evening to prevent a break-in, in the almost 11 years that I've been a member, I've never had a problem with this.

I think it should really be at the discretion of the individual. If your office warrants a location that is going to put you or your staff at risk in any way, I think that should be part of the cost of operating your constituency office. I would vote in favour of status quo. If Mr. Bruseker's suggestion was in the form of a motion that we adopt number 3 in a modified state, then I would speak against that motion in favour of option 1.

MR. HENRY: With respect, I would like to disagree with Mr. Brassard. I would like to speak in favour of the motion. I think it's oversimplification to say that the member determines the type of security by where the office is. Particularly representing a downtown urban area, Edmonton-Centre, quite frankly with the proliferation of liquor stores where there's any office space available, coupled with the enormous price you would pay in a downtown sort of high-rise office, there aren't a lot of options that don't require security in the downtown core. We do have and have had since I was elected a security system in place, but it seems to me that we need to be sensitive to that reality, that there really aren't a lot of options, certainly in Edmonton-Centre, where you wouldn't have a high break-in rate.

The other option would be to go to a place that has built-in security. Then the cost becomes prohibitive, if you're talking about Manulife Place or somewhere else.

So I just wanted to alert members that there is that difference, I think, in the constituencies.

MS HALEY: I'd just like to come back to the comments being made that it should be somehow mandatory. It's that Big Brother knows best philosophy. We have 83 independent MLAs that get elected in this province. No matter what party they're with, each one of them has a constituency budget, each one of them is entitled to have an office, and each one of them is entitled to have an alarm system. The only thing is that they should pay for it out of their constituency budget; that's my point. I don't want another line item in our budget that escalates our expenses by \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year on an ongoing, nonstop basis simply because there's an election, or somebody resigns early and somebody else gets elected and they don't want that office, or you decide halfway through your term that you need to move to another one. This is just not what we need to do. Everybody needs to be responsible. I feel responsible as an MLA for my staff. I've done the best I can to make their office safe. I think it behooves every other MLA to do the same thing but out of their own budget.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, I like option 3, quite frankly, particularly the modified version, and I'd like to know what Brian thinks of that. I recognize the risks that some of our employees run. I'm more concerned about them than any theft from the office, because my records are not, I think, worth that much to many people, nor do we have the latest in computer equipment. In my particular case there is very little danger because we happen to be housed in the same building as the father of my constituency manager, and he would defend her to the death. But that's a temporary situation. Who knows what's happening next?

I like that one because it means that we are safe, our employees are safe, and we don't have to pay once more out of our constituency budget. So I'd like to move that, Mr. Chairman, if I may.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's already on the floor. Did you want a response from the Sergeant-at-Arms?

MR. HODGSON: I would have no difficulty in agreeing with sort of a modified option 3 which would be workable and achieve the same end. It would just take a little bit longer.

MR. HENRY: Just a question for the administration. Is this potentially expense-neutral in the sense that if we make this expenditure, the predictions are that we're going to have less break-ins and deductibles?

MR. HODGSON: I wouldn't say that. I can't go that far, but I would say that it certainly would ameliorate the number of thefts.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion? Is the committee ready for the question? All those in favour of the motion proposed by Mr. Bruseker? Those opposed? The motion fails.

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Chairman, I would like to move adoption of alternative 1:

that the members be encouraged to install security systems as warranted at the cost of their constituency budget.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any discussion on the motion proposed by Mr. Brassard? Is the committee ready for the question? All those in favour of the motion proposed by Mr. Brassard? Opposed? Carried.

Item 4(e), Review of Policy re Former Members' Benefit Program. The chair welcomes Mrs. Scarlett to the table. She will give us the background with regard to this item.

MRS. SCARLETT: What I'd like to do is talk a few minutes just in terms of what the extended benefits option program is, as a refresher, then take a look at the points that need to be looked at. Basically, the extended benefits option is an option that's available to retired members. It was introduced back in 1988, and it allows retired members, former members, to continue participation on our health benefit plans, originally for a maximum of five years, on a cost-shared basis. That was amended in 1995 to allow those members to continue to participate in the group plan after the initial five years as long as they paid the total cost of coverage and the Leg. Assembly was incurring no cost.

A point for review is that the number of members that are presently participating in the plan is increasing with each election. Right now we've got 52 former members and, depending on the next election, we're anticipating between 70 and 80 former members. The EBO and the EBO plus programs involve a significant administrative workload. There are costs to the Leg. Assembly. The emergency out-of-Canada coverage offered through Blue Cross is normally intended – the assumption is that the members are working. With our former members, they are traveling out of the country, getting the benefit of that, but they are out of the country on extended periods, and that was not the intent. It has not been brought up as an issue yet, but there's concern that it might become an issue at some time.

The overall age of retired members these days is a lot younger; thus our members are not retiring from the workforce. What we have are members that stay on our plan and through other employers co-ordinate the two benefits plans, and we have other situations where members work as independent consultants and rely on our benefit coverage, some examples being the out-of-Canada coverage if that's where they're working.

10:26

Some alternatives to look at in terms of the program. One is to continue as it is right now. A second alternative may be to look at the qualifying eligibility in that, as an example, perhaps a member should serve two terms before they qualify for that benefit. Alternative 3 modifies the present program, offering (a), (b), and (c). Options for modification would be actually to plan to phase out the programs, say, over the next two years, with the program ending December 31, 1998; perhaps look at continuing the program but not cost sharing at all; and a third option would be perhaps to reduce the number of years that a member could participate in the program from the present five years to two years on a cost-shared basis and not continue what we call the EBO plus program, which allows continuation thereafter as long as the member pays all the costs.

To eliminate the program completely is not the recommendation. Nonreturning members are usually not able to secure career opportunities immediately on their retirement from the Leg. Assembly, and this program can offer a bridging benefit essential to members and their families. Therefore, we would recommend that the program be offered to all retiring members on a cost-shared basis for a maximum of two years after ceasing to be members. This would provide a benefit for a shorter period of time but represent a saving in the longer term to the Legislative Assembly. As well, based on a shorter period of coverage we could pursue offering some extended coverage to retired members over the age of 65, as the present plan offers no benefit to a member who retires over the age of 65.

MR. WICKMAN: Just a question, to begin with. I know it makes specific reference to the MLA health benefits plan. What about the other benefits in there, like life insurance? Isn't that automatically

continued as well at the present time?

MRS. SCARLETT: Before, health benefits covered under this program included Alberta health care, extended health, which is through Blue Cross presently, dental coverage, and life insurance.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah. With the life, does it only include the basic life or the optional life as well?

MRS. SCARLETT: The coverage that you would be allowed to select is based upon the coverage that you picked at the time you were a member.

MR. WICKMAN: I ask those questions in view of the age.

MR. SEVERTSON: To Cheryl, just a question for clarification. You said that we have 52 former members now and that it's going to go to 70 or 80. But in one year's time, roughly, if we go to an election in four years, those 52 will be struck off as far as cost-shared benefits because the five years will be up.

MRS. SCARLETT: Correct. What we have right now are 44 that are still on the cost-shared basis, and eight are on the EBO plus program, so they are paying the total cost and we're running their benefits through our program. Of those 44 that are a cost-shared situation, their benefits in terms of that five-year eligibility will run out June 15, 1998.

MR. SEVERTSON: So we just have a blip for a little while after, because we generally go for a four-year election, and then one year into the next term we lose a number. So when you mention 70 or 80, that's only roughly for one year, and then we'll actually drop on your projection from 44 down to about . So the cost would go down automatically after June of '98.

MRS. SCARLETT: There is normally an overlap of one or two years, depending on elections, where we are carrying two groups of retired members in terms of direct costs to the Leg. Assembly for the cost-shared arrangement. There are also heavy administrative costs in terms of staff time to maintain the benefit coverage for all of the people that are on the program. But yes . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jacques.

MR. JACQUES: Yeah, a couple of questions. I note that the EBO program was introduced in '88, which is eight years ago, and the EBO plus program was introduced in 1995, last year. Now we're suggesting that the program effectively be cut down from five to two years with regard to the EBO, as I understand it, and that the EBO plus program be discontinued entirely. I guess my question is: inasmuch as we dealt with the EBO plus program in 1995, a little over a year ago, why are we reversing direction at this time? Is this a cost-driven issue? In other words, what is the motivation behind the recommendations?

MRS. SCARLETT: Basically two points of information. Back in 1988 when the program was introduced, this program was consistent with a program that was being offered to the public sector, tied with an early retirement incentive program. So what was created for the MLAs was basically very much a copy of what was offered to public-sector employees at that time. Public-sector employees right now receive no kind of similar coverage when they retire, so in terms of how the program came to be, that's a little bit of history.

In terms of the information that's being presented right now, we're just going back and reviewing so that the committee is aware what programs are in place, what benefits we are choosing to offer, and allowing the committee to decide the direction they want the program to go.

MR. JACQUES: Well, I'm particularly interested in the EBO plus because it's only been in for a little over a year and the recommendation is that we discontinue it completely.

MRS. SCARLETT: The issue of creating something that allowed former members to stay on after the initial five years was brought forward as a result of interest from retired members to the committee back then. The committee decided that, yes, we were going to extend this. That's the history.

In terms of the alternatives that are presented, there are many in terms of if the committee decides that the EBO and EBO plus programs are something that should be reviewed or changed, we could change them in many different ways. We also are in a position to continue running the program as it is presently. There is a cost saving if we change the program.

MR. JACQUES: Can you provide just an estimate, a gut estimate if you like, in terms of the EBO plus program itself? Like, does that occupy one person full-time, one person half the time? What is the cost of the EBO plus, administratively?

MRS. SCARLETT: On my staff we have 3.6 people to do everything, so it's not a situation of where it takes one person full-time to do that. I could better give you examples in terms of: to run the EBO and the EBO plus programs involves keeping in touch with the members on a continuous basis, the updating of information, and as well, just as we do with current members, as there are changes to programs, contact with you. With the EBO plus, we have to make arrangements and monitor on a regular basis to make sure that we're collecting the moneys the members have to pay and submit directly to us to pay for the total cost of the program. If they have any questions, just as current members, about the coverage, if they need any help, for instance when they are out of the country, we are the prime contact for them.

Of the 3.6 people, it takes a portion of time that we could better allocate to serving the needs of the members, the current members, staff, and constituency. So it's paperwork within perspective, time-intensive in terms of what it takes to actually administer the program. No, it doesn't take .5 of a person to do it. We collectively work together on it. When the members phone, we respond to their needs, drop everything. The service we offer to members and former members is immediate. So it's those kinds of examples of impacts.

Does that address the concern?

MR. JACQUES: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Brassard.

MR. BRASSARD: Yes, Mr. Chairman. As you know, I'm about to retire in the next election, and as you also are aware, I'm 66 years of age. I'd like your interpretation as to whether I'm in conflict of interest on this issue or not.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, it sounds to the chair as if you and I might be in conflict of interest on the proposal to go for two years after retirement, because you wouldn't get anything after retirement under

the present system.

MR. BRASSARD: That's exactly right.

THE CHAIRMAN: But if it's changed to a few years after that, you would get two more years.

10:36

MR. BRASSARD: Yes. I just want to know if I'd be allowed to participate in the discussion of this or not. I'm at your disposal.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Bruseker, were you on the list?

MR. BRUSEKER: No, no. I was just harassing Mr. Brassard.

MR. BRASSARD: You never answered my question, Mr. Chairman.

MR. BRUSEKER: Now you know what we feel like in question period.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, I guess it depends on how you feel yourself.

MR. BRASSARD: I feel that this is already discriminatory anyway, because we have two members leaving. Myself, for instance: I will get no benefit from this program, and another member will get five years. I feel quite strongly about it, but I also don't want to say too much if indeed I'm in conflict. I'll await your decision.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we'll hear some comments from other members as we go along, and we can make that decision before the vote.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm going to move alternative 1. Speaking to alternative 1, there are a whole number of questions that always arise when it comes to benefits to MLAs, whether it be in the form of these types of benefits, whether it be in the form of the level of remuneration, whether MLAs be eligible for pensions, and so on and so forth. I've always maintained that in all these instances I'll continue to support the status quo until such time as somewhere along the line we have a process that uses an independent, outside body to review every aspect of direct benefits to the MLA. Until somebody on the outside can come forward and make recommendations to me based on all of these different avenues, I'll continue to support what's in place.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, I'm in a position of what I would call pending self-interest.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, the chair would like to interject at this time. Every single member of this committee is in potential conflict, so somebody has to make a decision here. Everybody is potentially in conflict; therefore, the chair feels that everybody has the right to participate in the discussion and do the best they can as they see the situation. Nobody will be in conflict of interest, because if they are prepared to do it that way, nobody would be able to make a decision at this table.

Mr. Van Binsbergen, please feel free to express your views as you see them.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was hoping you would say that.

Anyway, my question really is to Mrs. Scarlett. It seems to me



that considering the erosion, if I can call it that very carefully, of benefits for people past 65, maybe we have to look at this 65. Maybe we'll have to eliminate it and carry on with these benefits.

MRS. SCARLETT: The last statement in the recommendation, which talks about pursuing some extended coverage to the age of 65, is dependent upon a couple of factors, primarily whether the carriers that we have the insurance with will allow that. In the past that has not been the situation. The other thing that needs to be pursued is: if it were allowed, what kinds of premiums would there be and what would be the direct cost to the Leg. Assembly and to the former member, whether it would even be cost-effective?

MR. HENRY: I lean towards alternative 1. Simply one matter of principle that I would like to lay out: it would seem to me that if we were going to make changes, we should make changes for those who are going to leave the position of MLA, such as myself, rather than after the fact do it to members who have already retired. It seems to me that if we're going to do anything with those folks who already have retired on the basis of a certain package, it should be grandfathered in. But I lean towards option 1, which is to leave it at this point until a complete review.

I mean, this is tied in. Whenever you tinker with one part of remuneration, you get into another. It seems to me that you can't deal with one without the other. I think we have a general consensus, the MLAs that I've talked to certainly, on both sides of the House that there isn't a desire to alter salaries or institute pensions or anything of that sort. It seems to me that the time to deal with something like this would be in an entire package, if and when that time comes.

MR. BRASSARD: I'd like to speak to the motion given the generosity of your ability to allow me to speak. I would like to modify alternative 1 to include all members. As you know, many of the programs that we have had in place have been reduced significantly. I think it amounts to something in the amount of a 30 percent reduction in benefits that the MLAs have received. Someone the age of 65 has a great deal of difficulty replacing some of these benefits, life insurance being one of them, and the ability to carry on for five years even if it be in a modified form I think would be a distinct asset. As I say, because it's a discriminatory policy in that it allows one member to enjoy the benefit and not another, I would like to modify that to make sure that it includes all members.

MR. HENRY: I am just wondering, Mr. Brassard, if it would it be a friendly amendment to include a proviso: where the carriers are willing to carry insurance.

MR. BRASSARD: Yes. I would agree with that.

DR. McNEIL: I just think we have to be careful there, because there could be significant financial implications. Because of the increased costs for those over 65, the Assembly would have to bear half the cost of that initial premium. So there's that proviso.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jacques.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With all due respect to Mr. Brassard, I couldn't support the amendment, because I think we're dealing with an unknown. This is what Dr. McNeil was alluding to in terms of what carriers would do what and, secondly, what the implications would be in terms of cost. I suspect it would be very significant. So I would certainly support the main motion,

but I would have some difficulty at this time supporting an amendment to that motion on a broad inclusion basis, over 65, unless I knew what the implications were.

DR. McNEIL: What I might suggest is that you stick with the main motion and have another motion requesting the administration to pursue that option and come back to the committee with the alternatives in cost and so on. The committee could make a subsequent decision.

MR. BRASSARD: I would agree to that providing it wasn't too far in the distance, because time is moving on.

DR. McNEIL: I understand.

MR. HENRY: Those who replace us hopefully will make their decisions as well.

MR. BRUSEKER: You're feeling a little sensitive about this.

MR. BRASSARD: I'm a little sensitive, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion? All those in favour of the amendment proposed by Mr. Brassard? Those opposed? The amendment fails.

All those in favour of the motion, please indicate. Those opposed? Carried.

MR. BRASSARD: Then, Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I'd like to make a further motion

that the administration bring back a projected cost of such consideration and that it be put back on the agenda at the first opportunity.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is there agreement with that motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Item 4(f) is entitled Reward Program for LAO Employees. I guess before calling on Dr. McNeil, the chair would like to say that it feels that Legislative Assembly Office budgets over the last three years have been substantially reduced, that there has been in the chair's opinion an increase in service, and that members have been very well served by the staff, and hopes that members of the committee can agree with its observations. The chair feels that we have a very willing and productive staff that I think tend to be taken for granted at times because we are so well looked after.

So with that little observation, Dr. McNeil.

10:46

DR. McNEIL: I'll just preface with a few introductory remarks and then turn it over to Cheryl. The LAO has tried to assess if anything could be done to recognize the contribution that the staff have made. And I have to emphasize that over the past few years we've approached productivity improvements and budget reductions on a team concept basis. That's an essential point.

We looked at the productivity plus program that the government has implemented and came to the conclusion in terms of our environment and the kinds of things we've done and the way we've done them in this downsizing environment where everybody has absorbed a 5 percent decrease and we've removed about a million dollars from the budget we control, the Legislative Assembly Office

proper budget, that to differentially reward people at this time would be counterproductive in terms of morale. I think the productivity plus program, on the other hand, is a very good program, but I think the equity issue has to be addressed in terms of the reductions that everybody has absorbed before that program can be motivational.

What we did was create a subcommittee of managers to look at this issue. That subcommittee went back to sort of the academic research, if you will, to gather a lot of information before this recommendation was made. On that basis, I'll turn it over to Cheryl. Cheryl, you can elaborate from there.

MRS. SCARLETT: Basically, the issues that Dr. McNeil has talked to are covered on page 1. We're looking at how we can recognize LAO contributions. And truly we are talking about team contributions. That is the mode in which we operate.

We're talking about approximately 50 permanent employees and our sessional staff.

MR. HENRY: If I could interrupt; I'm sorry. Some of the members don't have in their binders a handout.

MRS. DACYSHYN: I have extra ones.

MRS. SCARLETT: Okay. So how can the Legislative Assembly look at recognizing and rewarding contributions of staff both in a medium-term situation and a short-term situation? Basically, in looking at the whole issue of pay tools and rewards within Leg. Assembly, we took a look at the kinds of cost savings and efficiencies we can demonstrate over the last year or so. What I'd like to do is hand out some material that speaks to that, give some specific examples, and then continue on with the proposal.

In terms of some examples for you when we're talking about rewarding our team and looking at our cost savings and efficiencies, the number 1 example, financial management and administrative services, information systems, and human resources collectively, the whole staff of us, planned, designed, and successfully implemented our integrated in-house payroll and total financial management information system, which we call LAMIS. We did that in very short time frames and are very proud of it. As well, the public information branch joined in this effort and implemented a point of sales system.

Through LAMIS we've already demonstrated some of its benefits in budget savings. In '94-95, \$85,000 were first budgeted. This year \$30,000 are budgeted. In addition, this system allows the flexibility now for us to enter into new technology and pursue electronic commerce. As well, the system has addressed concerns related to the Leg. Assembly's unique reporting and pay and benefit needs. LAMIS already is showing other benefits by its ability to track and process expenditures in multiple Legislatures, and this is going to be an issue in the next election.

The technology that we've used to implement LAMIS is similar to that being undertaken by the government right now in their review. Initial comparisons between our new system and the government system they're going to indicate that the Leg. Assembly's costs will continue to be lower with LAMIS than they would have been with other options. So in this respect we're two years ahead of the game, and we have a system that truly meets our needs.

Example 2 talks about the introduction and implementation of access to the Internet. One of the prime benefits there to us all but particularly to the caucuses and members is research capabilities using the Internet. Users on the system are able to access worldwide resources and as well can do other things like access news

broadcasts at any time. Expanded by that, the Legislative Assembly information system is another example of enhanced services that assist members and staff in their search for information. By that we're referring to Speakers' rulings, precedents, Alberta statutes, House records.

The public information branch, example 3, has done many creative things in terms of looking to how we can better meet the needs of members. One example is related to the MLA gifts that are purchased through the gift shop. The volume and the variety have risen. As well, the volume of retail sales through the gift shop has increased from \$25,000 to \$60,000. We feel that this is in large part due to the increased visibility, the promotion of the site, and as well the greater variety and quality of the products. In order to make that happen, the true team of the public information branch had to band together. As well, they're now able to co-ordinate numerous special events out of the site, and that brings more public attention to the Legislature and allows us to provide information through them.

Example 4 speaks to the innovation in the library where they have implemented their dial-in service, which again has showed cost savings and allowed staff to be freed up to address the needs of the members and the staff.

I'll let you read on, but those are examples where we feel very strongly that the Leg. Assembly as a team has demonstrated that we have made significant creative efficiencies and improvements and have shown productivity over the last year in terms of the work that we've done.

In terms of alternatives, going back to the whole issue of pay strategies, alternative 1 talks about a medium- and short-term recognition program. In the medium term the Leg. Assembly would like the involvement of our management team and team of staff. We would work together to analyze and develop recommendations for an appropriate pay strategy that would be designed to motivate employees, reward achievement, results, creativity, and efficiency. In the short term in order to recognize and reward our staff's achievements, some examples of which we just gave, yet avoid potential negative consequences of providing lump sum payments to selected individuals, we would propose through this alternative that we implement onetime lump sum reward schemes. The lump sums would be smaller lump sums awarded to each team member and truly would be presented as a reward for the achievement of the team.

In that respect we're requesting an amount of \$80,000 in this year's budget, and that represents approximately 3 percent of the base salaries. These would be provided to each staff person in the form of a small lump sum payment. Average lump sums would be somewhere between \$600 to \$1,100. These lumps that we're proposing will not adjust the employee's base salary but rather are, as I mentioned, a onetime payment in recognition of and reward for the organizational contributions and our staff's continued initiative and creativity.

#### 10:56

A second alternative would be consistent with the government: to look at productivity plus. But, as stated, given some of the experiences and feedback on the program, we believe that to do so in the LAO would be counterproductive and create more morale problems.

A third alternative would be to maintain the status quo. Our recommendation? We're very proud of our staff and their achievements. Thus we are recommending alternative 1, which requests the expenditure of \$80,000 for the implementation of both a short- and medium-term approach to compensation for performance in the Leg. Assembly Office.

MR. HENRY: I, too, echo the comments about the creative work the staff has done the last three years. I just have a couple of questions. I am aware that some other publicly funded institutions have adopted a similar strategy for the current or upcoming budget year with regard to lump sum employee payments for their employees. I have two questions. I know of one that gave the employees the option of taking the lump sum or having that lump sum held in a professional development account for use by the employee, which of course has tax implications and allows the employee more access to the dollars.

The second question. I recall when we went on the deficit reduction path about three years ago that the percent figure we targeted and the 5 percent figure for salaries were based on guidelines by Treasury at that time. I'm wondering, then, if Treasury has issued any sorts of guidelines or if any information has come from Treasury. Given that we started on this path with Treasury guidelines, is this the kind of thing Treasury is recommending for publicly funded institutions? So that's two sets of questions.

DR. McNEIL: In terms of the first question, that would always be an option, but that's not something we'd explore.

In terms of the second, I don't believe that Treasury has issued guidelines. As I mentioned, there is a productivity plus program in the government that has been implemented and a number of departments have utilized it. I think Ms Haley can provide more information, because I believe she's on that committee.

MS HALEY: On which committee?

DR. McNEIL: The productivity plus assessment committee.

MS HALEY: I'm not.

DR. McNEIL: Fundamentally what we're saying here is that we believe we need to recognize people's contributions, and at this point in time I don't see this program, where everybody gets the same lump sum adjustment every year, as being appropriate. I think you have to differentially recognize people in the long run. In the present circumstances I think doing that would be counterproductive. You have to recognize the fact that everybody has contributed to the reduction of about a million dollars in our budget, and I think our productivity improvements are even more significant.

One example that wasn't mentioned is the fact that our cost to provide information system services has moved from over \$3,000 per workstation down to \$1,900 in the past three years. Given the additional services that have been provided, dollarwise that's about a 36 percent reduction, but in terms of the real productivity improvement, given all the additional services that are provided, that's highly significant.

That probably was a bit more than needed in response to your questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Did Mrs. Scarlett wish to supplement before we recognize Mr. Wickman? Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, some time ago in the paper I was reading where there may have been a similar program offered to some of the unionized staff, and in turn a decision made by the union essentially rejected an incentive or reward type program. Am I correct? Is this similar to that concept?

DR. McNEIL: Mr. Chairman, my understanding is that AUPE decided they did not want to participate in productivity plus, so that

program has not been applied to unionized employees in the Alberta public service. It has been applied to some management employees in the Alberta public service.

MR. WICKMAN: And this program would be very similar to what was offered to AUPE?

DR. McNEIL: No. Productivity plus was offered to AUPE.

MR. WICKMAN: This is strictly a reward type incentive.

Mr. Chairman, I agree with the earlier comments you made. During the last few years in many, many sectors people have been asked to give, give, give. They've been squeezed and squeezed and squeezed, and they've responded. Now we talk more and more in terms of reinvesting, paying back these efforts and such, filling in the cracks, whatever. This is one area where, yeah, our employees have come to our aid. They've been there when we required them, and they don't have that same protection the unionized employees do. It's upon us to make those types of decisions. Some people may not view it as being a popular decision; nevertheless, I think it has to be made.

MR. SEVERTSON: Well, I have to agree with the reference to the staff and the excellent service they've given and saved us a lot of money, but where I'm concerned is to vary from the departments, other forms of government where they went to the productivity plus program. I know that even in some departments they're reluctant to go that way for the same reasons that have been explained here, for everybody to share, but they were excluded from that choice. They had to go to productivity plus to get any incentive. So that's why I'm a little hesitant to go to alternative 1, because of the variance from what the rest of the departments of government have done.

DR. McNEIL: I guess I have to emphasize that the Legislative Assembly Office is not a department of government. It's a separate legal entity. The Speaker may want to add to this.

THE CHAIRMAN: We wouldn't be considering our budgets if we were . . .

MR. SEVERTSON: I realize it's different, but it does have an effect overall on the running of government. Whether it's run by the minister or by Leg. Offices, it still has an effect on employees across the board.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, I have a question here. The \$80,000 that you would like to allot as sort of a lump sum payment: this has come out of a surplus that you have generated over the past year?

MRS. SCARLETT: What we're asking for is an additional \$80,000. We do not have that \$80,000 in any surplus. Any of the efficiencies and cost savings that were shown through the examples, we've taken and reinvested in being able to deliver additional services. Through those efficiencies now we're providing other services.

DR. McNEIL: Plus, as I mentioned earlier, we've reduced our budget by a million dollars, the bottom line, over the past few years in those elements that we have some control over.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, I'm having some difficulty with this, and I hate saying that because all the comments about the staff are absolutely and utterly and perfectly true. You

know, there were so many people who lost their 5 percent, and I know of many teachers, many nurses who are in no position of getting a lump sum or anything. I have to think about this. I'd like to hear some more about this. I just want to share my misgivings at this particular moment.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, it is a budgetary item of \$80,000, and I would just as soon we get a good handle on what is in this thick binder of estimates, because we have another issue coming forward that's also going to have a significant financial impact on the bottom line.

Maybe if we go through it all, you know, put our heads around what the actual costs are, the total bottom-line increase, and then take it from there. Now, how you would manage that, Mr. Chairman, is up to you, where you would reintroduce it in the agenda later.

11:06

THE CHAIRMAN: We can defer a decision on this at this time.

DR. McNEIL: I was going to say that it does come back in specific terms in the human resource services budget. So when you want to consider it, you may want to consider that budget, you know, near the end of the process rather than where it is in the binder, but I think we'll cover it.

MR. STELMACH: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: If there are no further comments, at this time the chair will defer further discussion and decision on this matter until the appropriate time in the development of the budget. Thank you.  
Item 4(g), Ergonomic Furniture Needs.

DR. McNEIL: This is an item that I'll have the director of human resources, who is responsible for occupational health and safety in the Legislative Assembly, present to the committee.

MRS. SCARLETT: The issue here, then, is workplace furniture. Human resources, as Dr. McNeil referenced, is responsible for occupational health and safety and workers' compensation issues, and one of our mandates is to ensure that members' and employees' health and safety are maintained. As a result, the LAO requires support for implementing and maintaining a formal ergonomics program. One of the key concerns within that program is the equipment and furniture in our workplace.

Some of the actions taken to date: we have been conducting work site assessments and monitoring high-risk stations and trying to resolve problems as they are reported. We've done some work site alterations, we've done some replacement of furniture, and we've been involved in promoting ergonomic awareness through discussions and distribution of information sheets.

A limitation that we're running into to date is that although the quick-fix furniture replacement approach sometimes provides an improvement, it does not properly address the situations that are being identified. As well, existing furniture that we have access to right now has been through PWSS's surplus, and the appropriate furniture is just not there anymore. So we have very limited ability to acquire the kind of furniture required to deal with the high-risk situations that have been presented.

Alternatives to this problem then. To do nothing at this point is not an option anymore. The appropriate health and safety of our employees is an obligation outlined under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. We could look at hiring an independent ergonomist,

a person to look at the ergonomic needs, to assess and then help in setting up workstations. Advantages there are that it would be quick; it's expert advice. The disadvantage is that that option tends to be very expensive.

A third option would be internally: establish an in-house LAO team to develop approaches, make recommendations, educate themselves, and go out and assist staff and educate staff on work site setup, furniture requirements, and working smart in the work environment.

In both cases, in terms of looking at addressing the furniture needs, we are gauging workstation equipment and furniture at approximately \$3,000 per workstation. These days, modular and system furniture is on the market for approximately \$2,500 to \$4,000 per station. What we're looking at is not an approach where we're totally modular: everything fits together, completely scrap what we've got and go with brand-new for everyone. Instead, we would be looking at lowest cost alternatives, but they have to be pieces that meet the needs identified.

Recommendations, then, based on an implementation plan that has been attached. Over a three-year period we would like to develop an organizationwide approach to assessing all the workstations, to educating and coaching staff, and to providing adequate workstations to staff. In terms of our proposal, it's two-pronged. With respect to the LAO, in terms of the first year we would be looking at trying to address workstations. Thus the cost would be approximately \$60,000.

In addition, the concerns expressed are of equal importance in both caucus and constituency, and those need to be addressed as well. So the second part of the cost: we'd propose taking a look at stations within those offices for another \$60,000.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any questions, comments, or discussion?  
Mr. Brassard.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As you are aware, I'm also a member of the Legislative Offices Committee, and we just went through a request and actually granted permission to our Auditor General to purchase a bunch of equipment. The discomfort I had at that time with that proposal was that I really didn't know what condition the furniture was in and what was required and so on and so forth. I don't doubt for a minute that we need to upgrade equipment in certain areas. I can only assume that the workstations in the LAO need that kind of attention.

I look at my own constituency office. That workstation is just as valid and hasn't changed for the last 10 or 11 years, and that needs upgrading. I think that what is really required here is an overall evaluation or assessment of the equipment. I'd like to see an evaluation of what equipment we have, what equipment is needed, how we're going to dispose of some of this other stuff, and bring a package forward that we can lay on this whole Assembly as opposed to one individual department, such as we went through with the Auditor General's office and now with this issue.

I would further recommend that we have on that committee a member from Leg. Offices and a member from Members' Services, and so on and do an evaluation right across the board and come back to this committee and let us know what condition our equipment is in throughout the system so that we know where we're going with this thing and we're not dealing with it on a demand, piecemeal kind of basis.

That's my recommendation. Unfortunately, it doesn't fit into any of these alternatives, but I'd like to make that recommendation.

MR. HENRY: Just a question for Mrs. Scarlett. This makes as much sense as I think anything we've ever seen. We have to do

something, and God knows the furniture that staff is using will cause and is causing problems. The question then: when you talk about this proposal with LAO staff, does that include caucus offices and constituency offices?

MRS. SCARLETT: No. LAO in our recommendation refers to the Leg. Assembly Office, so that's the support staff under the Clerk's operation. That's why it's presented in two parts. Within the LAO we have 50 to 60 full-time employees. We're looking at addressing a third of those and targeting the high-risk areas immediately. That's where we come up with stations for the LAO and another to be allocated to identified high risk at caucus and constituency offices as a start.

MR. HENRY: So to make sure I understand: your proposal essentially does include provision for those areas that need them the most based on the constituency offices and the caucus offices.

MRS. SCARLETT: Yes.

MR. HENRY: Right. Okay.

DR. McNEIL: This proposal is comprehensive in that it's designed to address the needs across the Legislative Assembly in terms of the responsibilities for which this committee has budget responsibilities – the LAO, the caucuses, and the constituencies – on a priority basis. The information that Cheryl didn't mention but that is in the background is that we've had a significant number of incidents, if you will, or lost-time injuries specifically related to the equipment that we do have. It needs to be addressed.

11:16

MR. HENRY: I just wanted to make it really clear that any support that I would provide for this is not a desire to get people new furniture. We do have a health problem. We would address a problem with the ventilation or other health concerns of employees in the same way. So I think this is on the right track.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just a question so that I understand. In alternative 3 you're talking about a draft three-year plan at the start. Are you proposing stations in this first year for a total of \$60,000 and then \$60,000 in each of the next two years additionally, so a total of \$180,000 for the LAO staff and another \$180,000 for constituency and caucus offices?

MRS. SCARLETT: For the first year we're proposing \$60,000 for LAO plus \$60,000 to start to address caucus and constituencies, so the proposal for the first year is \$1,000. In terms of addressing LAO needs in our three-year plan, we're looking at 60 workstations. So, yes, \$60,000, \$60,000, and \$60,000 over three years.

In terms of the caucus and constituency needs, we see that as greater in terms of the total number of workstations that we would be talking about and have only looked at trying to address stations in the first year, have not set any expectations for budget implications and how much or how many workstations for caucus and constituency in year two or year three.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you. I just wanted clarification.

THE CHAIRMAN: Further discussion?

MR. JACQUES: I just need clarification, Mr. Chairman. Is there a motion on the floor?

THE CHAIRMAN: No.

MR. JACQUES: Well, then I would like to make a motion.

MR. BRASSARD: We had a suggestion.

MR. JACQUES: Well, that's why I needed clarification.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to move alternative 3. I think in terms of the issue of the background that has been provided, particularly with regard to the assessment that has been done by OH and S, there's obviously a risk factor that has been identified.

I know that this can sometimes be a squiggly item in the sense that we're in these cost-restraint programs, and people think of office furniture as office furniture, period. What we're dealing with here is the equipment, if you like, and how that person operates that, et cetera, in a way that is not detrimental to their health or minimizes that risk factor. I think that if we're talking \$3,000 per workstation and we're talking probably a useful life of at least 10 years or somewhere in that category, we're talking \$300 a year. I think that in terms of looking at it from that point of view, I would fully support it. We're not talking about scratched furniture or old furniture. What we're talking about here is equipment that people utilize, sit on, et cetera, that affords them the best – and let's face it – efficiency. We gain from this, as well, but at the same time the bottom line is that it goes a long way in terms of protecting that individual in terms of possible risk.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Jacques.

MR. SEVERTSON: Mr. Chairman, just for information, is *Hansard* part of the LAO?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. SEVERTSON: Okay. They've had a plan in. Who's done their plan over the years? Internally or externally?

THE CHAIRMAN: Dr. Garrison?

DR. GARRISON: Excuse me; I didn't hear the question.

MR. SEVERTSON: Who's done the plan for *Hansard*? They said in the background that they've maintained a plan for adequate workstations.

MRS. SCARLETT: I can address that. The *Hansard* people that we're referring to there would be the sessional people that are coming in to work as transcribers and produce the *Hansard* while the House is in session.

Going back many years, Dr. Garrison identified that they were definitely a high-risk target group in terms of the kind of work that they're producing, that the work sites, when he had an opportunity to first establish them, needed to meet the needs. In terms of making sure that they have proper set up for their computers, the right kinds of chairs, those things were addressed many years ago. The result that we're seeing is that the incidences of accidents and injuries that are coming forth are not in that area.

So that's one small area that responded. They were the first high-risk group just because of the kind of work that they're doing, where they're entering eight hours a day. It's an intensive kind of work, and it's with a keyboard. Since that time the rest of the Leg. Assembly Office, in this age of technology with computers, have all

acquired computers. Just how we do business using the technology has changed significantly, yet our workplace setups have not adjusted with that. So we're in situations where how we do business and how we sit ourselves and how we move ourselves around in our workplace are causing injury.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion on the motion?

MR. STELMACH: Just a question, Mr. Chairman. Would you be able to give us an idea of what some of the injuries are, you know, some of the problems that people suffer from?

MRS. SCARLETT: Typical examples that we have seen several times now in our organization are related to injuries of the wrist area called carpal tunnel syndrome, repetitive stress-type injuries as well as back-related injuries, just how you position yourself when you're sitting at your terminal. If your shoulders are too high, if they're too low, if your wrists are cranked: all those kinds of things don't show up immediately, but after a year or two years of doing those, then the injuries start to come in terms of those long-term, slow-developing types of injuries. So those are typical examples.

MR. STELMACH: Good. Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for the question on the motion proposed by Mr. Jacques? All those in favour, please indicate. Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

Item 4(h), Outplacement Services to Members/Employees.

DR. McNEIL: This item, as an overview, is designed to address some of the concerns that we've seen in the past that both members and staff experience subsequent to a general election when members either choose to retire or, in other cases, where they didn't make that choice but the electorate made that choice that they retire and staff were impacted by the election and had difficulties dealing with that outcome. So what we're proposing here is an approach to assist those members and staff by facilitating that transition, if you will, out of the Legislative Assembly.

I'll ask Cheryl to elaborate.

MRS. SCARLETT: Okay. The human resource – and that's the people – turnover as a result of an election, as we all know, can be significant and normally represents very stressful, unplanned departures from the Leg. Assembly. In this case, both members and employees are affected, and we wish to pursue options available for providing support and assistance to our members and staff when dealing with the career changes that follow an election.

With respect to members, whether they choose to run for re-election or are defeated, most may still desire to pursue other careers full-time or otherwise when ceasing to be a member.

With respect to employees, all of our employees working in the caucus and constituency offices are hired on the premise that their employment automatically terminates following the polling day of the election. An employee's continued employment is directly tied to election results. Caucus employees also are affected by the total number of elected members. Our experience indicates that most employees are relatively unprepared when they become unemployed, even though they know that their employment is directly tied to election results.

Looking at alternatives to assist members and staff, in addition to trying to meet individuals' needs related to career planning and re-employment, other support may be required in the areas of stress management, counseling, change management, financial counseling,

or retirement planning. Human resource services offers basic career guidance and direction to employees in-house. During the election period the employees will be provided with packages of written materials, lists of outplacement resources that they could pursue. As well, we may offer the use of in-house LAO computer capabilities to allow employees to update resumes.

11:26

Also, in anticipation of member and staff needs, we're pursuing the feasibility of providing career planning and job search information on-line using the current technology, and we may be able to assist in providing resources to help staff prepare and plan for potential situations.

Another alternative that can be pursued would be to co-ordinate group information workshops for members and staff after the election which would be designed to address the individual needs of members and employees when making career choices. Although it would be co-ordinated through human resources, the actual delivery of those group sessions would be done by an outside professional.

Option 3. In addition to offering group sessions after the election, we would look at providing general information and planning workshops for interested members and employees prior to the election. This session would assist participants to assess their individual needs and help prepare members and employees to make career choices. At that point nobody knows what their destiny is going to be, but it is something that perhaps all would be interested in in anticipation of the what-ifs.

A fourth option would be to look at offering each employee and member that's no longer employed as a result of the election a standard package with a recognized outplacement organization. Those typically include a combination of group workshops and individualized supports. The costs for two different examples of programs are listed there. Administrative programs typically range between \$1,500 to \$2,000 per person. Professional management-type programs are \$2,500 to \$3,000 per person.

In terms of our recommendation, we feel that being able to offer something to members and staff is very important, and although alternative 1, the in-house human resource support, represents the lowest cost alternative, it doesn't address the real needs of members and employees. It's recommended, then, that in addition to support provided in-house, Members' Services provide direction to pursue a reasonable outplacement package similar to alternative 3, which would be a combination of a pre-election planning seminar or session with follow-up sessions after the election to specifically targeted groups.

MR. BRASSARD: First a question and then a comment. Do I understand that option 3 that's being recommended would be at a cost of \$15,000 per individual? So each individual taking that post...

MRS. SCARLETT: The \$15,000 that's represented there represents the cost of \$8,500 in option 2 plus \$6,500 to do just option 3. The group sessions are costed normally on a daily rate per session. So it's not per person. The total cost would be \$15,000...

MR. BRASSARD: The total cost of the program.

MRS. SCARLETT: Of the program. ... to offer pre and post group sessions.

MR. BRASSARD: I see. I guess, then, moving from there to my comment. I have the greatest sympathy and empathy for the employees that serve us so well while we're here, but each one of us

as a member comes into this business knowing that we may or may not be here following an election, and we take that job on that basis. We do have a severance that allows us a certain adjustment period and support, and while I like alternative 3, I do have difficulty having it pertain to members who go into this knowing full well the vagaries of our job. The employees basically are the ones most at risk. I support this program being offered to our employees, but I'm not sure that I'm comfortable with it being supplied to members. That's my comment.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any further comments?

MR. SEVERTSON: Just following up on Mr. Brassard's question, would there be any more cost for a group session if it was with the members, or is the cost fixed no matter how many are involved?

MRS. SCARLETT: In terms of the cost relative to the group sessions, sessions typically on average cost about a thousand dollars a day. Those sessions can be designed to address the generic concerns of employees. We would be looking at making those available as best we can throughout the province in the main centres so that staff had access to those. Thus the cost to deliver only to employees would not be significantly reduced. The sessions could be designed so that they are generic, and whether it's a member or a staff person, the issues that are being addressed may be the same. If we offer a session and we only have 10 staff people attending – normally those group sessions can be delivered to up to people, so there may be room for others to attend.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask Mrs. Scarlett for an explanation of number 3, particularly. I don't quite understand. It seems to me that people who intend to retire as MLAs have a pretty good idea of what they're going to do. I think the rest of us who are running again – I'm not so sure that I would be interested in attending anything, because I bloody well hope to win. So I don't think my mind is focused on it, nor is that of my personnel. I don't quite understand the importance or the use of number 3.

MRS. SCARLETT: Number 3 is combining number 2 plus an additional.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Okay. The pre part.

MRS. SCARLETT: The intent of the pre-election general information and planning workshop is to try and encourage particularly staff to attend, even though they fully hope that they're going to have continued employment. What we find is that after we get through the election, there always are examples where a staff person was hoping that they would have continued employment, but that is not the case, and all of a sudden now, effective election day, they know that two weeks down the line they will have no job, no pay, and are completely unprepared. So if a person attends it and gets some general information that assists them five years down the line because after the election they continue to be employed by the member, that's a bonus. But I am concerned. What we end up dealing with are the staff people who are unprepared.

To me, that is the point: how can we help these people? We employ them on contract. They have no control over whether they have continued employment or not, and they're choosing to work for us under those conditions. What kind of assistance can we provide to them on a reasonable basis that's not too expensive, that assists them in the what-next, if that's the case?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Any idea whether they would come out? Have you done any asking? Have you found out?

MRS. SCARLETT: No, I have not asked. My personal best guess is that there would be lots of people that are interested.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just following up on Mr. Van Binsbergen's comment, the issue of doing it prior to the election it seems to me would be very difficult logistically to co-ordinate because you don't know when the election is going to be held. It seems difficult to really plan that. That was a comment I wanted to add.

I guess one of the issues that I would wonder about is that this is designed – I take it that when you say employees, this also addresses constituency office folks.

MRS. SCARLETT: Yes.

MR. BRUSEKER: But in your \$15,000 cost have you factored in the cost of travel? Some of the constituency offices are a significant distance from the Legislature. To be offered to come to the Legislature to take a workshop that may or may not be of assistance at the expense of a day's travel – I'm not sure that you're going to get necessarily a lot of people who might come from Peace River or from, you know, down in the south country, Fort Macleod country or even Calgary that want to take an entire day, six or seven or eight hours' just for the travel part and maybe an overnight cost. I'm thinking that this may be something that really doesn't fully address all of the employees that we have in all of our offices across the province. So I think it could be a potential problem as well.

11:36

MRS. SCARLETT: The intent in looking at the cost was on the assumption that sessions would be held not just in Edmonton but in major centres so that they were spread out to address constituencies in the north, in Edmonton, in Calgary, potentially Red Deer, and southern Alberta as best as was reasonable.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay.  
Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anything further?

MR. HENRY: I very much appreciate and support the intent of what's being tried here, but I have just a couple of similar questions to what have already been raised. I'm trying to think back to the last two elections when I kind of hung around this building. I daresay that in terms of any sort of pre-election planning or whatever prior to the last election most employees and members of the Official Opposition didn't expect that they would be unemployed. I don't want to say it's a crapshoot, but it is a bit of an unknown. Certainly those who are running for election all hope that they get elected, et cetera, et cetera. So I wonder about the "pre."

The other is: I recall after the '89 election. I'm particularly thinking of opposition, where I believe that there were two members who were defeated, and again in '93 there were significant numbers. I remember running into them at various other places in the community, and there was really no desire to come to the Legislature. It was kind of, you know, you lose your seat and quite frankly you don't want to come back immediately.

So while I appreciate the intent and I think it's worth while doing something, especially for employees but I also think for the younger members who aren't sort of retiring, if I can say it that way, I would lean more towards an individualized package and, even if we had to

reduce the cost or keep within the same cost, allow employees perhaps a little bit of money that would be paid to an outside career counseling firm of that nature. There are lots of packages available out there for group sessions and career planning and whatnot, and that way if the employee wanted to access those, they could use those dollars for that purpose. I'm a bit leery, although I appreciate the intent. I think you're on the right track.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Brassard.

MR. BRASSARD: Yes. I would like to move adoption of alternative 2 but excluding members.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any discussion on Mr. Brassard's motion?

MS HALEY: If we have 83 constituency offices scattered throughout the province and offices inside the Legislative Assembly as well, we're now talking about a whole lot of people who could be impacted one way or the other in an election. I don't think the \$8,500 is even close to being realistic. I'm just very uncomfortable going down a path when we don't know what the real costs or ramifications are or just who we would have to exclude in order to live with an \$8,500 budget on this. I just don't think we know enough to make this type of decision.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anything further?

DR. McNEIL: Partly, I think these numbers are based on the assumption of a cost of a thousand dollars a day.

MS HALEY: But you have no travel costs in here, David.

DR. McNEIL: I realize that, but in terms of sessions that implies sort of eight sessions around the province.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, there's some reference made to travel costs. If after the election the individual, the employee is unemployed, then they would travel to wherever these workshops are held in the major centres at their own cost if they wished to receive the information and help in seeking employment. Our contract ceases at the election, so we have no obligation to pay any travel costs.

MS HALEY: We don't have any obligation to do this either.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for decision time in this matter?

MR. WICKMAN: Question.

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the motion proposed by Mr. Brassard, please signify. Five. Opposed?

MR. WICKMAN: Did we get a tie?

MS HALEY: It's a tie.

THE CHAIRMAN: What an invidious position.

MR. BRASSARD: Just for clarification, Mr. Chairman, that does exclude members. That was my motion.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair will vote in favour.

Item 4(i), Resources Available to MLAs. This is sponsored by the opposition caucus.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Being the acknowledged expert on computer-related matters – actually, I know very little about it, but I think the item speaks for itself here. Rather than leading you through it, I'll let you read it yourself and move to recommendation.

MR. JACQUES: I just need clarification. I don't have sections 22 and 23 in front of me, but are those the sections that deal with the basic equipment that is provided to a constituency office by LAO, or is this defining the type of equipment that is not provided by LAO but which you can purchase out of your constituency allowance? I need some clarification here, please.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: I sense LAO provides it, but I'm sure that David would know.

MR. WICKMAN: I have a couple of questions too, Mr. Chairman. First of all to the Clerk: in the existing policy with computers – and I assume it would apply to laptop and desktop models both – MLAs can request through surplus a computer; can they not?

DR. McNEIL: Well, in terms of desktop computers there's a caucus allocation: a certain number of computers, printers, and so on per caucus based on the number of members. With respect to laptop computers members have the option of purchasing a laptop computer out of their constituency office allowance. Bill, you can add to that. I believe some caucuses have purchased laptop computers either for specific individuals or as loaners to use within the caucus. As well, we have a number of loaners, if you will, in the LAO that have been provided to members. The trend appears to be for members to purchase a laptop computer out of their constituency office allowance. That's the major source of members' laptop computers.

MR. WICKMAN: There's no question that we're into the age of computerization. I imagine a lot of us have our own computers at home, laptops or whatever. I see now, even within our offices, a number of the MLAs will have desktop computers in their caucus office; others won't. I think that allowing those is one area that should be tackled as a priority basis. Whether it be desktop or laptop really wouldn't bother me. Access to a computer would be very, very handy.

My second question. I'm sorry I didn't have a chance to discuss this with the Member for West Yellowhead prior to the meeting. There is reference made to the communication taking place via the Internet, which leads me to a question on Internet. Is Internet available to MLAs through the constituency office or whatever?

11:46

DR. McNEIL: Sure.

MR. WICKMAN: What upgrades have to take place?

MR. GANO: I can address that. Internet is available to constituency offices if they subscribe to a service themselves right now. The Legislative Assembly Office is in the process of setting up the ability for constituency offices to use the Legislative Assembly as an Internet provider, which would allow them then to cut down on those costs. Certainly some of the hardware in the constituency offices is still not to the level that would provide them that capability. However, we're at about 75 percent now, and I expect that next year we'll be at the point where all constituency offices will have the



appropriate hardware to access the Internet.

MR. WICKMAN: I see that as a priority as well: you know, address the shortcomings in the existing system before we expand. I've been told upon any inquiries my constituency office has made that the computer equipment we have there is just not adaptable for Internet.

MR. GANO: I would suggest that you might want to have that person give information systems a call. I'm trying to recollect what is in your particular office. I can't right now, but if it's a 486 machine, it can access Internet and might just require some software that you don't have yet.

MR. WICKMAN: For any member who doesn't have Internet, it's a whole new world out there. That could be a priority for the benefit of a constituency office. The information that can be obtained through the Internet is incredible in terms of allowing staff to do research, resolve problems, and so on and so forth.

THE CHAIRMAN: Ms Haley.

MS HALEY: Thank you. It comes back again to individual members' decisions on what they want to do. When I had a summer student two years ago, I needed for him to be able to do some work on the computer. We didn't have enough computer access between my office here and my office in Airdrie. We made a decision after looking at our budget that we needed to get a laptop. We worked with Mr. Gano, and that's exactly what we did. It was our decision, and it came out of our budget. I believe that's the way it has to stay.

We've got a responsibility in Leg. Assembly to upgrade, and Mr. Gano has assured us that that is taking place. It's not a very big step from there to the Internet, but I don't believe the laptop has anything to do with the Internet. That's a personal decision. If you want to have a laptop computer for your office, then you make the decision, and it comes out of your budget. This year I'm just spending it on widgets; I'm not buying any equipment. So those are decisions that every MLA should make.

DR. McNEIL: In terms of the recommendation, the budget requirements to follow through on this recommendation would be approximately \$250,000 in terms of the equipment required, the purchase of 83 laptops at \$3,000 apiece. So that's the bottom line in terms of the cost of going that way.

MS HALEY: Well, you'd have to get a new one every year because it's constantly changing.

MR. JACQUES: It certainly would be helpful if you could clarify sections 22 and 23. I recall, for example – and correct me – the provisions for the constituency offices provided by LAO do not even include a fax machine. As I recall, a fax machine had to be purchased out of the constituency allowance. Let's get back to some basic fundamentals. It would seem to me that if we're going to talk about basic equipment in today's world, I would suggest that a fax machine is pretty basic in terms of an office. Let's address fundamentals before we get to the issue of laptop computers. I would appreciate clarification on that, please.

DR. McNEIL: Section 23 really relates to the *Members' Guide* and what is described in the *Members' Guide* on pages 22 and 23.

Each Member is provided with a standard constituency office equipment package consisting of:  
1 IBM AT compatible microcomputer with a colour monitor, a laser printer, operating system software . . .

1 answering machine  
1 photocopier . . .  
1 electronic typewriter  
1 hand-held dictaphone  
1 transcriber

1 sign approximately 10 inches by 18 inches.

So a fax machine is not on there. This committee addressed that issue a number of years ago, and the decision was made at that time not to include a fax in this standard equipment.

MR. JACQUES: I couldn't believe, Mr. Chairman, in 1993, after the election, that that wasn't included. As we are going into a new election, we are going to be having, obviously, new members dealing with offices. Maybe it's another item for the agenda, but it would seem to me, in terms of LA services of equipping an office, that certainly a fax is a basic piece of equipment, and we should be addressing that at some point.

MR. HENRY: Percy tried that, but you guys defeated it.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, just to clear that point. The item I have under New Business, which I want to get moved – the stationery my proposal there, for the interest of the member, would be to allow the members to expand the list of options that are available within that \$1,0 budget to include fax and fax supplies. There's not just the fax machine. I'm finding out that it's costing us \$40 a month to buy new ink to keep the fax going. We do have a stationery budget of \$1,0 – a lot of members don't use anywhere close to that – that could be expanded to take care of that without increasing the overall budget. But that is a separate item on the agenda.

MR. BRASSARD: Underlying all of this discussion is the fact that all of us in the constituency offices – I'm talking about members now – have varying degrees of computer literacy, and to just mandatorily allocate a laptop computer to some of us, like myself, who are very computer illiterate and only use basics I think would be a waste. I think that at this point we can purchase them out of our constituency allowances if it's going to benefit us, and I think we should leave it at that. With that comment, Mr. Chairman, I'd call the question on this issue.

THE CHAIRMAN: Did Mr. Van Binsbergen make a motion?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: I did make a motion, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Let him close debate on it.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Yeah. I wanted to point out that Mr. Jacques made the observation that a number of years back he was wondering why faxes weren't being provided, and now he's brought up the matter again. What I propose here is in a sense a shot across the bow, you know. I have a sneaking hunch as to which way my motion's going to go. I feel a bit like a sacrificial lamb. The point is that six years from now Mr. Jacques will make the observation: "How come we still don't have those blasted laptops provided to us by LAO?". I'm sort of talking to the future a bit. I'm willing to withdraw my motion.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is there a consent in the committee for Mr. Van Binsbergen to withdraw Item 4(i)?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

MR. STELMACH: Motion to adjourn.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have a motion to adjourn. It is now 5 minutes to 12. What time would the committee like to reassemble?

MS HALEY: Well, 1:30 sounds good, as scheduled.

THE CHAIRMAN: At the announced time, 1:30?

MS HALEY: At the announced time, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 11:55 a.m. to 1:33 p.m.]

THE CHAIRMAN: Order please. The chair sees a quorum, and it being past 1:30, I'd call the committee back to session.

We are now about to launch on the 1997-98 Legislative Assembly Budget Estimates, item 5 on the agenda. The chair would call on Dr. McNeil to provide an overview of this particular section.

DR. McNEIL: Corinne has handed out the summary paper. For this overview I'll just highlight a couple of things on the way through.

What this budget for '97-98 does is reflect an effort to maintain the restraints on growth in the budget, yet we've identified particular situations where because of client demands or a need to deal with particular problems, budget increases are requested. We've had some discussion this morning about some of those. As well, the anticipated general election will place particular fiscal demands on the office.

I indicated this morning that in the past few years we'd reduced our LAO budget proper by about 18.6 percent, taken over a million dollars out of that budget. We highlighted some of the productivity improvements that we had achieved despite that reduction, and I won't repeat what was said this morning. However, despite the success that we've achieved in improving productivity and achieving greater efficiencies, there's some evidence that the office is having difficulty in meeting growing demands for certain services from members and former members of staff.

We're also experiencing increased turnover in some areas and greater difficulty in recruiting to specialized roles, especially in the systems area. As well, staff are experiencing greater stress, and we're seeing increased illness and absenteeism. We discussed the occupational health problems that we are experiencing as a result of the shortage of ergonomic furniture in some areas.

In light of the issues that we talked about this morning, the planning process has generated a set of strategic goals for the 1997-98 fiscal year, which I've attached as attachment 1. Within the context of those broad goals, the various branches of the office have developed their specific budget proposals. The financial management and administrative services branch as well as the human resource services branch are focusing on productivity improvements arising from the Legislative Assembly management information system. We've developed a new structure which allows members to obtain one-stop service and which, along with the efficiencies gained as a result of LAMIS, should enable us to provide our clients with better and faster account information, faster turnaround on the processing of payments, and allow us the ability to introduce what we call complementary technologies. So we'll be able to do on-line allowance and expense claim processing and so on. All of these improvements are proposed within the financial management and administrative services branch, despite a 1.8 percent reduction in the budget in this branch.

The proposed 158 percent increase in the human resource services budget is somewhat deceiving as it includes one proposal that has application across the Legislative Assembly Office and two having application across the entire operation of the Assembly, including members, caucuses, and constituency offices.

We talked about the onetime, lump-sum payment earlier. We won't go into that other than to suggest that there may be a possibility to derive that payment out of any surplus from the LAO budget in 1996-97. When we get back to that item later on, that's something we may want to discuss. As well, we talked about the ergonomic furniture proposals. We also talked about the outplacement services and made a decision on that.

The Speaker's office budget. There are no significant changes anticipated there. For the public information branch the overall budget will not increase. We have transferred a position from the public information branch to human resource services to deal with an increasing workload in that area. We're requesting additional funds for the public information branch, on which Gary will elaborate, in order to continue to develop the Legislative Assembly site as a major tourist site in the city of Edmonton.

The Legislature Library is requesting a small increase in budget, primarily due to requirements to replace one piece of specialized equipment there.

The House services branch is projecting an increase of 4.9 percent. One factor relates to a significant increase in what I would call interparliamentary relations activities. Because of Alberta's and the Legislative Assembly's participation in what we call democratic development activities, primarily in Ukraine and South Africa, we are receiving an increasing number of delegations from Ukraine and from South Africa, some through the Canada/Ukraine legislative exchange program and Alberta's twinning with Mpumalanga, that have generated a lot more activity in relation to this type of interparliamentary work.

My understanding now is that there's a delegation being set up to travel to Mpumalanga sometime next year, with the possibility that there may be a representative from the Legislative Assembly asked to participate, and we are one of the participants when we are receiving delegations from South Africa and specifically from Mpumalanga. We hosted 10 South African officials last week for two days. We had a fairly intensive two-day program with them. So this kind of activity is increasing quite significantly compared to what it has been in the past. So they're funds proposed to deal with that.

As well, we discussed earlier the requirement for funds to proceed with continuing to broadcast question period via a different route.

One of the most significant changes that we're proposing with the LAO budget this year is an increase of 34 percent in information system services. We're receiving increasing demands from members, from caucus and constituency offices for – and this goes back to what we discussed this morning – faster upgrading of technology in caucus and constituency offices as well as for additional services to be provided. Right now our systems resources are being taxed to the limit. As I indicated earlier, we're losing people to other employers and having difficulty recruiting. In order to, I guess, keep up with progress, we need to put additional funds in this area. The funds in this area have a significant impact on the whole Legislative Assembly operation, and we're really starting to feel the heat here.

The committees budget is projected to decrease by about 8 percent next year as a result of decreased committee activity. This decrease is also projected on the assumption that the conference of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees will not be hosted by Alberta in 1997.

Finally, the MLA administration budget is projected to increase

by 10.7 percent. There are three factors. We have budgeted for the payment of re-establishment allowances in the 1997-98 budget. That's based on an estimate of the turnover among members, both voluntary and involuntary. The second increase: we've had a vote on that this morning, and we won't go further. Within the MLA administration budget we're also proposing that in order to ensure that all offices are consistent as far as our telephone services, 47 constituency offices will be upgraded to Centrex telephone service.

So that's a very brief overview of the major changes, if you will, in the proposed budget. What I propose now is that we proceed to deal with individual areas, and I think based on the discussion this morning, that would probably mean that we'd want to put the human resource services budget down near the end of the discussion, just to get a better idea as to what the overall picture looks like before any decision on that is made.

1:43

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Dr. McNeil.

Anything arising out of that overview before we go into the elements? If not . . . Oh, sorry. Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, just a question on the process that we're going to follow. Are we going to have each department head come forward, or is Dave going to walk us through?

THE CHAIRMAN: We're going to have various department heads deal with the various items. I guess the first one would be financial management, and the manager that services this area, Mr. Gano, will lead us off.

MR. GANO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Financial management and administrative services has undergone a large amount of change over the past year with the introduction of the new accounting system. In spite of that, there's still going to be a 1.8 percent decrease showing in the budget, which is basically due to us being able to move some manpower around and actually decrease some of the manpower requirements within financial management. There is a 39.8 percent increase within operational expenses, which is due mainly to expenses that we have no control over, such as postage and freight, telecommunications, and office supplies. Most of these increases are being offset, however, by the reduction in the human resources area.

We look at the goals projected for '97-98 in this area. As I indicated, a lot of work has gone into just implementing the financial management system, and over the next year we're going to be building on that new system, making fuller use of it, getting into areas that we are not currently into, such as electronic commerce, the ability to enter your expense claims and purchase orders on-line rather than having to fill them out on paper and then have the accounting assistants re-enter that information. In addition, we are still maintaining the general ledgers for not only the Legislative Assembly Office but also the Ethics Commissioner and Information and Privacy Commissioner.

As a result of the new system, one of the things that did happen this year and that we will be monitoring over the next year is the redistribution of duties. Some of our staff that you are used to dealing with – we've basically shifted everybody around, trying to do some cross-training type things so that people are aware of what goes on in constituency offices and caucus offices as well as within the LAO branches themselves. So the redistribution has everybody taking a cross section of those different areas.

On the other side, the administrative side, some of the things that we'll be looking at are things that of course we do every year in terms of insurance and risk management. Contract administration is

looking after all the supply, assets, and inventory management. In addition, the anticipated transition from the 23rd to the 24th Legislature is going to have a large impact on this area. They'll have to draft new checklists. They'll be arranging for lease terminations and setting up new leases; installing, transferring, canceling telephones: all of those types of things that have to happen when an election is called.

Just looking at page 1 of the budget itself, as I indicated, it's projecting a minus 1.8 percent change in total, which translates to about a \$4,000 decrease. So it's not a big dollar amount; basically, it's a hold-the-line type of budget.

At this point I'll look for the committee's direction. Do we want to go through page by page?

THE CHAIRMAN: What's the committee's wish on that?

MS HALEY: Your first page here is a summary of all of the pages that follow behind it?

MR. GANO: That's correct.

MS HALEY: So we're not talking about, like, one page at \$332,000 and then a whole other page at \$260,000 behind there.

MR. GANO: No. Page 1 is the overall budget for financial management and administrative services.

MS HALEY: Well, I would like to suggest that we deal with the first page, and then if there are any specific questions, we can go back behind it.

THE CHAIRMAN: That sounds like a reasonable proposal.

MS HALEY: I do try to be reasonable, Mr. Chairman.

MR. WICKMAN: Every so often she does come through.

MR. JACQUES: Can we vote on that?

MS HALEY: No, you can't. That's as reasonable as I'm going to be today.

MR. GANO: As far as page 1 is concerned, it's laid out there fairly well. There's that 3.1 percent decrease within human resources and the 40 percent increase within operations, which is the \$4,000 that I spoke about, coming up with a total expenditure of minus 1.8 percent.

MS HALEY: Would it be appropriate to move that we accept the budget at \$326,811 for financial management and administrative services, or is there a whole other way to do that?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, I think that should be the appropriate thing to do.

MS HALEY: I would like to move that motion, please.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Bruseker.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One of the goals that you have on the second page of your pages of goals deals with the issue of cellular services. I don't see cellular services listed in here at all in terms of, you know, ensuring that we get good rates and so

on, and I'm wondering why that is not listed in this section.

MR. GANO: Cellular services basically are covered under the MLA administration budget; okay? In terms of the actual budget item, however, this branch is responsible for basically monitoring the different cellular services out there, ensuring that for all of the services we get, both telephone and cellular, we're getting the appropriate rates and so on, but the actual budget item here is under MLA administration.

MR. BRUSEKER: So that would be further on down someplace here?

MR. GANO: That's right.

MR. BRUSEKER: Through the LAO do you negotiate then, you know, a best rate package on cellular costs? Those can get fairly high, I imagine.

MR. GANO: Yes, we do. A lot of those types of things are up to the members themselves if they want to go with a particular service. We keep track of what services are available and provide that information if a member requests it, and we also will recommend which service there is as far as the lowest amount. We haven't specifically negotiated with a carrier to use only their service for the LAO for example.

MR. BRUSEKER: Would there be some cost savings if we did? If all 83 members were on with one server, could we get a bulk rate and see some savings there?

MR. GANO: I'm just going to call on Jacqueline here, who has a little bit better handle on it.

MS BREault: Good afternoon, everybody. Certainly we have tried through the major cellular providers to get the best rates possible. Basically, we're able to coattail on any other public service, government type of program. In a lot of instances we've also been able to coattail along with the rest of the provincial government in terms of them accumulating minutes or air time amounts and giving us a discount based on a provincial total versus the LAO as a specific area, because that would be significantly smaller.

In my own personal opinion, I think that because the telecommunications industry is in so much flux, right now competition is generating a lot of opportunities. We're certainly trying to keep up with them and take advantage of them when they're in the best interests of the members. We're certainly, I think, in the business of suggesting. I know my admin staff keep in constant touch with our teleco providers, basically CANTEL and Telus – there may be a few others out there – and certainly attempt to get the best rates possible, get the news as to what's up and coming and communicate that to members. We are also able to get some general toll reports, or airtime reports, and if we see a plan that may be either underutilized or overutilized, we'll get in touch with the member and make suggestions as to a better package. I think for the most part that if you haven't heard from us, it's because the package you have is probably appropriate for the usage that you're making of it.

I hope that answers the question.

1:53

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay. Just in terms of keeping tracking of all of

those cell phones, then – and the reason I ask that question is because you've already heard about my break-ins at my constituency office. I had a break-in in my car, and somebody stole the handset of my cell phone. I learned that two years afterwards we were still making payments on that cellular service notwithstanding the fact that the phone had been returned to the Legislative Assembly Office and the police and the Sergeant-at-Arms had been informed of that. I'm wondering, you know, how we can facilitate keeping track of those cell phones a little more tightly.

MS BREault: Certainly we're looking, especially with the upcoming election, at doing a major review of all our fixed assets tracking in conjunction with Bill's area, because computer equipment is certainly part of the constituencies' or the members' complement of equipment. I must apologize for that oversight if it indeed happened. We certainly don't want that to be the norm, and hopefully it is not.

As things like LAMIS come up, we think there's a lot more integration available, so we will be able to better track who has which equipment, what type of services they have on those different pieces of equipment. We're hoping, again, that this upcoming election period will be an opportunity to take advantage of those things.

MR. BRUSEKER: To streamline some of those services.

MS BREault: Yeah. I think there was some duplication and, conversely, perhaps a few holes in the system that we're certainly looking to plug. We don't want that to happen at all.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay. So do you keep track of all the cell phones, then, and what each service has? For example, I have a cell phone not tied in with the Telus service.

MS BREault: Yeah. In order to pay our bills, we have to have an administrative listing of who's on which service and what type of features they have. We try to keep our records up to date. We sort of have a teleco bible that all our accounting assistants have access to. That information is to be updated as soon as we see a change, and if there's a change that has not been brought to our attention by a member, we get in touch with that member and make sure that there's not an administrative problem with the telecommunications company. Billing problems do happen, and part of our job is to keep track of those and make sure that they're addressed in a timely and efficient manner.

MR. BRUSEKER: And you make sure we get on the bulk rate so that we can get the best rates.

MS BREault: Yeah. I would suggest that you certainly give us a call, because a lot of times hopefully we can save you a few steps and make sure people are signed up on the best program possible.

MR. BRUSEKER: Good.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anything further on Ms Haley's motion? All those in favour of the motion proposed by Ms Haley, please indicate. Opposed, if any? Carried.

Now we move to the Speaker's office.

MR. BRUSEKER: There'll be lots of debate on that one.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair will ask Mr. Jung.

MR. BRUSEKER: Are we going to skip over human resource services?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yeah. That's going to the end of the . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: Oh, you're going to do it last. Okay. All right.

THE CHAIRMAN: We'd sort of agreed on that.  
Moses.

MR. JUNG: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a brief overview on the Speaker's office budget. There is a small decrease on the human resource side, minus 5.1, and on the operating side there's actually an increase of 57.7 percent. Overall, however, the budget is almost as is from last year.

Now, the reason for the decrease in the human resource expenses was actually a human error, whereby in '93 the 5 percent cut affecting MLAs was implemented, but in '94-95 in our enthusiasm we further reduced our budget, including staff as well as MLAs. Everyone's getting paid the appropriate amount. Unfortunately, our budget didn't reflect that in our accounting, so we had to recognize that they were adjusting it at this point. As well, there's a decrease as a consequence of the discontinuance of the cost-sharing arrangement between the Speaker's office and the government members' office. It would be, namely, the Deputy Speaker's legislative assistance. So that discontinuance provided the safety net, if you will, in terms of preventing an embarrassing situation from becoming any more embarrassing.

On the operating side the main increases you'll note are on the insurance, on the travel. On the travel side it's for allowing, in the event that the option is available there, for a vehicle for the Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Chair of Committees. Insurance increased accordingly because of making that allowance.

The other large increase is in other labour services. You'll note that our forecast calls for \$13,000; the increase is 66.7 percent. That's allowing for the commissioning of the Speaker's portrait. We're hoping to do that before the end of this fiscal year.

MR. JACQUES: On the leasing of vehicles, I think you indicated that they may exercise the privilege. I assume that that's provided for obviously in the Standing Orders, or whatever you call it.

MR. JUNG: Yes.

MR. JACQUES: Have they indicated they're going to? I'm just wondering why we would include it if we haven't included it previously?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, it's hard to say what's going to happen. We didn't want to . . .

MR. JACQUES: Taking the worst case scenario; is that it?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, because it's going to be new personnel, so it's hard to predict at this time.

MR. JACQUES: That could be part of the contract though.  
Thank you.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Chairman, then I'd moved the acceptance of the 1997-98 estimate of \$260,970.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Any further discussion or questions? Seeing none, is the committee ready for the question? All those in favour of the motion proposed by Mr. Bruseker, please indicate. Opposed? Carried. Thank you very much.

Item 5(e), Public Information Branch. Dr. Garrison.

DR. GARRISON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As you can see and as David mentioned, we're looking at a standpat budget, a zero change for the coming year. The way that works out is that there's a 1.2 percent decrease in our human resources. David also mentioned we had a vacant full-time position, which we're basically transferring to human resources, and we increased some wage hours there as well. So that's why it's not showing a decrease of the full amount for that one position in the dollars.

Under operational expenses we've got a 4 percent increase showing. There is an increase in travel. Part of that is needed as we try to market this location as a tourist site, a tourist destination, and encourage the public to come here, because it's their place and we want them to feel like they belong here. It always amazes me when I run across people who don't even know they can come here. They think they're not welcome in the building and that kind of stuff. So that shows me that we've got a job to do. That's just locally here. I've included some money for a marketing trip to Vancouver. It's just \$1,000, but Vancouver is the place where virtually all of the main bus tours come from. They're mostly people from offshore – Japan, Korea, from the Orient and that sort of thing – and there are thousands of people that stream through Vancouver and on to Edmonton every year, especially in the summer.

2:03

I've included some cab fares, as well, for *Hansard* staff who travel home after working at night.

I'm showing an increase in advertising. Again, that's to ensure that the site is marketed to the public, that the public know they're welcome to come.

Freight and postage is down a bit because we used to send a regular mail-out to schools to tell them what programs were available for students here. Now, instead of doing that, we put advertisements in the ATA newsletter to let all the teachers know that this information is available on request, and we've also put it up on our Internet home page.

Telecommunications are up because we have a cellular phone and new voice mail, which is new to everybody as well.

Some various changes in the printing costs.

Then there's an increase for a gift shop inventory. On the revenue side there's a bit of an increase because the gift shop has been doing well, and there is some other information on that elsewhere in your book too.

That's basically the overview, so if the committee wants to go through page by page and ask questions or anything in general, just fire away.

Oh, one thing I should mention too. As a result of the decision this morning, we've estimated that the scrolls would be about \$400 more than what was in your book before. So that's a relatively minor change.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jacques, followed by Ms Haley.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you. First of all, I want to make sure that I understand, that the far right-hand column, the '96-97 forecast, is your best estimate at this point in time as to what the '96-97 expenditures will be. Is that correct?

DR. GARRISON: Yeah. That's right.

MR. JACQUES: Okay. Turning to the line other labour and services, we're showing \$297,000 for next year; \$292,000, which is the budget for this year; and then showing \$262,000 as the, quote, forecast at this point. Looking then at the backup material on pages 10 and 11, a lot of the explanation says "Based on '96-97 actuals," which I assume would be the '96-97 forecast. What I'm having difficulty with is just looking at the \$262,000 versus the \$297,000. That's an increase of about \$35,000, which is over 10 percent, almost 15 percent, based on what you know today versus next year. I'm having some problem reconciling that to the explanation that's on the supporting material.

DR. GARRISON: That's basically because the estimate there, the \$297,000, is based on the cost of 85 sitting days. We've traditionally budgeted for 85 sitting days, and it's relatively certain, I think, at this point that we will not have 85 sitting days within the current fiscal year.

MR. JACQUES: And the '96-97 estimate was also based on 85?

DR. GARRISON: That's right.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you.

MS HALEY: I need some clarification. I'm not sure if I just misheard you or what. Under the earnings for management and nonmanagement and the fact that there was one position that had been eliminated, it doesn't show that kind of a drop that would normally be indicated by one person leaving that position. Could you clarify for me why it doesn't more accurately reflect the loss of that one position?

DR. GARRISON: Well, as you can see, under nonmanagement there's a decrease of about \$25,000 under monthly salaries. The '96-97 figure is \$378,000 and the '97-98 is \$353,000. That's about \$25,000. If you look down under hourly wages, that shows an increase of \$17,000. So what's basically happened is that we've eliminated a full-time position in this branch, which has gone over to human resources, and we've put some more money into wages. We have quite a few part-time people in this branch. I lose count whenever I try to think about it, but I believe it's between 25 and 30 part-time people. So we're really heavy on the part-timers.

MS HALEY: So this isn't a wage increase in here?

DR. GARRISON: You mean a wage rate increase? No, it isn't.

MR. WICKMAN: Dr. Garrison had made reference to the Internet services being provided under the public information branch. Can you just go through that again, please?

DR. GARRISON: What I mentioned was that the freight and postage were down because we normally every year had done a mail-out to teachers. We did a mail-out to every school in the province telling them what our programs are for schools. Well, we found, first of all, that that was an ineffective way of reaching the teachers, because if you send something to each school, it goes to the principal.

MS HALEY: That's right. It never goes anywhere else.

DR. GARRISON: Yeah. So what we decided to do this year – we

figured it would save money and be more efficient at the same time. We put an add in the ATA newsletter a few times in the fall and we said that this information was available on request if people wanted it on hard copy. We also put it on our Internet site, so they can get it in either form.

MR. WICKMAN: So you have it on a home page type of thing.

DR. GARRISON: That's right.

MR. WICKMAN: Okay. Thanks. Is that available – well, of course it's available to the public as well as to the teachers.

DR. GARRISON: Yes, it is.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Bruseker.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I just want to ask a question on the telecommunications side here. We've got percentagewise a large increase, not a lot in dollars I guess. I was just wondering if you could sort of detail how many new sites are going to have voice mail and cell phones, which are the new items that are mentioned on page 9.

DR. GARRISON: Well, the voice mail is a new service for the whole Assembly. We never had voice mail before the current year.

MS HALEY: It's awesome. I just love the voice mail.

MR. BRUSEKER: You never had voice mail there at all?

DR. GARRISON: No. So that's a new item across the board.

The other item that's new is the cell phone. We got that primarily because we found there was a need for it during the summer when we had a greeter inside the rotunda. That greeter had a little table. I don't know if you saw it, if you were here in the summer. There's a table just inside the inside door, past security, where we had a visitor services person who would welcome people to the site, tell them when the next tour was and, if they couldn't stay for a tour, give them a short tour, show them around in the rotunda, that kind of thing. They couldn't be tied down to a desk because, first of all, they could be anywhere in the rotunda. We also used these people to help welcome buses when they came, and the buses of course would be outside. It was essential, we thought, to have this cell phone for that person to keep them in communication.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just going back to the voice mail for a second. How much does that cost additionally? Like, you've added on a fair amount. Is that a fairly significant additional cost then?

DR. GARRISON: What page is that on?

MR. BRUSEKER: Page 9. I'm just curious how the numbers break down more than anything else.

DR. GARRISON: As I recall, the voice mail is about \$1,500, or something like that, for this branch, \$1,500 to \$1,700.

DR. McNEIL: To maybe just add to that, too, this was a system that was implemented across the Government Centre here, if you will. So everybody has it, and therefore everybody is now paying their portion of it. You'll see these increases in everybody's budget reflecting their portion of the voice mail charges, which we did not have in the past.

MR. BRUSEKER: Right. Thanks.

2:13

MR. BRASSARD: I would move acceptance of this budget of \$1,245,723.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. Having heard the motion put forward by Mr. Brassard, are there any further questions or comments? All those in favour of the motion proposed by Mr. Brassard, please indicate. Opposed, if any? Carried. Thank you.

MR. BRASSARD: Congratulations. You're doing a good job.

DR. GARRISON: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Next will be the Legislature Library and Mr. Buhr. Welcome to the table, Lorne.

MR. BUHR: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. With your permission I'd like to distribute this little comparative piece of information that we've been doing every year.

As you're getting that sheet, I'd like to indicate that two of those figures are not current. We like to make a comparison of how our operation stacks up vis-a-vis the other provinces as well as Ottawa. Given the time constraints, I was not able to get the '96-97 figures for Newfoundland and the NWT, so you are seeing the '95-96 figures there. In terms of where Alberta sits in that picture, those numbers are exactly the same in terms of rank as where we were last year. So we haven't changed in our ranking. You may have some questions about that too later.

I'll just go to our overview. There aren't very many increases in our budget. They appear in a few places. We have some manpower costs that are up because of merit pay increases. That's .3 percent. There's no change in staffing levels planned. Our major increase on the operational side is that we need to replace an obsolete microfiche reader/printer, and that'll cost \$6,0. We can go into the details of that later if you wish to.

Our travel costs increased. We'd like to do two visits in the coming year, one for sure and a second one if possible, because we feel that in the new technology and environment we need to plan our work a little bit better. One trip will be in Canada, if this is approved, to check out another place that is doing about what we are doing in automation. We want to find out whether we should take the next step in our automation process here. The other one, if it comes together, would be a trip – we're not quite sure where – to a library which has effectively brought technology into the 21st century and is doing some of the things we think we should do, but we don't want to guess on it. So there's an amount in the budget of \$2,500 for travel this year that wasn't there last year.

Beyond that, the only increases are related to our books, documents, periodicals, and newspaper budgets, just to accommodate some of the rising costs that we're finding.

MS HALEY: Could I just ask a question for clarification on your operational expenses?

MR. BUHR: Yes.

MS HALEY: You've got some areas where you've dropped substantially. One of them is books.

MR. BUHR: Well, okay. I'll explain that.

MS HALEY: The other one, before you start explaining, is periodicals and newspapers.

MR. BUHR: If you want to go to the details page, that would make it much easier to explain. That's on page 12. If you turn to page 12, we've made two changes this year partly due to the new accounting system. If you look at what we had for books in '96-97, it was \$50,500, and for the coming year it says \$37,000. But to that \$37,000 you have to add \$15,000 for documents. Those two together used to be the \$50,500. So actually there's an increase there of \$1,500. We didn't have a separate documents account before, but now under the new accounting system we can do that.

In the periodicals area, last year it shows that we had budgeted \$51,000 for the current year that we're in, and for the year to come we've budgeted \$40,000. In addition to that \$40,000 you have to add the \$12,000 that accounts for our Conference Board membership because we always paid it out of that budget before. In the coming year actually, then, that's an increase of \$1,000. All our memberships that we pay, which involve us getting some library materials, subscriptions and so on, come out of that periodicals budget.

MS HALEY: Okay. Thank you very much.

MR. WICKMAN: Just under the office administration supplies, it seems that as we've gone through the budgets here, a number of them have reflected substantial increases in supplies. Is there something that's happened there?

MR. BUHR: No. That's the \$12,000. If you go again back to page 12, you see that the Conference Board membership and the office supplies together come up to the \$32,000.

MR. WICKMAN: Okay.

Mr. Chairman, I'd just make a comment that I'm one of those who do utilize library services on occasion, and I find the staff there extremely helpful when it comes to getting clippings, getting books, whatever. It's a very valuable resource to me and to MLAs in particular.

MR. JACQUES: Just an overall question. Looking again at the '96-97 forecast on your page 1, under your expenditure section it shows \$795,000 versus the '96-97 estimate of \$821,000 and now versus the '97-98 of \$832,000. In round numbers that's about a \$38,000 increase, in other words, based on what you figure you're going to do this year versus next year. You know, if you had to pick the large components out of \$38,000 that make this up, what would they be?

MR. BUHR: Actually that forecast is quite low. It's based on six months, and the next number of months are when we have some of our heaviest expenses. I probably could have put that number up \$,000 and I wouldn't be wrong, but I didn't do that because I was basing it on the six-month numbers that I had. A lot of our subscriptions come due right about now. So in the next couple of months we'll be eating up quite a bit of our budget, and I suspect that our forecast at the end will be very low, that we will just about have used our allocation for this year.

MR. JACQUES: Okay. Thank you.

MR. WICKMAN: I'll move that we accept the budget of the Legislature Library, the figure of \$821,782.

THE CHAIRMAN: Having heard the motion put forward by Mr.

Wickman, are there any further questions or comments? All those in favour of the motion proposed by Mr. Wickman, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

Now the next is 5(g). Before we call on Dr. McNeil, I think I should perhaps say a word or two in this area concerning interparliamentary conferences, which I consider to be an important vehicle for maintaining good working contacts and for the exchange of information at the legislative level. These meetings afford legislators from around the country and throughout the Commonwealth an opportunity to exchange ideas and initiatives taking place within their jurisdictions.

2:23

Some of the other initiatives include – you've already heard about the Canada/Ukraine legislative education program, which is headquartered at the University of Alberta. There's also a German initiative called the Partnership of Parliaments, which is in its preliminary stages. The goal of this initiative is to create ties between states of the United States and provincial parliaments in Canada and parliaments in Germany. In the Canadian context the Germans feel that the greatest opportunity is to work with the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. The whole intent is to improve relations between Canadian jurisdictions, U.S. jurisdictions, and Germany in the fields of politics, the economy, and culture.

We've also heard about the South African twinning project. This has been so far carried on primarily between our government Department of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs. The Speaker's office has tried to be of assistance to that project over the last six or seven months, since I had the opportunity of going to South Africa in April with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. You've heard what the Clerk has said about the most recent delegation. Also, this fall the Premier of Mpumalanga visited us with three or four parliamentarians from that province.

I guess the genesis of this can be traced back to the 40th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference, which Alberta was very prominent in hosting at Banff in October of 1994. As Dr. McNeil has pointed out, we are expecting more South African delegations. The government of Canada is involved in this through CIDA. They're trying to help the establishment of democratic institutions in South Africa by way of helping to finance this, but there are still things that I think give great opportunities for our province and our Legislature that can be done in that area.

We've also had an initiative in the last two years to become a member of the AIPLF. That's the French-speaking parliamentary association. We are in the process of joining that organization, which is sort of a lengthy process. It takes about four or five years to become proven as a good member.

There's also the National Conference of State Legislatures. Before 1993 our contact with that organization was primarily through FIGA because of the interest of the former minister there, Mr. Horsman. By the very name, it's the National Conference of State Legislatures; it's not state governments. It's been my objective to try to get that more oriented towards the legislative side than the executive side.

In this connection the Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs recently, yesterday as a matter of fact, spoke to me about this. He had in fact been in touch with the executive director in Washington, who is looking forward to having closer ties with Canadian Legislatures. I have to say that I've been fairly active in that organization over the last three years. Unfortunately, this year – I don't know how it happened – the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association happened to be meeting at the same time as their

meeting was held, and I was unable to go.

A year ago I sort of made an undertaking that I would try to advance this connection as much as I could. The idea was that the Americans were to put on something in January of their election years and we would do something in the summer of those other years. So it's Canada's turn, not Alberta's turn. We were the last host of an NCSL thing, which I think was in '94 in Lake Louise on the subject of health care. Therefore, I'm going to bring it up at the presiding officers' meeting in late January here to try to get a province to take this on.

We should have representation at that whenever it's held – we really should – because there are so many things of common interest. At least, that's my opinion. That's what I'm trying to explain to get support for an increase in the budget for interparliamentary meetings. These things do help establish direct channels and communications with decision-makers in other jurisdictions and open the door for mutual trade opportunities and other opportunities of an economic nature for our province. The direct contact that our members have with other Legislatures from different areas of the country and around the world is important, in my view, because it does increase our knowledge base about the parliamentary system, our government, as well as our network of contacts throughout the Commonwealth. This is of particular benefit to new members. I have to say that if anything needs improving in our Legislature, after spending almost 11 years here, it's in this area. I don't think we have paid enough attention to it.

I would like to say before this is finished that I'm disappointed that we don't have an item in our committees thing for this Public Accounts conference. I mean, Alberta hasn't been a part of that for a couple of years now, and I have to say that I'm disappointed in that. I think that's too bad. Any government, no matter how good a government is, is always subject to improvement. I don't know; maybe it's a legacy of having served 11 years on an opposition side that I feel it's important that public accounts committees be fairly strong and inquiring. I would hope that something would happen through this process. Public accounts committees are well recognized throughout the Commonwealth, and I think they're important. I hope that we do not weaken that system.

So I'd just make a plea in that regard. I put that in with the area of interparliamentary relations because the fact is that practically every other Parliament in our Commonwealth does have active committees, and I think we can maybe get some ideas from them. We will never know unless we go and meet with the people.

With that little rant, I'll let Dr. McNeil fill in any blanks that I have left. I think there are other things that probably have to be filled in.

DR. MCNEIL: Just in terms of the overall budget being projected to increase by 4.9 percent, the major elements there relate to the funding we talked about this morning for the satellite uplink, which is \$52,500, and the funding that the chairman referenced is an additional \$,000 in the interparliamentary relations budget. Somewhat related to that is an increase in travel related to those activities.

2:33

The percentage changes under human resource and other labour and services are a bit deceptive in that last year we had a Parliamentary Counsel on secondment, so that individual was paid under operational expenses on a contract basis. Since Earl Evaniew's return to the private sector and our hiring of Shannon Dean, those funds are now under management earnings. That's why you see the big increase under management earnings and the fairly



significant decrease under other labour and services. That's the reason for that, the big jump in one and the large decrease in the other.

One other thing to add is that we budgeted an amount for the Sergeant-at-Arms to host the Sergeant-at-Arms' conference this year. Last year's budget had funding for both the Clerk's professional development seminar and the presiding officers' conference. Next year it's the Sergeant-at-Arms' turn to host his colleagues throughout Canada in Alberta.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, just one question. I'm still not clear on the increase in the human resources and the decrease in the other labour. The one increase is roughly \$95,000. The other one decreases by \$60,000. There's still about a \$25,000 disparity between the two of them. The one that particularly comes to light is the allowances and supplementary benefits, where there's an increase of \$,000.

DR. McNEIL: There are two things. The big increase there relates to the increase in the interparliamentary relations budget. That's almost the total, if you look on page 4.

MR. WICKMAN: Oh, from the \$10,000 to the \$30,000?

DR. McNEIL: Yes.

MR. WICKMAN: The increased interparliamentary activity. This was what the chairman was referring to.

DR. McNEIL: Exactly.

MR. WICKMAN: Oh, okay. Good. Thank you.

If you want, Mr. Chairman, I'll move the budget to the tune of \$1,040,377.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further questions?

MR. COUTTS: I have a question. I will support this, but just a point of clarification if I might, Mr. Chairman. You mentioned the Public Accounts, the hosting of that conference that could be coming to Edmonton in the summer of '97. Would that cost come out of this budget, or does it come out of the committees budget?

DR. McNEIL: The committees budget.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jacques.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to speak against the motion. I've listened very intently to your introductory comments with regard to the interparliamentary activities both in terms of the amounts and in terms of travel. Having said that, however, what we're moving from, as I understand it, in the total cost of those two items in the budget is \$29,000 to \$60,000, being that there's \$30,000 in the allowances and \$30,000 in travel and the respective numbers were \$10,000 and \$19,000 for '96-97. So in other words, there's effectively a 100 percent increase in those two items, which obviously, if you look at the bottom line, accounts for virtually all of the increase of \$42,000; \$31,000 of that is in that area.

As much as I have some sympathy in terms of the parliamentary activities, I find that I could not support that form of increases. I

will be voting against them.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anything further? Mr. Wickman has moved that the budgetary figure of \$1,040,377 be approved. All those in favour, please indicate. Those opposed? Carried. Thank you very much.

Item 5(h), Information Systems Services. Mr. Gano.

MR. GANO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As Dr. McNeil indicated in the overview, information systems is requesting a fairly substantial increment this year. Those increments fall into two different areas basically, the first one being human resource expenses. We're requesting that we be allowed to hire two additional systems analyst people. This is predicated upon a number of different things. Certainly one of the ones that has triggered this is that we have noticed a distinct drop-off in the service we were able to provide over the last year. We are no longer able to provide the same level of service that we have in the past in terms of being able to visit as many constituency offices as we'd like and being able to spend as much time with people that are having difficulty with their equipment as we would like to. So that's certainly one area that we have noticed a problem with.

The next thing that is precipitating this is an increase in demand for services in terms of requests for us to support additional software products. Right now we support basically the WordPerfect suite of products. We are now being asked to support not only WordPerfect but also the Microsoft suite of products, and that's just not possible with the current level of manpower that we have. In addition, we want to be able to provide the other services that are being requested such as the electronic commerce services, the ability to provide on-line access to expense claims, and the ability to do gift shop catalogue shopping over the Internet. Those kinds of things require resources to be put in place and support. In addition, the Chamber has recently been wired, and we anticipate that there will be some increased level of services in those areas. We have noticed a distinct increase in the number of members that are buying laptops and their own computers, and we do not have the resources to be able to adequately support those increases as well. That's one area that we're looking at.

On the other side, operational expenses. We're requesting a 59 percent increase there. Again, this is due mainly to the speed the technology moves. When we initially budgeted in this area, we were anticipating a turnover about every five years. That is decreasing quite rapidly, and we're down to three years. We're asking for an increased budget in mainly the hardware area so that we can buy more hardware each year in order to be able to turn over the computers in the constituency and caucus offices more quickly.

Just an aside. We do have some offsetting types of things that are occurring. For example, in 1995-96 we budgeted \$85,0 for the payroll system. This year we're budgeting \$30,000. That's basically because we have moved our system from the government system to in-house, and we are anticipating those savings to continue.

Looking at the goals for information systems, information systems is not only computers; it also includes the records management and freedom of information areas. Therefore, we are looking at a number of initiatives in this area related to records management and related to setting policies for producing an appropriate policy manual for the entire Legislative Assembly Office.

2:43

Under information systems we want to continue to support and expand Internet access. We want to, of course, continue supporting

the financial and payroll system as well as continuing the upgrades to newer technology and, if appropriate, providing the expertise and advice for automation within the Chamber.

Under performance measures, this kind of tends to highlight some of the cost savings that have been possible because of the information systems branch. As Dr. McNeil indicated in the overview, our overall budget since '92-93 has decreased by 18.66 percent. If you view it on a per workstation basis, the workstations have gone up; however, our budget has continued to go down, which shows an overall real budget decrease of 36 to 37 percent. If you compare the cost of an in-house information systems service versus using the private sector, we're looking at almost a \$500,000 difference per year there.

So looking at page 1, the specific numbers, the 29.9 percent increase in human resources is to provide us with the capability to add two additional resources to information systems. Under operational expenses a 58.8 percent increase is mainly due to an increase in data-processing equipment to again allow us to provide an increased rate of upgrading equipment.

So at that point, I'll toss it open to questions.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, on what line on page 1 would the increase in the support be, whether it be to repair or get the computers going once they're down, whether it be in the Leg. or the constituency office? Is part of that the increase in nonmanagement earnings?

MR. GANO: Yes, that's part of it as far as the human resource side. We do a lot of our own in-house repairs in terms of board swapping and those kinds of things. The other side of it is in the data-processing equipment, where we are requesting an increase to \$276,000. That allows us to have some standby machines on hand so that if a workstation goes down, we are able to ship one out quickly to the constituency, get the broken machine in, and make the repairs at a more leisurely rate.

I guess I need to draw your attention to the data-processing equipment page, which is page 13, because part of that \$276,000 is a proposal called the videoconference pilot project. This is a proposal whereby we would look at some new technology that is on the market now which allows the transmission over the telephone lines of not only data but also video type things as well. The concept is that there would be a microcamera placed on top of your PC in your constituency office, there would be a microcamera placed on top of your PC here in the caucus office, and you would then be able to meet one on one with constituents even though you may be in Edmonton and your constituent may be out in the constituency. Because you're seeing that person on your PC at the same time as he's seeing you, you can also be showing documents over that transmission line and could also be working on a WordPerfect document, for example, at the same time you're talking to this other individual.

The pilot project itself is basically suggesting that we acquire 10 of these units and place them in the different caucus and constituencies just to test whether this is a viable type of technology to be getting into or not.

DR. McNEIL: I just want to add something in terms of this page, the maintenance pool. We've gone along in the LAO on the assumption that if we allocate a certain amount of funds every year for this maintenance pool, we'll be able to constantly upgrade, and what we're asking here is an increase in that maintenance pool, if you will, because of what appears to be the accelerating rate of change, the difficulty in upgrading in a timely manner.

I think Bill prefaced his remarks by saying that, you know, our

assumption when we went into this initially was that we could do this over a five-year period. Technology is changing now, so it's more like a three-year period. With constituency offices lagging behind, primarily that's where the difficulties are arising, especially these days. The Internet was mentioned earlier today. That's what this aspect of the budget is here to address.

MS HALEY: Mr. Chairman, could we have a five-minute break?

THE CHAIRMAN: Certainly. We will recess for 10 minutes.

[The committee adjourned from 2:49 p.m. to 3:07 p.m.]

THE CHAIRMAN: Recess is apparently over. We will resume consideration of information services. Are there any further questions or comments?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, the request in this area is for about a 34 percent increase. Would we be able to get down to the bare minimum as to what the costs are to ensure that our computers are running efficiently, that there are staff that are able to repair them within a very reasonable period of time? We certainly appreciate the fact that when the computers are down, the staff, while they're waiting for the computers to be repaired – certainly it's an expensive proposition because they really can't do anything until the computers are up and running. In many cases if it takes, you know, a couple of days or whatever to get the computer going, that's a fairly hefty expense, and we can probably reduce that substantially if we get more dollars in this budget to make sure that equipment is running. Would you be able to just tell us what it is that you can pare down out of the budget, including this videoconference pilot project? What's the bare minimum?

MR. GANO: Well, the videoconference pilot was put in as an item that we saw as up and coming technology, and certainly I see our mandate as being able to maintain currency with the new technologies. Deleting that particular item is not going to affect our ability to provide service, if you will, one way or the other. It's an extra item and may perhaps actually allow us to provide, you know, more service because we would not have to support that particular project then.

We were requested to look into this particular technology. We put it in the budget in order to do that. If the committee feels that's not something we should be doing, then I have no problem with that.

When I put this budget together, I put it together with the view that it is a bare-bones budget. We have to understand that technology itself is increasing; the level of technology is increasing. It's no longer reasonable to expect the same level of resources to continue to support additional services, and that's what's being asked for here. We want to be able to support those services that are being asked for and continue to support the old services as well.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, to Bill. If we were to subtract the \$50,000, the dollars that you're requesting, let's say, for the maintenance pool will increase the efficiency of repair and getting computers back on-line if they're down?

MR. GANO: That's correct, yes.

MR. STELMACH: This would be not only replacement of obsolete equipment but also the hiring of additional staff?

MR. GANO: I'm sorry. The \$0,000 under the hardware?

MR. STELMACH: Yeah. You have on page 13, "Purchase of EDP equipment to replace unmaintainable . . ."

MR. GANO: Right.

MR. STELMACH: Okay. So that \$70,000 there is for the purchase of equipment?

MR. GANO: That's right.

MR. STELMACH: Okay. And then the additional increase will be in the manpower.

MR. GANO: That's correct.

MR. STELMACH: I would make the motion that we accept the budget as presented minus the \$50,000 for the videoconference pilot project. Although I suspect we all agree that it will be something that will be coming up in the future, at this particular time we have some great difficulty in supporting it with the dollars. There are other components in this budget that maybe have a higher priority at this particular time than the videoconference.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm prepared to support that motion deleting the \$50,000. The \$50,000 I see as an experimental thing that somewhere along the line we're going to need to face. Just like the earlier discussion with laptop or fax machines, changing technology demands certain things, but that is something that next year could be reconsidered. I'm glad that the member didn't start going after the data-processing equipment in that particular area, because with what's happening out there in the new technology, I think it's unavoidable to see these changes. We see the changes reflected in the budget. I don't think it's going to impose any severe consequences to delete the \$50,000. I'll support the motion.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, I'm having some difficulty with this motion for the simple reason that I have a hard time understanding what the videoconference pilot project could be used for. Could Mr. Gano maybe give us some more of an explanation. You mentioned that I could communicate, say, from here with a constituent and see the person on video, so to speak. Can you think of anything else?

MR. GANO: No. That's basically it. What it is is a one-to-one videoconference technology. We're all familiar with the group videoconferencing, where you've got large screens sitting up at the front of the room and large cameras and so on and so forth. With the one-to-one videoconferencing the camera is a miniature camera. It sits on top of your monitor. So as you're looking at your monitor, this camera is shooting you, and the person at the other end can see you as well. Your image is basically up in one corner of the monitor screen, while the WordPerfect document or the Excel spreadsheet is in the rest of the screen. So you're both looking at the same document on a screen at the same time. You're talking to the person at the same time. There is the ability to take snapshots of hard copy documents, so if your constituent has a report or document that they brought in and they want you to see it, they can show it to you on this camera and you can read it right at that time. That's the basic premise.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Will the \$50,000 hook us all up?

MR. GANO: No. The \$50,000 is a pilot project. It will allow us to buy 10 of these units. You know, you need two to complete the

circuit, if you will, so there basically would be five members piloting the project.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anything further? Then the question is on the motion of Mr. Stelmach, that we approve under this item a sum of \$814,699. All those in favour, please indicate. Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Chairman, before we leave this, I'd just like to compliment Mr. Gano once again on keeping ahead of this technology. It must be a tremendously demanding situation. I don't know how you do it, Bill. I'd just like to congratulate you on all your efforts. Thank you.

MR. GANO: Thank you for your comments.

DR. McNEIL: I might just add that I think the Legislative Assembly of Alberta can be proud of the fact that at least among Canadian Legislatures I think we're seen to be leading the way in applying technology to the business of the Assembly, a lot if not everything to do with Bill's contribution over the past 5 or 6 years since he's been here. He basically started from scratch, and it's been built in that period of time. So these have been very significant accomplishments.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, we certainly all do benefit from his expertise, and I appreciate it. Thank you.

3:17

MS HALEY: Could I ask you a question? I'm sorry to interrupt, but just so that I understand, on your three-year draft document at the beginning of the budget you had \$834,699 in this spot for information systems, yet it was showing up here as \$864,000. Like, do I have the wrong document in my book?

MR. GANO: No. You have the right document, but if you look down toward the bottom, there's another line item called central agency transfers. That includes the \$30,000 for the payroll system that is in the information systems' budget, but it's split out as a separate line item because it came from outside. It came from the government as a transfer amount.

THE CHAIRMAN: It used to be Treasury doing it.

MR. GANO: Yeah, Treasury transferred us the \$85,000 initially. That's decreased to the \$30,000, but it's still separate from this top part because it wasn't part of the '92-93 initial numbers that we started with.

MS HALEY: Good. I guess what I'm trying to get at, though, is: shouldn't these numbers from in here match this, like, by heading and category?

MR. GANO: They do match if you add the \$30,000. Of the \$50,268 under central agency transfers, the \$30,000 is in the information systems' budget. So if you add \$30,000, that brings that up to \$864,669.

MR. BRUSEKER: The obvious question, then, is where does the other \$,268 go?

MR. GANO: Am I missing another \$,000?

MR. BRUSEKER: When you're saying the balance – you're saying that out of the \$50,000 there's \$30,000 in your budget, whereas the other \$,000 . . .

MR. GANO: That's going to come up in MLA administration under risk management.

MR. BRUSEKER: Which we haven't come to yet.

MR. GANO: That's right.

MR. BRUSEKER: All right.

MR. GANO: Sorry. Because of the way this three-year projection was created back in 1992-93, which was our base year, we didn't have responsibility for those items. So to project an appropriate percentage decrease, we had to separate those numbers out.

MS HALEY: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The next agenda item is 5(i), discussing committee budgets. Mrs. Kamuchik.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Thank you. I'm looking at page 1 of the summary of budget estimates, which starts with human resources expenses, which might be the quickest way to go through the committee budget.

You'll notice a decrease in the allowances and supplementary benefits. This is for committee attendance at various conferences. The main reason for that, of course, is what you've just heard explained earlier about the Public Accounts conference, whether it's going to be held in Edmonton or not at all. If it is held in Edmonton, then of course our committee members would not be paying the registration fee, so there is a 75 percent decrease in that area.

THE CHAIRMAN: Where are we at?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Page 1.

MR. BRASSARD: Page 1, human resources.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: I'm sorry; there are two pages 1. I'm sorry. I should have pointed that out. The first one breaks the expense down by committees, and the second one . . .

MS HALEY: Are we on the human resources part of the budget, or we on committees?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: On the committees, but there's a human resources expenses item on the second page 1 of the summary. The first one breaks down the expenditures by committees. The second page 1 breaks down the expenses by budget items.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think maybe we should have a quick overview.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Thank you. I had first thought that everyone might have looked at it, but this will give you another quick overview of what the overview contains.

At the September 1996 meeting of the Public Accounts conference and the Canadian Auditors General conference in Victoria, the Auditor General volunteered to host what is called the COLA, which is the Conference of Legislative Auditors, in Edmonton this coming summer. This conference is always held in conjunction with the

CPAC conference, which is the Canadian Public Accounts conference. The Canadian Public Accounts conference, whether or not Edmonton would host it, was to have been brought before the Public Accounts conference committee's meeting of August 28. Unfortunately, the session adjourned on the 27th, which was Tuesday, so the issue never came up before the committee.

The COLA conference is still a go-ahead, but if the CPAC conference is not held in conjunction with it in Edmonton, it will not take place at all next summer.

THE CHAIRMAN: So it's a go-ahead if there's a Public Accounts conference?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: No. The COLA conference is going ahead whether CPAC takes place in the summer or not.

THE CHAIRMAN: In Edmonton?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: That's right.

MR. SEVERTSON: And CPAC will not take place if we don't host it. That's what you're saying?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: That's right. No other jurisdiction is willing to undertake it. They always hold them together. It's COLA by itself in Edmonton next summer or COLA and CPAC together if we get the funds, if we can get approval to hold the Public Accounts conference next summer here in Edmonton.

MR. WICKMAN: Louise, you don't explain the budget implications to that though.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Well, what happens here is that for the members that attend these various conferences, there is a registration fee charged. So if we host it, we're not going to charge our own members a registration fee. If there is no conference, there will be no registration fee, so we see a 75 percent decrease in the allowances and supplementary benefits of the human resources expenses. That accounts for the 75 percent. We're not going to charge our members, one way, if there isn't a conference. We're not going to have a charge even if there is a conference. We're hosting it; we're not going to charge Alberta members to attend this conference. That explains the 75 percent decrease in the allowances and supplementary benefits. The issue of whether or not Alberta hosts it we'll certainly get to, I'm sure. Right now we are not budgeting funds for the registration fee, and this is the budget impact it has on this item of the budget. Am I being clear here? I know it's confusing.

The next reduction under committee members . . . [interjection]

MR. WICKMAN: No. Let her finish talking.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: I was going to go on to another item. Are you okay with "allowances & supplementary benefits" here?

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah, go ahead.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: The next item, pay to Members of the Legislative Assembly, has a small reduction of 1.4 percent, which is a result of decreases in the Parliamentary Reform Committee. The chairman has indicated that he wanted a percent reduction across the

board on that particular committee, so that is reflected under pay to Members of the Legislative Assembly.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jacques.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you. Just a question, a clarification, Louise, on the '96-97 forecast. It's coming in at about \$38,000. Are we assuming the number is if everybody claimed what they could claim based on certain meetings?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: This one is the chairmen's salaries under pay to members.

MR. JACQUES: Yeah, I understand that.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Some of the chairmen do not claim. For instance, the chairman of Public Accounts does not claim for salary.

MR. JACQUES: Right. In other words, if everybody claimed, that would be the amount.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: If everyone claimed, it would be \$83,870.

MR. JACQUES: Yeah, versus \$38,000.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Right.

MR. JACQUES: Okay. Thank you.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: That's why the difference in that section.

Under the travel portion, that is again affected by a change in venue, for instance, for the Canadian Ombudsmen's conference. It's in Regina next year as opposed to where it was this current year. It was in Buenos Aires. Again, that is held once every four years, the international one. We're back to a Canadian regional conference for the next three years, so Regina next time.

MR. JACQUES: Again I'm looking at the '96-97 at \$6,000 compared to the \$32,000 and the \$37,000.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Yes. The expenses, for instance, for the chairman of Public Accounts to go to the Public Accounts conference: that did not take place because the chairman was unable to obtain permission to attend the conference. Again, why other expenditures – I'd have to go back here to refresh my memory why others are lower.

3:27

MR. BRUSEKER: Isn't it that much of the travel to come to these committee meetings isn't necessarily charged directly to the committee? People just put it in their general travel allowance, and they don't put it in as saying, "I'm traveling for this particular committee."

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Yes. That's correct. It used to be a separate item, but now it's combined with the attendance at committee meetings. We budget for all of the members' travel expenditures to come to committee meetings. Not all of the members do claim against that. They may charge that expenditure to another allowance because most of the time they are already attending, for instance, a caucus meeting. A lot of our committee meetings are held around caucus meetings or when the members are in the city for another reason, so they do not always charge their travel expenditures to

attend a committee meeting to that particular committee expenditure.

MR. JACQUES: I was just wondering if that's typically the profile of why we would assume that we're going to have a major change in practice, I guess.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: But we're never sure which way the members are going to go in their expense claims, so we always budget for the maximum.

MS HALEY: If I could make a comment on that. One of the things that occurred a couple of years ago when we were dealing with this budget was that some of these things were getting written down to zero because the current group of MLAs hadn't charged, and you lose it out of the budget totally. It's very difficult to put it back for the next parliament that comes in. We wanted to ensure, for the chairmen's salaries, that that was there. If those chairmen determined that they wanted to take it, as in fact they were entitled to, then the money would be there. We specifically asked the administration to include these numbers, because while it's been great that people haven't abused anything and taken extra money for trips, it needs to reflect what it would really cost if people did it the way they were supposed to be doing it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wickman, did you want to get in now, or do you want to wait?

MR. WICKMAN: Well, just one point that I had. First of all, I apologize for calling Louise Karen. I don't know where the Karen came from, but I guess you've been called worse than that; eh, Louise?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: No comment.

MR. WICKMAN: I'm still not clear on the conference. The reason why I'm pursuing it: when we broke for lunch, the former chairman of Public Accounts made the remark that she may come back to watch the discussion on the conference. So I assumed by her comment that it was relatively important, but I didn't get a chance to discuss it with her. What's the position of the Public Accounts Committee on it? Should they host a conference or not?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: As I explained earlier, the Public Accounts Committee was to have discussed that very issue on August 28, which was a Wednesday.

MR. WICKMAN: But they can't do it now?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: They can't because once session adjourned, the committee could not meet or did not meet, and therefore the issue was never addressed.

MR. WICKMAN: Because they're not allowed to, yeah. Right. Okay. So even informally you haven't been able to get an indication.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Well, we've been trying to get some indication. There are a number of difficulties in this area. Alberta's turn was in 1989. They hosted the 1989 public accounts conference, so it wasn't Alberta's turn to do it again. Because it's always held in conjunction with the COLA conference and with the Auditor General saying, "We'll do the COLA conference next year," it became Alberta's turn – "Well, are you going to do it or not?" – even though it wasn't our

turn.

The problem we have there is that with the impending election, if it's held in the spring, all committees cease to exist. The next set of committees will only be struck at the first session of the 24th Legislature. If there is no session, say, until September, we could have no chairman for Public Accounts, technically, to run the meeting. So there is that difficulty.

MR. WICKMAN: So is your recommendation, though, that it should be included or that it shouldn't be included?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: I have no recommendation. It's not up to me to make that recommendation. The committee decides whether Alberta hosts it or not. It's certainly not up to me.

MR. WICKMAN: No, but if the committee could have met. Could we make that decision if we wanted to? We can't? Well, then we're talking about something that's redundant.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Yes.

MR. WICKMAN: Then there's no sense talking about it.

THE CHAIRMAN: If I might add a little more fog to this issue. When I attended the Canadian regional conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Fredericton three weeks ago, I guess it was, I was asked by several people as a result of our Auditor General inviting the auditors general here whether we would also follow the tradition of hosting the public accounts committees, and I said, "I don't know." There was a feeling that they would certainly like to be meeting in Alberta in 1997 in conjunction with the auditors general meeting.

MR. COUTTS: I'll add a little light into this fog, if I might, as vice-chair of a committee that may not be in place. The circumstance around it of not being our turn, of course, was one of the biggest concerns, and the political situation of whether or not we're in elections has been brought forward. When we get to that point in Public Accounts and we discuss whether or not we should include this in the budget, recent events as of just this afternoon, we'll be recommending that we include this in the budget. Then we'll have to leave it up to the committee during the first part of February, when we reconvene in the House, whether or not we include it. It's not that much money. It's somewhere around the \$,000 mark.

MS HALEY: Not that much. I think you've been here way too long, Dave.

MR. COUTTS: Well, it's certainly not that much when you see what we wasted, minutes, around the table thinking about it.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, what does it mean now? We're talking about a budget now in which there may or may not be ,000 bucks set aside. How do we deal with that? In other words, if we pass this budget, then it's too late or . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no. We'll be doing individual committees, unless you want to roll them into one.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: I was going to suggest, because it's a onetime item only, that we might consider, like we've done in the past, a onetime only budget as a special planning department or include it in the Public Accounts Committee's budget.

THE CHAIRMAN: It'd be Public Accounts.

Thank you very much, Mr. Coutts, for . . .

MR. COUTTS: . . . shedding all that great light on it.

THE CHAIRMAN: I suppose we should let Louise finish her overview here before we get down to the nitty-gritty of having the necessary motions to deal with this element of the budget. Is there anything further?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Well, I was just going to mention that there's a decrease in the labour and services portion as a result of no charge back from *Hansard* for recording meetings of the Select Special Committee on Parliamentary Reform. We would normally in the past have kept those separate for select special committees that were one time only, once their mandate had expired. It did, of course, put demands on the staff. This one is still ongoing. It doesn't meet too often, and *Hansard* has absorbed the cost of recording the meetings and producing the transcripts.

There's a slight increase in the fee charged by the firm of Kingston Ross Pasnak to audit the office of the Auditor General. That's a requirement. They do this on a yearly basis. They've had their fee pretty stagnant, although they did have an additional fee last year because of the changed procedures and reporting issues in government. They've upped their fee this year by about \$350.

There's been a slight decrease, again back to labour and services, as a result of the percent decrease as directed by the chairman of the Select Special Committee on Parliamentary Reform.

That is basically the long and short of it. There's been a slight decrease in revenue for the Standing Committee on Private Bills because we haven't had as many of those Bills now come to the Private Bills Committee.

MR. JACQUES: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee approve net expenditures of \$177,845 for the legislative committees as shown on the first page 1 of the two page 1s.

MS HALEY: What about Public Accounts?

MR. JACQUES: That comes up later.

3:37

THE CHAIRMAN: No. If you wish that, then you would have to move a motion to amend that for a further \$,000.

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Chairman, I would amend the motion to include up to \$,000 . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Make it \$157,000.

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Chairman, \$157,845 to include the hosting of the 1997 public accounts conference in Edmonton.

THE CHAIRMAN: Did I hear \$157,845 or just \$157,000?

MR. COUTTS: Yes, \$157,845.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm told that we should be dealing with the grand total rather than the net expenditure in this case because of this revenue item that falls after. So I assume Mr. Jacques' motion would then be \$139,045, and then that would be amended by Mr. Coutts to \$159,045.

MR. STELMACH: I just have a question, Mr. Chairman. The forecasts until the end of this fiscal year are \$65,000. So in this budget line we won't see the net expenditures from their year previous, because as we talked about before, we are budgeting for MLA payments, the travel, although sometimes they don't charge for travel if they're on other business. So there is money, I guess, in this line item to accommodate unless you specifically want to identify Public Accounts, but then what if the committee says no?

MS HALEY: Well, then the money goes back. Consolidated budgeting does that to you.

MR. STELMACH: It lapses. Okay.

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Chairman, if we vote on this motion, do we then need to go through each of the different committees individually subsequent to that?

THE CHAIRMAN: No.

MR. BRUSEKER: Oh, that covers them all blanket. Then my question would be: if we have allocated zero for three committees and should those committees for some reason be motivated to move – although none of them has met in my tenure in the Legislative Assembly, particularly Law and Regulations – and actually meet and do something, which would be intriguing to see, how would they do that?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: If I could comment. Two of the committees cannot meet unless they have a motion referring a matter to the particular committee, Law and Regulations being one of them. Actually all of them for that matter, because even Privileges and Elections has to have . . .

MS HALEY: It's a creature of the Legislative Assembly.

MRS. KAMUCHIK: That's right. The committee itself, the chairman, can't say, "We're going to meet," unless they have a matter referred to that particular committee by the Assembly. If such a thing would happen, then we would try to accommodate the meeting within our budget that we've got for the committees. The forecast usually is a little lower, and if the members continue their fiscal restraint when it comes to claiming travel – and it depends how wide the mandate of the committee – we might be able to accommodate. Otherwise we'd have to come in at the very tail end and maybe ask for supplementary estimates if it's grossly overexpended. That's how those committees would be accommodated if they have a matter referred to a particular committee by the House. So the chairman cannot say, "Okay; we're going to call a meeting on these issues."

MR. BRUSEKER: We've heard that many times.

MS HALEY: There you go. I knew you understood.

MR. BRUSEKER: I understand. I don't agree, but I understand.

THE CHAIRMAN: On the amendment proposed by Mr. Coutts, all those in favour, please indicate. Those opposed? Carried. Thank you.

Now we have to deal with the motion as amended. Are there any questions or discussion on the motion as amended? All those in favour, please indicate. Those opposed? Carried.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, in view of the fact that we get into a heavy item the next one around and it's a quarter to 4, I'd move that we adjourn till tomorrow morning. We're due to adjourn at 4 anyhow.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before we adjourn, could we deal with one light item?

MS HALEY: We haven't agreed to adjourn, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, then, would the committee be prepared to let Louise deal with one other item, dealing with the changes to the electoral boundaries?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: Actually it was a special funding requirement last year of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. It appears at the very tail end of your binder, at tab 13. You'll see that now they've reported they have no budget requirements for the 1997-98 fiscal year. You might be interested to know that they had over a two-year period approved a budget of \$586,000. They actually expended \$338,216.14.

THE CHAIRMAN: They returned \$0,000?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: That's right.

MR. JACQUES: Verification, Mr. Chairman. When I had made that motion, Parliamentary Counsel advised you that it was not appropriate to base it on net expenditures, that it had to be on gross expenditures. Hence, the motion was amended. I'm wondering back to all the earlier motions that we passed with regard to everything we've dealt with prior to standing committees of the Legislature. They were all on a net basis where applicable. Now, do we have an issue here? Legislature Library: I'll use that as an example. I think we approved the amount of \$821,728, and that's net.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think we'll review this over the evening and deal with it tomorrow morning. It would appear that one of them will have to be changed. We'll have to be consistent no matter what we do. We will try to get the best advice available for tomorrow morning to be consistent.

That was just a reporting thing?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: That's right.

THE CHAIRMAN: No action is required by the committee?

MRS. KAMUCHIK: No.

3:47

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, on the agenda the next item is MLA Administration. Does the committee wish to deal with MLA administration at this time? Would you like to have the overview given? If you'd like to have the overview introduced, we will invite Ms Breault to be available. Hearing no objection . . .

MS BREAUT: I'll just hand out the new pages from some of the decisions that were made this morning and on the security system.

Starting with, I guess, the overview page, we made a bit of a format change and moved payments to MLAs into our human resource expenses category. So it comes to the top of the list this

year. The biggest change there is the re-establishment allowance of \$1.25 million. There is provision in the Members' Services orders for this: RMSC, M-1, clause 9. In anticipation of an election in '97-98, we have put that into the budget.

MS HALEY: How many people do you anticipate this dealing with?

MS BREault: I'll defer to Cheryl.

MR. BRASSARD: Approximately 30; is it?

MRS. SCARLETT: Approximately. The ones we know plus the unexpected turnover were about 15 percent in addition.

MS BREault: In this particular expense area there was a premium increase for dental coverage and also workers' compensation. Also, as was discussed this morning, concerning the extended benefits plan funding under the status quo scenario, the anticipated costs are \$110,000.

Under operational expenses basically it is status quo with the exception of our telecommunications area. In anticipation, again, of an election or considering that as a prime opportunity to upgrade telephone service to as many constituency offices as we can, we've put in an item concerning a Centrex upgrade for 47 sites. We've been in contact with both Ed Tel and AGT, which are now one big, happy family as Telus anyway, and have quoted that there are 47 locations that could be upgraded. One of the main criteria is being RITE-friendly, so the new telephone system will allow RITE access similar to what we have now. We're certainly looking in the future to upgrading other offices, but this was, according to the technical people there, the sure thing that we could do.

MS HALEY: Where are these 47 offices?

MS BREault: For the most part they are, I believe, in Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Cardston, Highwood – these are on the old boundaries, by the way, just because that was the reference we had at the time – Lethbridge, Pincher Creek, Red Deer, Taber, Wainwright. Those are basically it right now. I'm not sure if that has changed at all, but that was the list they gave us at the time that could be accommodated.

MS HALEY: Do you save almost as much in one year on the lower monthly toll fee as you do on the total cost of the unit?

MR. GANO: If you refer to page 7, it might give you a clearer picture.

MS BREault: We've broken it down. The bulk of the charges are equipment and installation, which are onetime-only charges. I guess the benefits of having a Centrex system is that right now just about all offices have a business telephone system where the software resides in their office. So if they need any upgrades, technicians have to come out to the office and upgrade it; it's an additional cost. A lot of times these electrical boxes take up space if you're in a smaller office. With Centrex, which is the system that the government and the Legislative Assembly Office have, the software basically resides in a large computer maintained by Telus in each of the different areas across the province – I assume the major centres – and if there are any enhancements to the system, they can effect those enhancements, essentially, to anybody on the system. So that is obviously a cost saving that's achieved. We anticipate that it will pay for itself within two years.

It also will allow offices easier access to a number of services like call display, number display, the potential for voice mail. I know that as a security concern call display is becoming more and more prevalent. Usually if an office is interested in call display, we have to order a special box to attach to the phone system they have now, which is borne by the constituency offices, and then the service is paid for on top of that. These telephone sets are able to handle those sorts of services unto themselves.

The other thing that is an advantage is if there is a constituency move. There will be a onetime telephone number change that will have to occur, because there is a different exchange system related to Centrex. Again, because at election time there are a number of moves or changes anyway, that might be a good transition point, when people are creating new letterhead, business cards, and they're going to have to make changes anyway to that information. As I understand it, if a move is made, the telephone number from that point on wouldn't have to change. I believe you'd be able to move it around the city or move it around your area without any trouble, whereas before if you moved to another exchange, you inherently had to change your telephone number.

MS HALEY: Even if you moved down the block. It wasn't just moving to another exchange.

MS BREault: Yeah. So we see that as potentially having greater cost savings than just the telecommunications in terms of, again, printing costs and directory advertising and just allowing members and constituents to have a constant contact number and not being worried about updating it all the time depending on moves, elections, those sorts of vagaries.

Otherwise, it is basically, again, a status quo type budget. We've been able to accommodate a few of the members' needs within the amounts set up and budgeted before in all the other operational budget areas.

3:57

The one thing that Mr. Gano alluded to before under the central agency costs was that we have our insurance handled by insurance risk management through Alberta Treasury. I believe it was about 1994-95 they began assessing us an annual premium for their services and the amount of insurance that they used to cover for our particular risks and assets. We anticipate this cost being 16.5 percent greater than last year. It's been a continuing process of them evaluating different things within the LAO, and it's just becoming a bigger picture. I assume there are insurance increases that they are incurring also. So we're anticipating an increased cost there. It's a onetime premium annually levied.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wickman, followed by Mr. Brassard.

MR. WICKMAN: No. My question's been answered. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Oh, sorry. Mr. Brassard followed by Mr. Bruseker.

MR. BRASSARD: I'm going to move acceptance of the budget for MLA administration of \$14,171,775.

MR. JACQUES: That's net.

MS HALEY: You betcha. That's the bottom line.



THE CHAIRMAN: Whatever it's supposed to be.

MS HALEY: I don't think that's going to work.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, total expenditures of \$14,172,275.

MS HALEY: How about you move both of them; that way we're covered.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, we'll adjust all of these tomorrow after we go over them.

MR. BRASSARD: That's my motion, anyway, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: You're moving the appropriate . . .

MR. WICKMAN: We know your intent, Roy. That's the main thing.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Bruseker.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just going back to that page 7 on telecommunication expenditures. It seems that we've really adopted the philosophy – and I agree with it – that the key role of an MLA is communication with their constituents, and we have all kinds of allowances for various types of phone connections: residential, constituency offices, cell phones, and so on. I have a fax machine in my constituency office, and I imagine most MLAs do, but we have to pay that out of our constituency budget. What would the cost implication be to include under this telecommunications heading 83 fax lines into 83 constituency offices?

MS BREault: Well, the fax line costs vary across the province. For instance, in Calgary they're averaging about \$41 per month per line.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yes, which is a significant cost.

MS BREault: With the changes to CRTC price rulings and things like that I'm not sure I could anticipate just exactly what the cost would be. The majority of our offices now have fax machines, so I would think we're looking at least at 70 offices times \$40, \$45.

MR. BRUSEKER: Times 12.

MS BREault: Times 12, yes. Just wish my math skills were better.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, presumably the machines are already purchased out of the constituency budget. I mean, that's what I did in my office. I purchased a fax machine out of my constituency allowance. You're talking roughly \$40 a month, \$500.

MS BREault: At \$45 for 70 offices for a year it would be \$37,800 approximately.

MR. BRUSEKER: I guess, Mr. Chairman, the reason I raise that at this point is – and I don't know what the situation is even like in other constituency offices. Under the total motion we also look at members' services allowances: constituency, communication, and promotional allowances. I know that I've got a great couple of women who work in my constituency office who haven't seen an increase in pay in some time. I expect that most of us feel that way

about our constituency office people. The budgets are getting tighter with respect to rental accommodation, the cost of renting a constituency office, and our promotional allowances are also a stand-pat budget. I look at the stand-pat proposal here. I guess I'd like to be able to offer my constituency people a little bit of an incentive, and this might be one possibility that we could free up a little bit of cash if we could somehow do that, so I raise that as an issue. I don't want to make an amendment at this point because I don't have a figure that would make sense to introduce at this point in time, but I did want to raise it as a concern that I think some of our constituency folks have helped out in toeing the line and toeing the cost benefits, and I think we should give some consideration to them in the future. So I would like to see some consideration given to that for a future meeting of the Members' Services Committee.

THE CHAIRMAN: Further? Is the committee ready for the question? All those in favour of the motion proposed by Mr. Brassard, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

Thank you, Ms Breault.

It is now past the advertised adjournment time. Does the committee wish to continue?

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, one quick motion and we can adopt 10, 11, and 12, because that's not controversial at all. That's on a fixed formula. It is.

THE CHAIRMAN: Caucus Budgets?

MR. WICKMAN: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Item (k). That seems to be rather mechanical, all right.

MR. WICKMAN: I'll move that budgets for the government members' services, the Official Opposition, and independent, although there are no independents, be approved as submitted.

THE CHAIRMAN: The committee has heard that motion. Is the committee ready for the question on that motion? All those in favour of Mr. Wickman's motion, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

MR. SEVERTSON: We have to do the independent.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, the independent was included.

MR. SEVERTSON: It was included? Okay. Sorry.

MR. BRASSARD: I would move that we adjourn.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Brassard moves that the committee be now adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9:30. All those in favour of that motion, please indicate. Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 4:04 p.m.]

