

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

9:30 a.m.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, ladies and gentlemen, when we adjourned yesterday afternoon, we had completed items 1 through 5 with the exception of 5(c), Human Resource Services, which did not receive full consideration yesterday. Perhaps the chair could call upon Mrs. Scarlett to get us back on where we were when we left.

MRS. SCARLETT: Good morning. We handed out three sheets to you this morning to replace inserts in the human resource services branch budget. One is the revised overview, one is the revised performance measures, and thirdly, the summary: page 1, summary budget estimates.

Basically, the human resource budget this year, again to address it in two components – in human resource expenses you'll notice that the budget increase is reflective of two major components. The one component is the proposed pay-for-performance program. So the \$80,000 being requested is in that part of the budget and, as well, an increase of overall human resource requirements reflecting an increase from 3.6 staff-years to 4.6 staff-years. This is a result of a transfer from the public information branch's budget.

Under operational expenses there's a large percentage increase. This is reflective of two proposed budgets that are reflecting on the human resource budget, that being the ergonomics project that's been approved at \$120,000 and, as well, the outplacement package for staff, which has been approved at \$8,500. The other cost increases there then are direct operational costs reflecting actual costs of doing business, primarily in the areas of, again, the increase in telecommunications tied to the phone system, advertising, and some training.

In terms of the goals for human resource services, primary goals are continuation of the in-house pay system that has been implemented and enhancements of the system. One of the prime objectives for the next year is to be able to then go and expand the abilities and flexibility of the system into additional personal pay choices, detailed reporting, and on-line entry of information such as time sheets and attendance from source.

Other goals. We see ourselves as human resource experts in the field and, with the new technology, as a result are actively involved in the human resource community and the pay communities to make sure that we're right on top of leading developments and changes as they relate to compensation, administration, pay processing, liaisons with Rev Canada to ensure that our staff and our members are paid appropriately.

We're looking at enhancing our systems and procedures, developing tools to address the needs of retiring members and staff and new members of staff as a result of the upcoming election. A spin-off of that is the development of an orientation program for members, caucus, and constituency staff.

Again, we're looking at the development of an enhanced extended benefits option administrative system to help us more easily process the paper and the flows that happen as well, as the result of taking care of the retired members on EBO.

As always, we are very interested in promoting the identity of the LAO, setting an example as a leader amongst Legislatures. We're very interested, as already discussed, in terms of occupational health and safety and workers' compensation issues, and we'll be proceeding with the ergonomic work site project.

We also provide total human resource services to the offices of the Information and Privacy Commissioner and the Ethics Commissioner.

So that's an overview as to our major goals, performance

measures – already talked about – and enhanced features of the new pay system.

We also are the prime contact for the public and receive many referrals in terms of any information relative to MLA remuneration and benefits. Those calls come to our office, and we take pride in being able to provide the public with the appropriate information. We want to make sure that our systems and our work with members and staff ensure that all staff and members are treated in a fair and consistent manner. As a result, the budget that's being presented under page 1 as a summary reflects 4.6 staff-years, reflects moneys that were spoken about in terms of pay for performance.

Under operational expenses again the primary items there are related to the \$120,000 for the ergonomic project, and "Other Labour & Services" refers to the dollars approved for outplacement.

MR. WICKMAN: Just a couple of questions, Cheryl. In your overview you made reference – you used the term a couple of times at least – to things that were previously approved; in other words, that we've committed ourselves to. We've committed ourselves to the \$121,000 as a result of yesterday's decision; have we not, basically?

Secondly, labour and services, \$8,500. You made reference to that being approved. What specifically was that again?

MRS. SCARLETT: That was the decision relative to offering outplacement group sessions to staff after the election to assist them in their transition.

MR. WICKMAN: Okay. Are there any of these items that have a significant increase that have not already been approved in one of the other budgets?

MRS. SCARLETT: The outstanding item of pay for performance still has not been decided on.

MR. WICKMAN: Oh, yeah; right. The \$80,000. Okay. Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Ms Haley.

MR. WICKMAN: Are we looking for a motion? Go ahead.

MS HALEY: I'm not looking at a motion yet. I wanted to highlight two points on this page that I'm personally having a problem with. The first one is the pay for performance. I'm not sure that this is the right time to be moving ahead with things like this.

The other one is an item that we did discuss yesterday, and that was the office furniture purchase. I just want to highlight again that I'm very uncomfortable with that \$121,000 in there. I'm just not sure that we can afford to do this. I'll just throw it out for discussion.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, I've a few questions with respect to the \$120,000 for office equipment. This is the ergonomic review. Our first focus is on our legislative offices here.

MRS. SCARLETT: The \$120,000 is representative of \$60,000 to address 20 workstations within the Leg. Assembly Office. The support branch is under the Clerk. The other \$60,000 is intended to address approximately 20 workstations within caucus and constituencies.

MR. STELMACH: So how many workstations would you have now, Cheryl, in the Leg. Assembly Office?

MRS. SCARLETT: Approximately 60 workstations.

MR. STELMACH: So that means that you wouldn't be able to do yours totally for at least three years?

MRS. SCARLETT: Correct. The plan was a three-year plan in terms of the bigger issue of assessing and addressing the ergonomic needs, starting with the higher needs as identified.

MR. STELMACH: Okay. Quite frankly, in assessing our own caucus ergonomic needs I guess, if you were to base that on the amount of time lost due to some injury as a result of, you know, working with a computer, it's probably not as large as some of the incidents that were reported in the information package here in your operation. I'm just wondering where the dollars would be spent more wisely; looking after caucus offices at the same rate as Legislative Assembly offices, or would it be more prudent to concentrate on Legislative Assembly offices first and then proceed with caucus offices?

9:40

MRS. SCARLETT: Our responsibility for providing safe work environments is for all LAO staff and members as well, so the focus was being able to have the flexibility to take that. The three-year plan outlined not only just the fact that part of the solution is acquisition of furniture but also creating teams and those teams going back to the staff to make them aware, to help them educate themselves and take responsibility for working smartly, and also for making sure that the employer can take and address it in bits and pieces, because again we're not looking at total modular sets of furniture for those workstations that are not set up appropriately. The concern is that although there may not be significant injuries that are here on the table right now, those things take a while to develop, so someone in either caucus or in a constituency office may be set up in a way that the injury is not reflected now but three months down the line may show itself, and we will need to deal with that.

Twenty workstations over a split between two caucuses and 83 constituency offices do not go very far, but it was just offered up as a start in terms of the total process.

MR. STELMACH: I guess my question is, number one: how do you determine which 20 you start with? Number two, I think the issue that first and foremost has come up in discussions is that our primary focus is on the operation side. You know, if the computers are down – they have to run, because if they don't run, it's time wasted, especially when we're in session. If we tie ourselves to the three-year plan, have we allowed ourselves enough room to move next year and the year after to ensure that their equipment is upgraded? That, I believe, is the key here.

The last question. The \$120,000 is part of the three-year plan, but do you have to come back next year for another \$120,000?

MRS. SCARLETT: No.

MR. STELMACH: Okay. The only problem is that if you do 13 offices, let's say, in our caucus, and we – whoever is on the next Members' Services Committee – don't approve the next \$120,000, then you'll have some new and possibly some old. I'm just looking ahead. It's a commitment, really, of approximately \$360,000, because I think in some ways although your numbers can be pretty firm, we really don't know what the costs are. We may save some money, or it might even be more. It all depends.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, Mr. Chairman, if we're going to open this up for discussion all over again, I'd like to reiterate my comments of yesterday, that I'd be far more comfortable if I had a plan in front of me knowing where our hot spots or weak spots were in the system, where furniture was in the greatest need, and we could address that on kind of a priority basis. I think we all agree that we don't want our staff working in unsafe or stressful conditions. Certainly with the change in technology and everything, there's no question that some upgrading needs to take place, but I'd be far more comfortable if I had a plan of action in front of me that could clearly identify where the greatest needs were and how we were going to address them on a progressive basis and in an orderly fashion.

DR. McNEIL: I think there was a plan presented yesterday, and we reached a decision on it. Part of that plan relates to a front-end process that identifies the priorities, that involves using outside expertise where necessary but identifies the priorities within the context of the plan that was presented yesterday. I think what we said yesterday and what I reiterate today is that we have problems, and we've got to start dealing with them. I don't think we can wait. Maybe the rate of dealing with them has to change; that's up to the committee. But there is no doubt in my mind that the problems have to be addressed. That's why we presented the three-year plan, with a process enunciated in that plan to identify priorities and focus initially in the first year on the top priorities and then in subsequent years, as we learn more, to update all our equipment. The plan is there. We can't put on the table today: these are the top 20 priorities. All we can say is, "Here's the process which we are going to use to identify those top 20 priorities in the constituency and caucus" and proceed from there.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I guess the first thing I want is a ruling here as we didn't make a decision yesterday on this. Is it reopened to wide-open discussion?

THE CHAIRMAN: That may be one of the difficulties with this whole process, but we are faced with the debate and decision on this particular branch's budget. The chair feels that all items that appear in this particular budget, that hasn't been dealt with yet, are germane to this discussion.

MR. WICKMAN: That's fine, Mr. Chairman. I accept that. Based on the assumption that we're going to hold to the decision made yesterday, I don't have any difficulty with a three-year process in terms of approval. It's really not that unusual. I've seen it happen before with computers, where we've undertaken that we're going to equip every constituency office over a period of time with a certain type of computer, and that's normally held. I don't think the next Members' Services is going to change things. In fact, it appears there may be greater recognition that it should be speeded up, not reduced.

I can't see the administration having any difficulty working in conjunction with the chairman's office and the caucus offices in determining a priority. When I go through our caucus office, it isn't difficult to identify which of the staff are sitting there all day long just pounding away on those computers. I assume that would have to be their priority, in terms of improving that workstation. Constituency offices aren't so bad, because there's such a variety of functions that take place. The staff there aren't just pounding away on keys all day. Anyhow, I think it was a good decision yesterday, and I stand by it.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, a question to our Clerk. Dr.

McNeil, do you have the room to move though? Let's say that we really get hit with a high maintenance cost in the first year and the budgets we have allocated may not be sufficient to operate the computers. I suspect that as time wears on, some of our equipment becomes outdated and has been maintained a number of times and may be running out of its full use. Can you move some from the components here, the line budget of \$120,000, directly for the office equipment purchase and massage that around and make sure the computers are working so that we put some priority on making sure that equipment is working, period?

DR. McNEIL: I think that relates to the information systems budget. I think that question was addressed yesterday. Given the decision the committee made yesterday, I don't see a particular concern in that area.

MR. STELMACH: Okay. So you feel you have enough dollars there?

DR. McNEIL: Definitely. There are a lot more long-term potential problems that we face in not addressing this ergonomic problem. Every employer's facing it, and other offices in the Legislative Assembly have addressed this as well.

THE CHAIRMAN: I guess in that connection, if the committee is interested in the order of magnitude, the Auditor General's office is about 50 percent or less of the staff of the Legislative Assembly Office.

DR. McNEIL: No. I'd say it is 25 percent of the total staff complement of the Legislative Assembly operation.

THE CHAIRMAN: The Auditor General's overall global budget for this is about double what the three-year program is. So I would suggest that this is a fairly modest approach.

9:50

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, you almost force me to make a comment on the \$700,000 expenditure. You know, I don't know what their needs are, but definitely there are situations in the Leg. here that should be addressed in terms of the furniture. Let's proceed from there. I'm just making it known that once we start the process this year, you're pretty well tying yourself to \$120,000 every year for the next three years, because you can't just stop midway with a portion of your staff having maybe the newest, the latest modern furniture. This isn't the equipment; we're talking about the furniture. Besides, it'll probably take away from the decor of some of the offices if some have new furniture and some don't. So we have to really put our heads around it. But I'm perfectly satisfied with the answers.

MR. SEVERTSON: I can't remember from yesterday. Could the staff tell me: if Leg. offices are the most critical point and caucus or constituency offices aren't as important, are we going the wrong way when we split it half and half, or should we be doing all the most critical, no matter where they are, instead of going \$60,000, \$60,000?

MRS. SCARLETT: I believe that in terms of forming the committees, we can sit down and then do the assessments of all of our work sites and identify where the priorities are, that out of that process will come a clearer reflection of whether we're talking about 20 and 20 or 15 and 25. I don't know the numbers. I know that in our area

of the Leg. Assembly Office, 20 at this point in terms of high-potential, high-risk areas is not unreasonable. I haven't been out to do any kinds of visits to constituency offices, and I am aware that in caucuses they're not all set up like they should be.

I don't believe that what we're asking for in the first year in doing an assessment probably addresses all of those issues, but I see it as a start in terms of prompting the education, making staff more aware. Some of the quick and immediate solutions are through awareness. They can make some minor modifications that have no cost or little cost; we might be able to address them. We're not, again, looking to get all new furniture and make the office look nice and have it all match. But when there is a need identified in terms of having a computer table or having a proper chair or making sure that the match of pieces at least comes out to the right level so that the body is positioned properly, we can't even get those pieces.

MR. SEVERTSON: My question was whether we should be splitting the budget \$60,000, \$60,000.

DR. McNEIL: I think we'd probably be better off not to say a 50-50 split and just identify the total sum, and we'll address the priorities wherever they may be.

MR. SEVERTSON: That was my question.

DR. McNEIL: That was the question, and the answer to that is it's probably better not to split it but to allocate the money for that purpose, and the process will determine what the priorities are.

MR. STELMACH: That's right. You have the block of funds there. Then spend it prudently and address the real needs as opposed to trying to equalize, because it's pretty difficult.

DR. McNEIL: Yeah. The thing is, you know, that \$60,000 to the caucuses and constituency offices is a smaller proportion given the total population of the caucuses and constituency offices.

MR. SEVERTSON: But they've got a different workload.

DR. McNEIL: Agreed. A different type of workload and so on.

MR. HENRY: I just wanted to point out a couple of things. I agree with Mr. Stelmach in that we are essentially morally committed, this committee, to the three-year plan. For those of us who won't be here or on the committee next time, I hope it does continue.

Two other points. Sometimes we get into problems, and we do it to ourselves all the time. When we first dealt with the EDP management plan in committee, Dr. McNeil, you'll remember, back in '88 or '89, we talked about furniture, needing to purchase computers and having the right or wrong furniture and whatnot, but we were always conscious of dollars. Maybe that's another one of those lessons for us: when we want to do something, we should do it right. We should maybe have had that. But, you know, we were all part of that decision at that point.

The last thing I just wanted to put on the table is that I think sometimes we get hung up because it's in an office equipment line item. This is not office equipment like if Cheryl Scarlett doesn't like her desk, that it's kind of scratched and she needs a new desk, or the upholstery's a bit old. This is an occupational health and safety expenditure. It's in the same vein, I view, as when public works came into the Annex a few years ago and replaced all the asbestos insulation. It's the same kind of expenditure. I think the staff should be commended for coming in with such a low figure, quite frankly.

If we were really going to do this right and really take care of the employees who work very hard for us, whether they be in the constituency, caucus, or in the Leg. offices itself, that would be many times that. So I think we should certainly support it and go ahead with the plan.

THE CHAIRMAN: Have we got a motion?

MR. JACQUES: Mr. Chairman, I would like to move that the budget for the human resource services be approved in the amount of \$371,849. Speaking to that, that reflects the total expenditure of \$451,849 shown on the page less the \$80,000 pay for performance.

THE CHAIRMAN: There's a motion before the committee. Is there any discussion or comments on the motion before calling the question?

MR. HENRY: I understand the mover, and I understand why he would like to remove that \$80,000. I understand it's because the government has a productivity program in place. I think we need to reiterate why we've borrowed from government departments from time to time. The Leg. Assembly is not a government department, and there are times when government departments have benefited and the Leg. Assembly hasn't benefited. We just finished dealing with ergonomic furniture for computer stations and whatnot. I believe the LAO was one of the last departments, if I can call it a department, of government to get into EDP management systems. So while we borrow from government departments, I don't think we can automatically transfer.

I'm uncomfortable. There have been precedents set in fully provincial government funded organizations where in a current year a onetime bonus, if I can call it that, or an incentive is given across the board to all employees. I'm not sure if the Leg. Assembly staff is aware of it, but there are other public institutions who have done exactly what is being proposed here with the \$80,000: across-the-board onetime payments.

In my experience of having been on both sides of the table, of being a policymaker and an administrator, it seems to me that if you agree in principle that you should reward people individually or collectively for a job well done over and above the normal call of service, when you get into how you do that, you need to depend on the experts that you hire to look at those kinds of items for you.

So I'm uncomfortable with voting for \$371,000. Our administration has come to us and I think provided a rationale for the pay for performance, and from what I understand, it's not in line with the policy in provincial government departments because there's a different system there. That has been looked at, I understand, by our administration, and the administration has said that because of the circumstance here that particular government policy does not apply, and I think we should take the advice of our staff.

10:00

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, I still have the same unease about this particular item that I expressed yesterday, and it stems from several reasons. One is that the employees here at the LAO are doing an excellent job, so I don't want this to be construed as a criticism; far be it from me. I wish I could give you a 10 percent increase. They have taken a 5 percent cut like all other civil servants and semi civil servants, and I just don't like the idea of us coming up with a device to reward these people, much as they've earned it, while there are many of us who haven't got that possibility at all. So I think the best thing we could do for the LAO people is to plead with the government for a hefty increase for all these

people.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm going to move an amendment to the motion, get it on the table for debate, and the amendment is to increase the \$371,000 to \$411,849. Speaking to this, what it is really is a compromise, a saw-off, because I perceive that the direction we're going, we're going to lose the \$80,000. We're going to lose that whole concept of pay for performance. Forty thousand is only half as good, but it's better than nothing, I guess. At least it does give the administration some opportunity for reward.

I see our staff as different than the constituency staff. In my constituency office at the end of the year – last year, for example, I said to Susan and Stacey: "Look, you guys did good. Despite rent increases, despite this, despite that, we still came in under budget." I didn't have to reach into my own pocket and subsidize my constituency office, so they each got a reward or a performance bonus or whatever you want to call it of \$500. I know several constituency offices will do that type of thing, and there's nothing wrong with it.

Our staff here are not unionized. They don't have a collective bargaining unit to go to bat for them. It's based on the decisions that we make. I realize that they're going to benefit by any decisions that are made in terms of negotiations with the unions, but the unions do have that option of attempting to negotiate for productivity reward. They have various options that they can bargain. So I think it's our responsibility to protect our employees. They've done a good job, and I think they're very deserving.

MR. SEVERTSON: Mr. Chairman, I'm not speaking on the amendment. I just want to ask a question of Mr. Henry. He said that other areas have done this type of a program right across the board. I was wondering if he could share with me and the committee what areas they are.

MR. HENRY: The city of Edmonton, Grant MacEwan College. I think there are a couple of other colleges, and I understand one of the universities is considering it. Okay? That is in the current fiscal year, and as I understand it in both situations that I'm aware of, the way it was termed by management was that it had been a difficult three years of reductions, and employees had contributed substantially to achieving that while not only maintaining but enhancing services to the public. This was a way for the agency or the organization to say thank you, and it was a onetime, lump-sum payment.

MR. SEVERTSON: Grant MacEwan, the city, and . . .

MR. HENRY: And I'm aware of one university. I forget which one, but I know one is considering it.

DR. McNEIL: There are two issues here. There's voting money in next year's budget for it, and then there's the whole principle of doing this. One alternative in terms of not having to allocate funds in next year's budget but yet accomplish this objective is to approve the use of any savings up to a certain limit that we can achieve in this year's budget within our LAO budget alone, not including MLA administration and so on, for that purpose. In other words, you're rewarding the productivity, if you will, from those savings that might be achieved within this year's budget. So that obviates the need to vote \$80,000 or \$40,000 or nothing in next year's budget, but you still face the issue of: do you want to approve the principle of this kind of program?

The difference in the principle of what we're suggesting here

compared to the productivity plus program is that we're saying that because of the way we approached productivity improvement and the other circumstances we mentioned yesterday, we feel at this point in time that it's appropriate to reward the team. I think we need to in the long run reward the team and recognize individual contribution. I don't think you can do one or the other; I think you have to do both. At this point in time, because everybody has absorbed the responsibility to do more with less, I think our proposal is based on rewarding the team. Now we're suggesting you might want to consider, first of all, if you believe in that principle of rewarding the team, applying that concept against any savings we might realize out of this year's budget. So that removes one issue, but you still have to deal with the other.

MR. HENRY: With respect to Dr. McNeil, I appreciate the effort and the alternative. In fact, I think it's six of one and half a dozen of the other: whether it's taken at the end of March for a saving for this year and given as a reward to the employees or whether it's done after April 1. If the money is left over this year and not used, it can go back to Treasury and comes out of next year's, so it's still the same expenditure.

Really, I have a question for those who question this, who perhaps believe we should follow the model used by government departments. If I'm not mistaken, the public sector union – I'm talking about AUPE probably – contracts are up for negotiation in the next fiscal year. Negotiations are going on now. One of the things that would be on the table, of course, is the return of the 5 percent that was reduced back in '93-94. So my question – and I'm not asking for sort of a prediction – for whoever would like to take it on: if the government would settle with their employees and give them back that 5 percent, would that be seen as a precedent for the LAO? I mean, if we're going to use one measure, in terms of the productivity plus program, would we not use the same kind of rationale with regard to salaries? I guess the question that that begs is: is this an issue of timing? If we looked at it in April or May, when hopefully the public sector union will have settled, would there be a different view? This is for anybody who wants to take that on.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure we can gauge that now, but I would certainly feel a lot happier about having the LAO share in an increase, yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anything further? Is the committee ready for the question on the amendment? All those in favour of the amendment proposed by Mr. Wickman to revise the total expenditure figure for this item, Legislative Assembly human resource services, to \$411,849, please indicate. Those opposed? The amendment is defeated.

Any further questions or comments on the main motion?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, is there a way in which we can now lay that out? Can we do anything so that if indeed there is going to be an increase in the public sector unions . . .

MR. WICKMAN: Duco, it's done automatically. It's automatically extended; is it not?

MR. HENRY: No.

MR. WICKMAN: No?

MR. HENRY: It has to come back to this table.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Is there a way in which we can make sure that the old members can share in that immediately?

THE CHAIRMAN: I don't think so, not without some action taken by this committee.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Unless we set money aside, eh?

DR. McNEIL: In our budget we did not make any assumptions about what was going to happen with respect to the bargaining rate. Our bottom line was sort of status quo. We can't deal with hypotheticals in terms of the budget; it's either there or it's not.

10:10

MR. BRUSEKER: Mr. Chairman, the concept of rewarding pay for performance I think is a good concept. Where I'm having a little difficulty with the \$80,000 in this budget is putting it in a line item. I think what Mr. Wickman talked about, that some of us in our constituency offices will provide a bonus at the year-end if such moneys are available, is an interesting mechanism that we can do, but it depends upon how the year goes. Now, I'm wondering if there's a possibility, sort of what I heard Dr. McNeil saying, of allowing that principle to occur without putting a specific line item in the budget to address pay for performance. Is that a possibility? Can we direct that as a policy statement out of this committee? If Mr. Jacques' motion passes at \$371,000 and change, could we then make a motion saying that if there is some saving that has been realized over the course of the year, up to a certain amount could be used as pay for performance?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, I imagine an amendment could be made to this motion adding those words, that any surplus remaining in the 1996-97 budget up to a certain figure would be made available for pay for performance on the basis suggested by the administration.

MR. BRUSEKER: Could I make that amendment, then, that the motion be \$371,000 . . .

DR. McNEIL: I think those are two separate issues.

MR. BRUSEKER: Or would it be a separate . . .

DR. McNEIL: You vote this motion and then, you know, that deals with the money.

MR. SEVERTSON: The one is '97-98, and the one the chairman mentioned was '96-97.

MR. BRUSEKER: Okay.

MR. SEVERTSON: So they're two different motions.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair stands corrected.

MR. BRUSEKER: I was following your lead, Mr. Chairman, but okay, that's fine too.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any further comments before we call Mr. Jacques' motion? Hearing none, all those in favour of the motion proposed by Mr. Jacques, that the total expenditure figure for Legislative Assembly human resource services be \$371,849, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

Mr. Bruseker, would you like to attempt another motion?

MR. BRUSEKER: Certainly, Mr. Chairman. Then I would make the

motion that if savings in the total Legislative Assembly Office budget are realized in the next fiscal year, then up to . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: The current fiscal year?

MR. BRUSEKER: Oh. The current fiscal year, '96-97. The \$80,000 is for the next year. So I'm talking about next year. I'm talking about the '97-98 fiscal year.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no. The principle was that if there was money saved this year, that money would be available for the staff in this fiscal year.

MR. BRUSEKER: But it's in '97-98.

THE CHAIRMAN: No. The chair suggested that it was open for the committee to consider the remnants of the current year.

MR. BRUSEKER: Oh, the current fiscal year, '96-97. Okay. The current fiscal year, then, up to a maximum of \$80,000. If there are savings in the total Legislative Assembly budget realized in the 1996-97 fiscal year, up to a maximum of \$80,000 could be used as a reward pay for performance.

THE CHAIRMAN: Now, does that correctly describe the budget we're talking about? Because you didn't mention it. We wouldn't put the MLA administration . . .

DR. McNEIL: I wouldn't say "the total Legislative Assembly budget." I said the Legislative Assembly Office budget as is outlined in the . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah. It's a \$5 million figure or so; isn't it? I don't have the figure right in front of me.

THE CHAIRMAN: We should get the proper description of the budget we're talking about for that motion.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, out of the \$4,679,986, the top one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight categories, because obviously it wouldn't come out of any of the government members' or Official Opposition's services. So the first subtotal, \$4,679,986: if there are savings in there, up to a maximum of \$80,000 could be used for pay for performance.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay; that's the motion.

MR. JACQUES: Mr. Chairman, I would speak against the motion. The concept of performance and merit increases, particularly performance increases, is one that had been alluded to at this table in terms of the philosophy involved and certainly as it relates to the LA staff. Nobody is arguing with the issue in terms of the principle. I think the concept of tying something into a budget and saying, "Well, if you underspend your budget, you can therefore spend it in other areas" is so fundamentally wrong in the sense of prudent management, fiscal management, and in terms of even performance measures.

It's interesting, too, if you look at the '96-97 forecast. The difference is \$60,000 lower than the '96-97 estimate, which is what Mr. Bruseker is referring to. When we went through the discussion yesterday and in response to several questions that I had asked on various departments on the '96-97 forecast in terms of its relationship to the '96-97 estimate, in several cases the answer given was,

"Well, we know that the number we're showing is low, that it's going to indeed be higher and in fact, in a couple of cases, very substantially." I mean, even with all due regard to what the intent of the motion is, we know at this point in time that it's a nonstarter. In other words, the '96-97 forecast as a result of yesterday's deliberations and discussion is going to be more than the '96-97 estimate. Let's not try to fool ourselves or fool some people by saying that there's something on the table there that could be handled.

So for all of those reasons I would speak against the motion.

DR. McNEIL: Just in terms of the member's first point, the productivity plus program was based on the principle of allocating savings from the present fiscal year's budget to productivity pay. As a matter of fact, one of the legislative officers used \$104,000 of savings for that purpose. You know, I don't see where this in principle differs from what other officers of the Legislature have done in applying those funds for that purpose.

MR. SEVERTSON: Again, I guess more of a question for information. Maybe, David, you can tell me: what percentage of the savings were they allowed to use for the productivity plus? It wasn't 100 percent. That's the only one I'm familiar with.

DR. McNEIL: Oh, no, no. I think it was . . .

MR. SEVERTSON: Twenty percent or something. I'm not sure myself. It wasn't 100 percent.

DR. McNEIL: No. Definitely not. Oh, no.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr. Jacques.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you. Well, that was one of the points I was going to make in reply to the comments by the Clerk. First of all, there are, as you know, some restrictions in terms of the formula that can be used under productivity plus. Equally important, I think, is that it is tied to very specific and measurable performance items. In other words, it's not based on what the total budget is in the department. It has to go right down to the level of the project that's involved, with a demonstrated, clearly accountable method that is consistent for identifying those savings. It is not part of the budget. I mean, there's no reward for meeting your budget or even being below the budget if indeed those are the normal, if you like, circumstances that occur.

To suggest that the motion was along similar lines, I would not accept that argument.

THE CHAIRMAN: Further?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, I believe all members around this table agree that we're certainly blessed with a Leg. Assembly staff that's skilled and talented and has come through a very difficult period of time, especially the first time we sat around this table right after the election trying to pare down the budget by at least 20 percent. There is no doubt that various members of staff have sacrificed not only salary but the extra time that they put in to reach the savings that we have appreciated over the last three years. I see no reason why — our staff here in the Legislative Assembly will not be treated any differently than other government staff in the province. I would say let's wait to see the results towards the end of this fiscal year. We will have a session this coming year, in 1997. Let's revisit it. I don't know what the results of the discussions and

the negotiations will be, but we would certainly like to extend that to our Legislative Assembly staff, and I would just leave it as it is until we see what develops over the winter months and into spring.

10:20

DR. McNEIL: Just another point, too, is that the Legislative Assembly staff are usually linked with the nonbargaining unit and management staff of government. We're not specifically tied into the union and never have been in the union negotiations.

MR. HENRY: So we're now prompting a unionization attempt.

DR. McNEIL: You can't, under the Legislative Assembly.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is the Assembly ready for the question on Mr. Bruseker's motion? All those in favour, please indicate. All those opposed? The motion fails.

Thank you very much. That concludes the human . . .
Oh. Mrs. Scarlett.

MRS. SCARLETT: I'd like to just thank the committee for the many times that they've expressed and acknowledged and recognized the efforts of all the LAO staff. As important as monetary rewards are, the nonmonetary rewards and your comments will be passed back to the staff.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before we proceed to follow-up items on our agenda, there was some discussion yesterday about gross and net estimates. Just to clarify the situation, the chair feels that perhaps we should revisit the votes for the public information branch, House services, the Library, committees, and MLA administration to do both the gross and the net figures. The chair will perhaps provide the motion for the committee so that we can dispose of those with both gross and net figures. The chair has them here. Is the committee agreeable to that process just so there's no mistake about what we're doing?

The public information branch: the gross expenditure proposed is \$1,364,523. The net figure is \$1,245,723. Does the committee concur in approving those figures for the fiscal year 1997-98?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, would someone move that? Mr. Van Binsbergen. All those in favour, please indicate. Opposed? Carried.

The figures for House services. Gross, \$1,040,477. The net is \$1,040,377. Mr. Brassard moves those figures. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

The Library. The gross figure is \$832,820. The net is \$821,782. Mr. Severtson moves that this committee approve those spending figures. All those in favour, indicate please. Thank you. Opposed? Carried.

Committees. Gross expenditure, \$159,045. Net – I don't know how this happens – is \$557,840. That can't be correct. We'll come back to committees.

MLA administration: gross \$14,172,275, net \$14,171,775. Mr. Coutts moves. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Now we'll go back to committees. The gross figure is \$159,045; the net is \$157,845. Mr. Henry moves. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Chairman, could you just clarify those numbers

again on committees.

MRS. DACYSHYN: I have them here.

MR. COUTTS: No. Could you just repeat what you said?

THE CHAIRMAN: Gross \$159,045, net \$157,845. Is that satisfactory?

MR. COUTTS: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, members of the committee, there's one final item on the budget. It is the overall consolidated figures for the entire operation, and the chair would therefore ask for a motion to approve the gross spending, \$22,386,620, with a net total of \$22,254,982. Mr. Brassard moves. All those in favour? Those opposed? Carried. Thank you.

Now we have Dr. Garrison at the table to give us the overview on the follow-up item concerning the cost of gift shop operation. Dr. Garrison.

10:30

DR. GARRISON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At the committee's budget meeting last year a question was raised as to what the operating cost of the gift shop was in relation to the income of the shop. I've done a little table here under your tab 6A basically to outline the various figures since the gift shop has been in operation, since 1994. I don't know if I need to go over the background information. [interjection] Okay. I've been told I don't need to, so maybe I should just leave it at that. If anybody has questions about it, I'd be glad to entertain them and offer an answer as best I can.

THE CHAIRMAN: The item is titled Cost of Gift Shop Operation. Apparently now there is no cost; there's a profit. You'd maybe like to share that for the record.

DR. GARRISON: Okay. I guess it means there's a negative cost. Well, I guess it basically indicates that there has been a modest profit of around \$9,000 on a gross income of \$163,000. That of course subtracts from the gross sales the cost of the items sold and the approximate cost of the staff involved in operating the gift shop, ordering the materials, shipping and handling, and that sort of thing.

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to just offer a comment and congratulations to Dr. Garrison for turning what I thought at the time was a potential loss operation into a not only modestly profitable but a very helpful situation. I have had a lot of comments about the selection of gifts and not only about that but about the cordiality in the way the staff have handled any of the students and staff from my constituency schools and so on that had been up. So I'd like to congratulate you and your staff, Dr. Garrison. I'd be uncomfortable if the profit was very large in this area because I don't think that's the idea of it. It's to try to disseminate as many artifacts and as much information as we can about the Legislative Assembly and what we do. I think you're right on the money, and I congratulate you.

DR. GARRISON: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further questions or comments?

MR. WICKMAN: I'll move the report as information.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any debate on that motion? All those in favour? Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

Next is item 6(b), Whether WCB Rebates can be included in LAO Budgeting Process.

MRS. SCARLETT: Just a follow-up to a question that was asked last year about the issue of WCB rebates for 1995. The Legislative Assembly received a rebate in the amount of \$3,800. Basically, that \$3,800 has been put back into the system, reflecting cost recovery and to defer future costs in terms of the costs of solutions related to work injuries and as well towards education and just making sure that within the office the occupational health and safety concerns are addressed. This coming year we are going to have a premium increase from .20 to .21. As well, given our experience to date and the number of work compensation injuries that have happened on the job, we have no guarantee that those premiums are going to hold down there. If you take that amount of money, that basically works out to a cost recovery equivalent to about \$8 per Leg. Assembly employee and member.

MR. BRASSARD: Given that so many of the rates with WCB have come down, do you see the fact that ours are increasing as significant? Is it representative of the injuries on the job? To what do you attribute the increase?

MRS. SCARLETT: The rate increase projected for this coming year is for the total group that we fall into, and that's the administrative group. So it is not just reflective of Leg. Assembly's experience. At this point in time it's reflective of the total group experience in administration. However, they do monitor that.

MR. BRASSARD: Obviously the group experience is up.

MRS. SCARLETT: Yes, it is.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anything further? Thank you very much, Mrs. Scarlett.

Item 6(c) is the proposed Former Member Survey. The chair would invite Dr. McNeil to bring this to the committee.

DR. McNEIL: This is a revival of an item that was considered at the last meeting. The survey is designed to provide some information on the impact of a political career on one's total career. When the issue of MLA compensation comes up, this is one area where there is a lot of speculation but very little fact. What this questionnaire is designed to do is add more solid information on this issue. The request at this point is to send this out to up to 10 former members on a pilot basis to get some feedback on the instrument. You know, does it have some face validity? Is it providing information that those former members think may be relevant to the issue when it comes up? And it's likely to come up in the future. What I'm asking for is just approval of the committee to pilot this survey instrument among up to 10 former members just to get their feedback as to whether it's worth while.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just a question: why only 10? At the last election I think we had something like a turnover of about 49 members. Why not get a broader survey?

DR. McNEIL: Well, the idea is not to do the survey at this point in time; the idea is to pilot the survey. The idea would be to send it out

to all former members after the next election so that you would have a very solid database on the experience of former Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta on which any committee, commission, whatever mechanism was in place to look at the issue of MLA compensation would have that as a database.

MR. BRUSEKER: Then are you really just interested in testing the validity of the questionnaire you've designed at this point?

DR. McNEIL: Exactly. Yeah.

MR. HENRY: Given that if we do these annual kinds of meetings, we may well be through an election by the time next December rolls around – and who knows? – I would like to make a motion

number one, that the committee approve the former member survey project in principle; number two, that the Clerk be directed to proceed with his recommendation to send out the draft questionnaire; and further, that the Clerk be empowered to make the decision as to whether to go forward with the survey at the appropriate time and to carry on.

Speaking to it, we're not talking about major dollars here. We're talking about some personnel costs in terms of Dr. McNeil's time and, I'm sure, other staff and whatnot. I don't think we really need to rehash; I think we all agree it's basically a good idea. We have a PhD, for goodness sake, as a Clerk here. If he hasn't got research experience – he probably has more than anybody else around this table – then I don't know who does. If we agree in principle with the idea, let Dr. McNeil pilot it and then go ahead at the appropriate time.

MS HALEY: I will speak against this motion, then, just on the following basis. I've read through this. Frankly, it made me uncomfortable to even read it. I don't want to answer these questions for you. If this were coming out to me, I wouldn't respond. So much of what it is I guess depends on what you want to do with the information when it's all said and done. I think that there are some MLAs who've done very badly in their lives and some MLAs who have done very well probably because they had strong career paths in the beginning and could pick them up or maybe because they didn't have strong career paths and couldn't pick them up. It's all about your own life. I don't know how knowing this information is going to change or benefit us in some way here. I can't imagine a Members' Services Committee – of course, you know, I'm not planning on being here forever – taking all of this information and saying: "Geez, these people have really got it bad. Let's give them a whole bunch more money and give them a big pension because life is so bad after you've been elected." I don't think that will happen. Apart from that, I don't know why we would do this.

10:40

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Chairman, it's a bit scary, but I almost agree with Carol.

MS HALEY: God, no, Percy. You're invalidating my argument.

MR. WICKMAN: I can't recall the specific history of this, as to whether it came forward as a notice of motion by a committee member or Dr. McNeil and his staff brought it forward, but, you know, this has been around for a long, long time now. The bottom line is that we are big boys and girls, and we do get a relocation allowance. If there is any struggle that takes place afterwards, I think I would point the finger at the individual. I would tend to be more concerned with what happens to constituency staff, for

example. They don't have the same opportunities as some of the MLAs may have, the same career paths and such. So if Dr. McNeil wants to do it, fine, but I just wonder: in terms of priorities, is it even worth while spending any time with this? Could someone answer my question. Who initiated this initially?

DR. McNEIL: This was initiated by staff, really arising from some of the issues that have come up related to the discussion of MLA compensation.

MR. WICKMAN: But isn't that when we had the New Democrats around?

DR. McNEIL: Well, no. This has only come up in the last year.

MR. WICKMAN: Oh, it did, eh?

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Chairman, I agree with Ms Haley. The first question that comes to mind is why. The second is that we have all had experience with reports of this nature or results of a survey of this nature coming out and being responded to in a very selective manner, whether it's by the press or whomever. You can pick things out of a response that's as broad as this to suit whatever question you may want to ask.

I've known MLAs who have retired who have had a terrible time trying to get re-established; as a matter of fact, some of them for as long as four and five years have not been able to get back on track. I've found others who have walked out of their position here and, because of their career and background, they were able to walk into another position and hardly noticed a ripple in the change of their lifestyle.

I find something like this, without a specific purpose, a scary document. I share the sentiments that I would be reluctant to fill it out and send it in myself because I think it would be too open to interpretation or selective interpretation. So I speak against the motion, and I don't think it should go out.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, I don't see anything unwholesome in this quite frankly. I think it's a good idea. I think it almost gives us from a sociological point of view, if you wish, an insight into what happens to many of us after we pass through these halls. I think we can learn some lessons from the experiences of all these people. I know for a fact that in my particular case I was not able to get leave from my school board. I know others did, and I would like to get a sense of what is happening throughout the province. I think it would be very educational for future members, people who might be interested in this kind of thing.

In terms of any further financial compensation or whatever, I think it has pretty well been accepted that that's not up to us anymore. I know officially it is, but we would certainly take our p's and q's from some independent body on this, I would hope. So I think this is a good idea, and I'm in favour of this.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jacques.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Percy expressed concern that he was agreeing with Ms Haley, and I'm equally concerned because I agree with Mr. Henry.

MS HALEY: Oh, no. I knew there were latent tendencies in you, you know.

MR. HENRY: Is there a doctor in the house?

MR. JACQUES: Mr. Chairman, I was interested in reading the background because the word "myth" was used in here, and I think there is a lot of myth out there in terms of what life is after having served as an MLA. I found that my decision-making process to even seek a nomination let alone an election was based on, hopefully, a lot of research on my part. I found it totally inadequate after having served, because there were myths, some of which certainly were relative to, quote, being an MLA. But I think equally important was trying to get information in terms of: what was the range of experience that people had incurred after the fact? There simply was no information. I found it interesting because the stories that one heard were generally the very successful stories or the very down-and-out stories. One never had really a kind of clear idea of what that spectrum or that range maybe was.

I accept the recommendation on the basis that it is information. It's not something that is being used necessarily to dictate policy of this committee or of legislative services. I think the information itself, particularly for those that may be considering public office – and they can use it as they see fit. It's not a question of interpretation. They can interpret it in whatever fashion they wish; that's up to them. But at least the information is there, albeit subjective information in many cases because it's based on, to quote, the experience of the individual. So I would fully support it.

MR. SEVERTSON: I'm in favour of it too. I guess the part that I understand from this is that the pilot project will come back to this committee whether it's useful or not or we make changes to it. I speak in favour of it just for the fact that nothing's been done in that area. There are a lot of myths there, and if we don't have a pilot project, how do you know whether it's doing any good or not?

MR. BRUSEKER: I support the motion as well. I think getting some objective information – following the last federal election, you may recall, *The Parliamentarian* magazine did a survey of some former federal members to see how they had fared. Some did very well and some did not, but I think that was probably the first that I was aware of at a federal level where a survey had been done. I think it would be worth while having that at a provincial level.

With respect to perhaps some former members being uncomfortable with answering some or all or any of these questions, Dr. McNeil is not a particularly scary character, and if they fire this into the garbage, I don't think Dr. McNeil will be coming after them with a big stick saying, "You didn't fill out the questionnaire."

I think it would be worth while getting some objective analysis. Therefore, I think it's a good project, and I support it.

DR. McNEIL: The other thing is that it would be anonymous too. In other words, names of respondents aren't required.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah. There's nothing here that says to give your name. Although I suppose in some cases . . .

MS HALEY: If it's mailed back from Airdrie, it's pretty anonymous, you know. You know, not everybody lives in Edmonton and Calgary. You have MLAs in Carstairs and Three Hills.

MR. HENRY: You're not predicting the election outcome; are you?

MS HALEY: No, I'm not. I'm just saying that it's not that easy for everybody to be anonymous.

DR. McNEIL: The purpose of the thing is to provide information to the committee in the first place, and it's up to the committee as to

what they would do with the information when they had it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Coutts.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I support this. I think if 10 copies of this went out and we only got two back, we would have a good idea exactly whether these former MLAs thought this was worth while. From talking to former MLAs, some of them would like to get their information out so that it does help some of us that are coming behind them. I just think this pilot project would be really good.

MR. WICKMAN: Just one question to Dr. McNeil before I make my final decision. Are there any costs involved, or will it take you or your staff away from other items?

10:50

DR. McNEIL: Not significantly, no. The funds that have been expended on this in the past have really been for one summer student working part-time on certain aspects of it. That's been it.

MR. WICKMAN: And then after the initial stage it'll come back to us before the . . .

DR. McNEIL: Oh, that would definitely be my intention. I'd come back with the feedback obtained from the pilot and with a proposed redesign if it's necessary. You know, I would want approval from the committee again in terms of the timing and so on if I even recommended that it go out.

MR. WICKMAN: Michael, can I hear the motion again?

MR. HENRY: Yeah, I could try to restate the motion.

MRS. DACYSHYN: I have that motion.

MR. STELMACH: We have a very simple recommendation here. It says that the survey will be sent out to up to 10 former members just to test the questions, see if they're relevant, see if they're not too intrusive. I can assure you that those that have suffered some financial setback, et cetera, may not be so willing to roll out all of their life history on a piece of paper for anyone to peruse, so we may not always get the best information. However, you know, it's a step in the right direction that we go according to the recommendation and it come back to Members' Services Committee at the next sitting. We'll get the reply from these former members and look at a redesign and fire from there.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, if I may have a friendly amendment to my motion, I would move

that we accept the recommendations proposed by Dr. McNeil.

If I can close debate, I just wanted to make a couple of points. There has been one other survey done, as Mr. Bruseker said, in *The Parliamentarian*. To respond to Ms Haley, one of the glib responses could be that those who did not run again who were in government did better than those in opposition, and that particular survey, if I recall, showed that not necessarily to be the case. That's one piece of information, one of the myths out there that we could expel.

The other point I wanted to make was that I think if we had more of the information that might come from a survey like this, we would have been in a better position yesterday to make the decision about – I forget the exact term – the outplacement. If we found that a majority of members, regardless of party stripe, were having problems getting back into career paths, perhaps we may have made

a decision – we're not talking about pensions – to provide some career counseling or something of that sort. We were making that decision yesterday in a vacuum. We didn't have information. Certainly I would think, Dr. McNeil, that if you ended up sending this out to 10 people, speaking to the fact that some of them may be uncomfortable with some parts of it, if a significant number, three or four, said, "Geez, I really don't want to do this," then that would colour whether we went ahead with the project, because your results would be that less valid.

I would urge members to support at least going ahead at this stage.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anything further? All those in favour of the motion before the committee, please indicate. Those opposed? Carried. Thank you, hon. members.

For the next one I'll ask Mr. Reynolds. This is on the municipal jurisdiction survey. Rob Reynolds, Parliamentary Counsel. It's nice to have you here.

MR. REYNOLDS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be here. This is a very brief item, and it relates to a question that came up – I believe it was posed by Mr. Henry exactly one year ago today, November 27, relating to the procedure whereby outgoing municipal councils set a salary for the incoming council. Basically, the research failed to indicate that that was the case. Essentially, it appears that municipal councils just establish salaries by either bylaw or resolution, and the bylaw or resolution continues until such time as it's amended. There's no mandatory guillotine on when that would occur.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to thank Parliamentary Counsel for the information and the time going into it, and maybe we can move on. I don't think we need to accept this, but thank you very much. I appreciate that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

Item (e). Ms Breault will come forward to discuss postage rates used for members' mailings from the Legislative Assembly. Ms Breault, nice to see you again.

MS BREULT: Thank you. This again emanated, I guess, from comments or questions in this current year's budget discussions last year. There was a question concerning the rates that our mail room here in the Leg. charged. Basically, the Legislature mail room, which is run by Public Works, Supply and Services, handles first-class mail at the regular rates that you would find I guess in a retail situation. Any of those charges are billed to us, and the paperwork basically is processed by my office. The charges are put against each member's \$750 per fiscal year postage cap for individual member mailings from the Legislature precincts.

There are also additional services that the Legislature mail room facilitates concerning foreign mail, U.S. mail, and also parcels, and those rates are also listed. That's probably the biggest potential for savings overall for the Assembly and for members, and I assume that's because they have a large volume and do a lot of the processing themselves versus Canada Post having to do a lot of the handling.

Also for information concerning bulk mail that members are entitled to under the Members' Services order, there are two Canada Post accounts which members can access and also LAO branches. The basic saving there is that PWSS maintains the contract for that service, so instead of each member having to go and put down a \$100 or a \$300 deposit themselves, by contacting I believe it's Mrs. Fraser in the central mail room, they can get the appropriate contract

number or Canada Post contact and facilitate that process. Those charges are billed against each member's members' services allowance as bulk mail, ad mail, for constituent mailings.

MR. WICKMAN: Just one question, Mr. Chairman. With Canada Post going out of the flyer business, that basically brings an end to what's being addressed here in the bottom paragraph, unless the administration has already pursued some other course with a private flyer distributor company trying to get a preferred rate.

MS BREault: No, we haven't yet. We did understand that was coming about fairly quickly, and we're moving to investigate other options.

MR. WICKMAN: It's January 1.

MS BREault: We're hoping that in contact with Canada Post they may be able to offer us some cost-effective options also.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask Ms Breault: can I make use of that bulk mail, unaddressed, at 6 cents per item in my riding? In other words, could it go from here to there, or how does that work?

MS BREault: I have to admit that I don't know. I'm not sure whether the mail has to be processed here in Edmonton or not. I would think that the contract would be good through any Canada Post outlet, that it's just a matter of referencing the contract. If you'd like me to investigate that, I certainly could.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Anything further?

Thank you very much, Ms Breault. You're also going to do the next one: Policy on Insurance/Replacement of Standard Office Furniture.

MS BREault: Again there was a question from this committee concerning how the Legislative Assembly handles insurance coverage and also what would happen if there was loss of an item that had originally been paid for from the members' services allowance. As outlined here, we have a \$5,000 per occurrence deductible on our offices here and the constituency offices. We cover the cost of replacement in its entirety of any equipment that is considered, quote, unquote, standard equipment that the Legislative Assembly Office provides to constituency offices. That includes computers, photocopiers, telephones, answering machines, typewriters: that sort of item. Also, there is furniture that we have obtained through PWSS surplus, and that is covered as well.

11:00

For anything that had originally been purchased out of the members' services allowance, normally it would be up to the member to cover that cost, but especially with the \$5,000 deductible we thought that was an onerous obligation to cover. So the policy has been that we have covered 50 percent of the deductible if it's a loss over \$5,000 or 50 percent of the original cost of the goods, with the balance being borne by the particular member.

There was also a question or a comment concerning insuring the amount under the deductible. Our counsel from insurance risk management has told us that basically it wouldn't be a cost-effective alternative.

THE CHAIRMAN: Fine. Thank you very much. Now we'll go on to New Business. Thank you, Jacque.

The first item under New Business would be the disclosure of Legislative Assembly Office salaries and benefits, which seemed to receive some comment by the Auditor General last year. Dr. McNeil will introduce this subject.

DR. McNEIL: It's a decision item. The issue is whether the committee should reverse its previous decision that the Legislative Assembly not provide staff salary and benefit information for publication in the public accounts to comply with a particular Treasury Board directive.

The background: in '94 the committee decided that since the Legislative Assembly was not a Crown-controlled organization, the salary and benefit information for staff of the Legislative Assembly Office as well as that of caucus and constituency staff would not be provided under that order. In a recent letter and then in his '95-96 annual report the Auditor General noted that while some of the legislative officers had provided this information, neither the Legislative Assembly nor the office of the Ombudsman had done so.

I responded to his letter sort of clarifying some of the points that he had made and committed that I would bring this issue before the committee again. What I've done is outline three alternatives. One is to maintain the status quo. That would maintain the existing decision. The second is to comply with the Treasury Board directive, and a third alternative that I propose is to table permanent staff salary and benefit information in the Assembly in an appropriate format.

My recommendation is that to accomplish the objectives that the Auditor General has yet retain control of the format within which this information is presented, it be tabled in the Assembly by the Speaker as chairman of the Members' Services Committee. That complies fully, I believe, with the advantage of disclosure, yet it puts the information in a format that is acceptable to the Assembly.

One of the concerns there has been with the way this information is displayed is that it accumulates certain categories of salary and vacation pay and so on and does not necessarily accurately reflect, as members can fully relate to, in the public accounts. It's only been in the last year or two that we've managed to have the members' information broken out in very specific categories. So some of the concerns that you've had in the past I think have been dissipated.

What I'm proposing here is to take the same approach in terms of having broad categories of this information. I believe that meets the requirement the Auditor General states, and it is done within the Assembly itself. That's my recommendation.

MR. STELMACH: My motion is to accept the recommendation.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any comment or questions? Is the committee ready for the question?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the motion before us by Mr. Stelmach, please indicate. Opposed? Carried. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Clerk.

Item (b) is Dissolution Policy. I'll again ask Dr. McNeil to introduce this item.

DR. McNEIL: The dissolution policy document is the document we sent out before the 1989 election and before the 1993 election. It's just a document to be sent to members and staff that outlines all the policies and procedures which apply when the Assembly is dissolved. It's here really for information. It reflects the existing

policy framework. There are not very many changes from the last time it went out, but I wanted the committee to see it before we sent it out. I believe that everybody received a document from the Ethics Commissioner, which made reference to a lot of the policies in this document. I believe it referred to this document itself. Well, this is the update, and it would be our intention to send this out probably with the next month so that staff and members have as much information as early as possible that might affect them.

MR. STELMACH: I move Dr. McNeil's recommendation to send out the dissolution policy.

MR. BRASSARD: I just have a question of Dr. McNeil. In that I've already established that I'm leaving, is there an allowance for members to purchase some of the equipment that they have used? Some of it is personal, like a telephone. I'm sure that not everyone would want to inherit someone else's telephone, because it's more of a personal thing. But sometimes it's as broad as the computer that we use in my office. I have a computer that I use, and I think it's about three years old now or a little better.

Is there any allowance or is there a procedure to follow for a parting member to selectively purchase some of that equipment at whatever the going rate is? Can you just answer me that? Perhaps Mr. Gano could.

DR. McNEIL: Mr. Gano can best answer that question. We've dealt with this issue for the last few elections.

MR. GANO: Yes, there is certainly a procedure in place for acquiring surplus equipment. The basic premise is that the equipment is surplus. We first have to make that determination, and in the area of computers and whatnot certainly a three-year time frame seems to be the point at which it is no longer usable by the Assembly.

We make each decision on a one-on-one basis. We look at the specific equipment that is being asked to be surplus. We determine whether there's a need for that particular piece of equipment elsewhere within the Assembly. If there is, then it will not be surplus. If there is not, then a specific request needs to be sent to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services to exempt the member from the normal surplus procedure. That's the basic policy at this point.

MR. BRASSARD: I see. Good. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: How is it valued?

MR. GANO: Public Works, Supply and Services places the value on the equipment. They have a lot of experience, particularly with computers again. That's where my experience lies. But they do surplus a number of these pieces of equipment, so they have some standard prices that they put on if it's a 386 machine, whether it's a colour monitor or monochrome monitor, those kinds of things.

MR. BRASSARD: There would be allowance, though, even if that particular piece of equipment wasn't declared surplus to at least apply to purchase it on, say, a used basis or something like that.

MR. GANO: That's correct.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for the question on the motion before us by Mr. Stelmach?

MR. BRASSARD: Question.

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

The next item is a member orientation program. Members of the committee, this is an item that I wished to have put on the agenda. It was my observation after the '93 election that while the Legislative Assembly staff did conduct orientation programs, I did not think they were done early enough in the procedure. It was left too close to the meeting of the Assembly. I thought that there could be a certain strengthening given to that program to prepare new members or any re-elected member also for service in the Assembly.

11:10

I wanted to advise the committee that in an effort to get the best possible results, I propose to send out invitations to all candidates running in the next general election immediately following the close of nominations – that will include incumbents, of course, who are running again – advising them of the time and date and location of the orientation program. I also want to see that the orientation is pretty well uniform for all members no matter what caucus they're proposing to join after election. I think the orientation will greatly benefit new members and could possibly benefit returning members as well. In fact, I'm going to be strongly encouraging all people elected to the next Legislature to participate in this program.

In that context I'd like to ask all members of this committee for input as to what material they feel should be included in this orientation. So in the next number of weeks if any member of this committee has some ideas on that, I'd certainly like to hear from you. If I'm not immediately available, please discuss it with Moses so that we can get the best possible input.

I know this whole subject came up at the meeting of the new executive committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Kuala Lumpur in August, and they were quite interested to hear what we would be doing in this Assembly through this initiative. They want to have a copy of our material in London for dissemination throughout. So I think this is an area where we can be of assistance to our sister parliaments.

I hope I have your support for this program. I must tell you, though, that it's going to go ahead whether you like it or not, but I sincerely would like to have your help in making this the best possible thing so that we get this new Legislature off on a very good footing.

MR. JACQUES: Just so I understand – I agree with your intention, by the way; I'm not arguing with it – when we talk about administrative and procedural matters, I think I understand administration. We're talking about all of those things, anything from payroll to what happens with your constituency, you know, how you hire somebody. But is the procedural aspect what happens in the big Chamber? In other words, as I recall, last time David did an orientation session of some type right in there. Would this be included under your initiative as well? Is that part of this?

THE CHAIRMAN: Oh, yes. I just want to strengthen the whole thing and bring some new things in too for a better understanding by all members as to what government is and what the Legislature is. There is not a good understanding in our population about how things are set up, and I do want to have a stronger program.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, there's definitely merit in such an undertaking. I'm wondering what else we can do to orient our staff, because many times if our staff are properly informed and go

through a proper orientation period, then they can always highlight and advise the member as well on some issues that may be coming, especially after the election, when members are tremendously busy and preoccupied with other things. I know it's not in this motion, but we're going to look at something as well.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, this may help you help others in other orientations too.

Dr. McNeil.

DR. McNEIL: Yeah. I think this focuses on the members, but we're also thinking along a parallel track in terms of what we have to do for the staff, both the caucus staff and the constituency staff. We haven't yet come to any firm conclusions about anything, but again we'd appreciate feedback from the members and their staff as to what they think staff needs and when they need it, both on the administrative and the procedural side.

You know, we did sessions with constituency staff – was it last year? – that proved very worth while. You would want to do that same thing but early in the game so that as soon as the majority of members have made their staffing decisions, then we could get them together at the appropriate place and orient them.

MR. WICKMAN: Would you entertain a motion . . .

MR. STELMACH: Oh, he's going to do it regardless.

MR. WICKMAN: . . . that item 7(c) be struck from the agenda?

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair brought this forward as information but with a really sincere invitation to try to respond to any suggestions you had for strengthening this program.

MR. STELMACH: You have our support.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Now, from the sublime to the ridiculous: Members' Services Committee order amendments related to boundary changes. That is going to be Dr. McNeil.

DR. McNEIL: I think, Jacqueline, maybe you can comment on this, and I might follow up with a comment or two.

MS BREAULT: Certainly. This is sort of a two-pronged information item. In concert with Parliamentary Counsel we reviewed the current Members' Services orders to determine whether any of the name changes that occurred because of the changes to the electoral boundaries would affect the orders and whether we needed to update any of them. There is no action required of this committee because there was no change there.

Secondly, there was mention made in the report, the statement listed in bold here, that the Legislative Assembly may wish to look at the resources made available to members in light of the electoral boundaries change. So we bring that to your attention and for your information.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jacques.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that item 7(d) – i.e., the Alberta electoral boundaries report – be referred to the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services following the next general election.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions or comments? All those in favour of Mr. Jacques' motion, please indicate. Opposed?

Carried.

Ms Breault is here to discuss item 7(e), Policy for MLA Travel Points/Travel Authorizations.

11:20

MS BREAULT: This draft travel policy for your consideration arose out of, I guess, a number of factors or a number of situations that we've dealt with over the last little while. One of the biggest, I suppose, is the fact that this committee had dictated before that the LAO was exempt from the Treasury Board directive that other government departments dealt with concerning out-of-country travel. The Treasury Board did change that, and we are still exempt from that. However, there is sort of a policy gap in terms of what authorizations or notifications concerning travel, be it within the country or out of it, should be made.

I think that from the perspective of accountability and audit trail considerations – I guess the audit trail is the one I deal with the most. We have drafted a travel policy. Basically, the benefits of having a travel policy for all of the LAO is that there is a clear understanding of the travel approvals and also bonus points used by all Members of the Legislative Assembly, its managers, caucus officials, and staff prior to committing or expending public funds. There are no financial costs incurred. The other option is to leave it as status quo.

Travel approvals are basically up to individual managers or the MLA or caucus representative. There have been, I believe, a number of motions concerning bonus points use that differ from each other subtly. We've tried to take into account all the motions and have a comprehensive notation for use as a reference concerning bonus points. Again, the benefits of status quo are neutral. The costs are that travel policy may be applied on an ad hoc basis, and there may be the potential for inconsistencies or confusion. So we would recommend alternative 1.

THE CHAIRMAN: Questions or comments?

MR. WICKMAN: Well, one question. This has come up several times in the past: the concept of caucuses being allowed to pool their air miles, allowing that caucus to make a determination as to what caucus business, government business, whatever the case may be, those points could then be utilized for. In this documentation was that again looked at, or is it a dead horse?

MS BREAULT: We investigated how the bonus points programs are managed by at least the two major carriers. The Legislative Assembly does not have a bonus points plan for members. Basically if members have one, it is at their own instigation. I guess its use is a lot on the honour system.

I understand that because it is a personal program, the carriers won't allow people to pool points, that they accrue to an individual and can only be used by an individual. We certainly thought there could be some benefits to pooling, but it is too much of a cash crunch drain to have those points pooled and used by the carrier. So that's why they don't allow that, as I understand it.

MR. WICKMAN: The reason why I bring that up, Mr. Chairman, is I think it was yourself that had requested a representative in the Liberal caucus to attend a parliamentary conference in Winnipeg. But the stipulation was that it had to be somebody who had sufficient air miles, which excluded any that might have expressed interest.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. The chair regretted having to do that, and that was one of the reasons why the chair asked for an enrichment of interparliamentary funding, which the committee responded to with this upcoming budget, to try to avoid that situation. The chair still

feels, though, that if it's possible for members who do have points, then they should use them for that.

MS HALEY: Do you have any current information with regard to Revenue Canada's new policy on including a certain percentage of the value of a trip on your income tax if you use those bonus points?

MS BREault: I don't have any specific details. I would hesitate to comment on that.

MS HALEY: I would hesitate to support a program like this until that information is known.

THE CHAIRMAN: We have an expert who is indicating . . .

MR. JACQUES: No, I'm not. I'm not an expert, but I can shed some light on it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. Somebody who's in the field. Mr. Jacques.

MR. JACQUES: Yeah. This is based on my experience in my prior life.

MS HALEY: In your real life.

MR. JACQUES: In my real life, yeah.

The Department of National Revenue some years ago issued an interpretation bulletin, as I recall, that basically said that if you used points for purposes of traveling on business, et cetera, for which you had earned the points to begin with, then there was no deemed benefit from such. If you used your points for personal use, then it was up to the individual to report a reasonable value regarding the value of that trip. I made the unfortunate mistake of doing that. I was severely chastised by my peers because I was opening new ground, and I say that with a certain amount of tongue in cheek. But most people were not doing it and still are not doing it to the best of my knowledge. The Department of National Revenue were really accepting anything that was reasonable put down by the individual. If you selected a discount rate on a group package and put that in as the rate even though you may have traveled business class on your points, then there didn't seem to be really any quarrel with it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Because they can't enforce it anyway.

MR. JACQUES: Well, this was the whole point. The airlines have not voluntarily supplied that information to the Department of National Revenue, and I doubt very much, quite frankly, that the tax department would go after it on, you know, a real witch-hunt basis.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Henry.

MR. HENRY: Yeah. I just had a question. The policy seems reasonable to me, but in terms of the question about pooling, I'm aware the federal government has negotiated with the airlines to pool. So when a federal government employee travels, they don't accrue points, and in return the federal government receives a discount on all the flights. I'm wondering: do we have any information on whether the Alberta provincial government has negotiated a similar arrangement? I'm looking for: is there a way that we could buy into that kind of thing and participate?

MS BREault: I would assume that Alberta Treasury would be the

resource I'd check with. I would think if anybody would co-ordinate that, it would happen at that level.

DR. McNEIL: I can add to that. I think the federal government does all their travel through one company. It's because of the contract with that company that they're able to get those reduced rates. That company did approach, I understand, the Alberta government and also the Legislative Assembly a number of years ago. At that time we concluded, at least for the Legislative Assembly, that given our volume and the type of travel we do, it wouldn't be cost effective for us.

MR. HENRY: Okay. Given all the changes in deregulation, it might be worth looking at that at some point. I'm particularly concerned – I mean, we're on the honour system. I suspect most if not nearly all members adhere to that. But especially for those who live in the capital region, it wouldn't be – I would doubt that Mr. Wickman would have accrued enough points, for this five trips a year and over, to have any trips.

MR. WICKMAN: I drive. I don't fly.

MR. HENRY: You drive.

I know that I haven't done that with those trips, and those points are going to sit there. So there are some points there that aren't being used to the advantage of the Legislative Assembly unless they can be pooled with other points.

We did have one precedent in the previous Legislature where one caucus approached an airline in a specific case to pool somebody's points and allow some other people to use them for a specific purpose that was related to their legislative duties, and they allowed us to do that. At that point the airlines said it was an exceptional case and they were reviewing that. They hoped that that would happen on a regular basis, but in anticipation of a change of policy – well, then of course deregulation, competition, and all sorts of things.

I wouldn't be adverse to supporting the recommendation here, but we do want to put a bug in administration's ear that the airline industry, as we all know around this table because of what's happening in our province with if I can call it our airline, is a very different kettle of fish than it was four years ago. Maybe we should review this, as the competition is much stiffer and they may be willing to do some pooling for us in terms of exclusivity or something.

11:30

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: I want to move that we accept the recommendation.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's what Mr. Stelmach wanted to do. Mr. Stelmach.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you. Well, I guess I have to speak against Duco's motion. In light of the additional information that Mr. Henry brought forward, I would just as soon accept this item as information. We'll get a chance to run it past the two caucuses. In the meantime, we'll get more information on pooling of the travel points, and then we'll be able to make a better decision after our next meeting.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further discussion?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: I withdraw the motion.

THE CHAIRMAN: Consent of the committee for the motion to be withdrawn?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: So it'll be an information item. Thank you.
Changes in Member Benefit Programs. Mrs. Scarlett.

MRS. SCARLETT: As some background, the existing MLA health plans are presently integrated with the government's benefit plans for management employees for the most part.

For your information, effective as of March 1 of next year the management plans are going to be changing significantly, which necessitates a review of the MLA plans. The government is going to be introducing significant changes and will be offering a modified flexible benefit plan to its management, opted, and excluded employees, and that plan is called First Choice. All the staff of the LAO, caucus employees, and constituency employees will be affected by that change. That is the plan that they participate in.

First Choice is intended to be cost neutral to the employer. It will allow employees additional choices to acquire additional coverage, but it will be at the employees' expense if they choose that additional coverage. Some of the aspects of First Choice may be appealing to members. However, the overall coverage offered by First Choice is still less than what is presently received for benefits as the total MLA package. Examples of those types of new features that are attractive include on-line adjudication at source for dental and Blue Cross claims, some higher optional life insurance choices, and potential premium savings for nonsmokers on group life insurance.

Some alternatives presented to you in terms of the MLA health benefit plans. Alternative 1: "Maintain the status quo" in terms of your present package. This option is presented as a short-term solution because it's been indicated to us that there is a way whereby our existing MLA plan, instead of piggybacking onto the management plan, could piggyback onto the bargaining plan. It's seen as a short-term solution because at some point in time that plan may also negotiate something else. A second alternative would be to look at actually selecting First Choice as the plan that the MLAs want to participate in. A third alternative may be to pursue a flexible benefits plan for members to provide the benefits of First Choice and also to maintain the existing level of coverage for the members.

Our recommendation at this time is that it's probably not the appropriate time to pursue changes to members' benefits plans. As well, given the very short period of time to pursue the alternatives, it's recommended that the LAO take advantage of alternative 1, "Maintain the status quo," at the present time. Perhaps this issue can be reviewed after First Choice has been fully implemented by the government.

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

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move
that we accept the recommendation; i.e., alternative 1, which is
"Maintain the status quo."

MS HALEY: That was my comment exactly.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are we agreed to this motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The next item is Constituency Employment Contracts; also Mrs.

Scarlett.

MRS. SCARLETT: What I'd like to talk about are two changes to constituency office employment contracts. All employees in members' constituency offices are hired through formal employment contracts. Just a little bit of history again. Prior to 1989 the staff in the constituency offices were paid as independent contractors, and in most cases this constituted a violation of Rev Canada's guidelines. As a result, appropriate employment contracts were developed. Our employees now are recognized as true employees, and we are on-line with Rev Canada's guidelines.

In addition, based on direction from Members' Services, changes were made to those contracts to add the option of a modified benefits package for qualified constituency employees if the member approved those choices. The employer deductions are deducted from the member's constituency allowance, and the employee's deductions come from their cheques. Effective as of March 1, as earlier referenced, the benefit options available to those employees will increase as a result of First Choice. However, any of those increases will be the employee's choice and the employee's expense.

Two changes that we want to talk about. One is the dental. Effective December 1 dental coverage is going to be costed either on a single or a family rate whereas right now it's a straight flat rate, so there are going to be new premiums. Right now the premiums are \$49, and instead they're going to go to \$34 for single or \$68 for family. So it is a change to your expense in terms of constituency allowance, depending on whether your person is single or family. The benefit of this change is that by this new dental it'll allow the employee to select optional dental billing and, if they choose to pay for it, have an ability to have additional dental coverage.

The second benefit that needs to be looked at is the pension option. Just to go back, the options we're talking about that a constituency employee may participate in, if the member has approved it, include participation in Alberta health care, Blue Cross, dental coverage, group life insurance, and presently pension. Presently members may choose to offer the employee participation in the pension plan, and based on that, members and employees match contributions. The employees hired in the constituency offices are normally hired on a shorter term employment contract and quite often are not in a position to accrue five years' full-time service. That's what is required to be vested and to obtain any benefit from the pension plan.

Because the contracts tend to be for a short term and some employees in constituencies do not necessarily have work of a full-time nature, the salaries may be at a lower level. The premiums are quite costly for the pension, and with the fact that most employees never accrue the five years vested, the question is being asked in terms of whether this is a benefit that we want to continue to be reflected and offered in the constituency contract.

If an employee terminates prior to having the five years' full-time vested service, the employee receives a refund of the value of their contributions. However, the moneys that the member has paid from their constituency allowance into the plan is not refunded. It stays with the plan. There are no dollars that come back for moneys paid out.

Alternatives. One alternative is that the pension benefit not be offered as an option to new employees after the next election. However, present constituency employees – and at this time there are 12 – would be grandfathered and allowed continued participation if they continue their employment. The second option is to leave the benefit there for the member to choose or not choose.

Just to back up, an average annual contribution for employee and for member is about \$1,300. So \$2,500, \$2,600 every year, based on

the average of our 12 employees, is what's contributed, and sometimes there's a benefit and sometimes there's not. Mainly there's not.

Recommendations then. In terms of the dental, changes to the dental coverage are not under our control, and they will be implemented December 1. Again, however, this is viewed as an additional benefit to your employee because they have additional options now for greater coverage if they choose.

Pension. We are recommending alternative 2(a): "It is recommended that changes be made to eliminate the pension option to new employees after the [next] election." Again we emphasize that the present constituency employees participating will continue to be grandfathered as long as eligible.

11:40

MR. HENRY: Two things. The dental, I think, is a given. I'd like to speak to the pension issue. I'm not sure I understand the rationale for the particular recommendation. I understand the cost figure, but if I'm correct in what I'm assuming, that whatever decision we make on this there's no cost one way or the other to the Leg. Assembly because the employer cost of the contribution comes out of the members' services constituency allowance – and picking up on a theme that I hear quite often from Ms Haley, that it's the responsibility and choice of the member to make certain decisions – it seems to me that this is essentially cost neutral to the Leg. Assembly, which I understand it is regardless of which way we go, and we should leave the provision in there. There are 12 people participating in it now. There may be 12 more after the next election. We don't know. But it gives people the option. If somebody is working for a local institution such as a village or working for another public institution, a hospital or an academic institution, it allows them to transfer, because there are reciprocal agreements. [interjection] It does not?

MRS. SCARLETT: There are recent changes to the pension plans that do not allow anymore for transferring accrued benefits from one plan to the other. Even when you transfer within the public sector from public service to public-service management, you can no longer move your service. It stays with the plan.

MR. HENRY: All right. This is a public-service pension plan, so somebody who's working in the public service right now and wants to leave and work for a member would lose the option of continuing their pension if we accepted this recommendation. It seems to me that our job here is to make sure that the choices are available for the member and their employee, assuming no cost implication for the overall. There is a risk – I understand that – that some employees will participate for three years and the member won't get re-elected, or they will move on and lose their contribution, but that's the same with participation in any of the public-service pension plans, whether they work for the provincial government or local authority or whatever. I'm not sure I understand why we would remove this option for members if again there's really no cost to the Leg. Assembly. What we are allowing members to do by leaving it in is have that much more incentive if they choose to in terms of being able to get staff and offer it to them. We know they're low paid, but offer at least some options. It is a risk, and if they choose not to take the risk, then so be it. If they choose to take the risk, that is exactly what it is.

So I would speak in favour of the dental and against changing the pension provision right now.

MS HALEY: Actually, I was going to ask how many people currently have taken advantage of being part of this pension

program. I think you answered it. You mentioned the number 12.

MRS. SCARLETT: Yes. Of 68 qualified constituency employees, 12 are participating.

MS HALEY: And nothing would happen to them at this point? They would continue to pay?

MRS. SCARLETT: We could continue to allow them to participate.

MR. HENRY: But no new ones after the election if we accept this.

MRS. SCARLETT: That's what's being recommended.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask a question on another aspect of the benefits of that contract. Is that appropriate now?

THE CHAIRMAN: Give it a try.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: It has to do with the general illness leave. My constituency manager, as I think you are aware, asked me to inquire about that, because the way it reads now is that if she gets ill, general illness leave shall not exceed 80 consecutive workdays, and during those 80 days I'm still to pay her salary while having hired someone else. If it were to happen, I know that my budget could ill afford that.

MR. STELMACH: That's fairly similar to the teachers' contract.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Is it?

MR. STELMACH: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Similar to what?

MR. STELMACH: Similar to the ATA contract.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Yeah, but my budget is minute, so I wanted to ask Mrs. Scarlett about that.

MRS. SCARLETT: For clarification, the provisions in section 8, which talk about health benefits, and section 9, which are additional optional benefits, were designed again in such a way that the member dependent upon the negotiations with the employee they are hiring can select which ones seem appropriate. Yes, it does sometimes come down to a budgetary item in terms of what can be afforded through the constituency office.

Two of the items that have the potential to be heavy cost items with benefits or no benefits: one is the pension, for the reasons that we just talked about; the other one is the general illness provision in that at any point in time if your employee is off for any period of time, then, yes, you must maintain that salary. That gets very expensive, and the realities are that you normally need an additional person to cover off that person.

At the time when we are doing an orientation with new members, we try to sit down and go through the contract itself in terms of the realities of selecting options or not selecting options. When they were first presented, it was a package that tried to give as much as we could to the constituency and again give the selection back to the members. Those are two very good examples of where there either may not be a benefit and dollars contributed from the constituency allowance don't come back or very costly.

MR. WICKMAN: Two points. I would suggest to the Member for West Yellowhead that he make a subsequent motion asking for a written report. We had a situation similar to this from one of our former colleagues in the last go-around, an employee that had multiple sclerosis. Then it's a very difficult situation to put an MLA in. It could happen to any one of us. With the normal staff you can always pull in somebody else to cover for that person, but our budgets simply don't allow it. A motion may ensure some action is followed through.

Secondly, on the pension. The Member for Edmonton-Centre basically asked a question why alternative 2(a) was being recommended. It wasn't really answered.

MRS. SCARLETT: It's been brought to the committee's attention. Because it was the committee that first requested that the benefits be put in, any changes to those must come to the committee and, as well, again, based upon the low participation and the potential that dollars spent from a constituency allowance do not come back into a constituency allowance and are lost, if you will. It's presented more for information and to re-emphasize the pros and cons of benefit choices. We need to decide.

MR. WICKMAN: Why not recommend 2(b)? You recommended 2(a) for a reason, but you haven't given the reason as to why. I can't see that there would be any implication to the Leg. Assembly whatsoever.

MRS. SCARLETT: The reason for bringing it to the attention is that there has been and will be examples again where staff leave, they get the refund of the dollars, but the money that has been expended by the member does not come back.

MR. WICKMAN: But you would be just as comfortable if 2(b) were adopted as opposed to 2(a).

MRS. SCARLETT: Administratively we could continue to run the program as it is right now.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you.

MS HALEY: I guess I'd like to make a recommendation that we accept the dental recommendation as per the administration's recommendation and that we leave the pension option as it is.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: The committee concurs in Ms Haley's motion? All those in favour? Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

The next item. Mr. Gano will talk to us about Legislative Assembly Office Records Management Policy.

11:50

MR. GANO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is a decision item that has been brought forward as a result of some legislative changes that have occurred over the last year. Specifically, the Legislative Assembly Act has been changed to give authority to this committee to adopt a records management policy for the Legislative Assembly. Given that and the fact that the need for a records management policy has become greater due to the freedom of information legislation, we looked at all of the different policies that are currently out there in the government, took those policies and basically formulated a records management policy that was more usable by the Legislative Assembly.

Another issue here is that the records services area of the LAO

does get a number of requests for assistance in records management both from the caucus offices and from the constituency offices, particularly prior to an election and just after an election when there are a number of new people coming on board. They're looking for some assistance on how to set up a filing system, what constitutes a transitional record versus an operational record, and those kinds of issues. Prior to an election we get a lot of calls saying, you know: "Can I throw these records out? What do I do with them? Do I keep them? Do I file them? Do I send them to you?" And so on.

Briefly, the records management policy tries to address those issues, however, in a manner that leaves it up to the member to determine whether they want to follow the guidelines or whether they want to create their own guidelines. You'll notice that throughout the policy in a number of areas it's stated that the member may do this or may do that, so it provides that option to the members to either use these guidelines or formulate their own. The recommendation, therefore, is to give us some direction by adopting the attached draft Members' Services order that you'll find on the second page there. Questions?

MS HALEY: Well, I'd just like to move their recommendation alternative 1. I've read through the manual. I think it's very good and it does give us some ideas, especially out in my office in Airdrie, as to how we should be handling things and how long we need to keep them. So I thought it was good.

MR. WICKMAN: Carol stole my thunder.

MR. HENRY: I'm going to agree with the motion, I think. What I want to check with Mr. Gano is – with particular case files such as a Workers' Compensation Board file or whatever that the member is working on, we had problems over the last election where some members destroyed all of their case files before they moved on, yet there were cases in progress, so it caused problems for individuals. I was fortunate. The member whom I replaced left all the case files, and although I was uncomfortable, I did get permission from each person prior to going through those. I want an interpretation of this policy. Would the member who is not returning simply leave the active case files there, or would it be the new member's responsibility to have the consent for transfer completed before the new member worked on that file?

MR. GANO: That's the recommendation of the policy: that the outgoing member get permission from the person that's affected with that case file to have that case carried over to the new member. If that permission is not received, then it's suggested that those case files be transferred to the Legislative Assembly Office for storage in case there is an issue where one of those files needs to be brought back.

MR. HENRY: Those files would not be destroyed; they'd be held by the Assembly and could be brought back.

MR. GANO: Again, that's an option that the member has. It's not suggested that the member will be bound by that.

DR. McNEIL: In the final analysis, the files are the member's files. He or she will make that determination as to whether they're handed on or not.

MR. GANO: But in keeping with freedom of information and protection of privacy, you know, it's certainly in the member's best interest to receive approval before those files are passed forward.

MR. HENRY: That of course works well when a member is deciding not to run again, but if a member is unexpectedly defeated – that's what happened last time.

Okay. I think you've answered it. I have no further questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of Ms Haley's motion, please indicate. Opposed? Carried. Thank you very much.

That leaves three more items under New Business unless some other new business crops up.

Legislative Assembly Office Space Requirements: Mr. Gano will again introduce this subject.

MR. GANO: This is being provided for information. We are currently in the Legislative Assembly Office experiencing some problems related to the current space allocation that we have. Some of those problems are specifically related to the amount of space that is available. Other problems are related to the alignment of that space in that some branches are split apart, which results in some difficulties in management and so on.

So as an information item we're indicating that the Legislative Assembly Office will be submitting a request for a space realignment. Two specific areas: one, to have the Legislative Assembly Office space reassessed, and the second is to resubmit a request that was submitted earlier for some committee room space over in the Annex. The committee room space, we're suggesting, is needed because of some of the changes that have resulted in the way committees are structured over in the Legislature Building, and the meeting room space in the Legislature Building is at a premium. So there's a need for some additional committee room areas.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wickman.

MR. WICKMAN: Possibly we should wait until after the next election, and they could expand onto the vacant seventh floor.

MS HALEY: A little political humour there.

MR. WICKMAN: No humour. No humour.

MR. BRASSARD: I would move that we accept this item as information.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair wants to say that it's grateful for this coming forward because the chair has been attempting over the last three years to get the minister of public works interested in doing something to upgrade our committee room facilities. The chair would just ask that those who return – I think that really members should have a little better concept of themselves. In the chair's opinion the Legislative Assembly does not give a good impression to members of the public who come here on public business. Our facilities for committee rooms, in the chair's opinion, are terrible, and I don't know why members put up with it. So I hope that there will be some effort in this regard for the next Legislature.

Mr. Stelmach.

MR. STELMACH: Oh, okay. Just another word of caution is that if we're looking at some additional space in the Annex, this space would not be with various other caucus offices. This would be independent.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes. It's on the 10th and 11th floors.

Of course it may be easier to do that after the next election, depending on what happens, but I would suggest that it probably will be much easier to move in that direction after the next election. I would hope that those people who come back don't lose any time in getting it initiated. You know how things go around here. Unless it's done early, it just won't get done at all.

12:00

THE CHAIRMAN: Next item, the Year 2000 Problems and Approaches.

Mr. Gano, computers.

MR. GANO: Recently there have been a number of articles and questions regarding the impact of the year 2000 on, for the most part, computer systems but also extending into things like just forms and those kinds of issues. The background is that when computers were first envisioned and when computer systems were first begun to be written, it was never visualized that we would ever reach the year 2000 with a particular computer system. As a result, things like calculations for number of years were based only on two digits rather than on the complete four-digit year. This is going to cause a number of difficulties with the older computers. The Legislative Assembly Office has recently undertaken a review of our computer systems to ensure that we do not have this potential problem.

Because of the way we operate in terms of trying to keep up with technology as much as possible, we do not have the problem. None of our systems is old enough to have to worry about using only a two-digit year. All of our systems are already based on a four-digit year, so there should not be any difficulties with the transfer to the year 2000.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's nice to hear.

MR. BRASSARD: Yes. Mr. Chairman, I recall raising this last year at this time, I believe, and was assured at that time that it wasn't going to be a problem. I find that encouraging, because it can be a very expensive problem I understand.

I move that we accept this as information.

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

Thank you, Mr. Brassard. Thank you, Mr. Gano.

The next is Stationery Allocations.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I've distributed a document. Let me start by saying I was very, very encouraged by the enlightened statement made by the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti yesterday in terms of the necessity for a fax machine. When I was first elected in 1989, like a lot of people we didn't have a fax machine in the constituency office because it was not deemed to be necessary. I would venture to say that there is no constituency office throughout the province now that would not have a fax machine.

We do pay for the fax machines out of our own constituency budgets, which of course is an additional cost that wasn't there originally, plus we pay for the line, which in my case is \$35 a month, which wasn't there originally. Now I find that to buy supplies for that machine, because I can't just order them upstairs, even using the recyclable cartridge is 33 bucks a pop. Others have fax machines that require special fax paper. All I'm requesting is that the current definition for the allocation under stationery of I think \$1,200 per member just be expanded to include by definition fax supplies.

MR. HENRY: I think this is a reasonable request, Mr. Chairman. In

fact, some fax supplies are covered. If an individual has a plain-paper fax machine, then that paper is covered under the stationery allowance, so part of the supplies are already covered out of the allowance. It seems to me that it's not going to have any impact on the budget overall. We should accept it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Ms Haley, were you wishing to . . .

MS HALEY: No.

MR. WICKMAN: No. Everybody agrees. Let's just move along.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is there agreement to Mr. Wickman's motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

Was there anything else? Mr. Bruseker, you wished to bring something forward.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah, Mr. Chairman. Just following on the issue of fax machines and fax lines, I wonder if we could have the staff do an investigation of the cost that Mr. Wickman pointed out. Currently we have to pay for the cost of fax lines out of our constituency budget. All other phone lines and so on are covered under the telecommunications budget of the LAO. I'm wondering if we could ask the staff to investigate the cost of providing on an annual basis a single fax line into each of the presumably 83 constituencies. I don't know if there are any that don't have a fax. Find the cost of 83 fax lines into 83 constituency offices, the total annual cost. What I'd like at this point is just to do some research and find out what the cost of providing that would be so that we can bring it back, perhaps for future budget considerations in this committee.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you on behalf of all members for your leadership over the past three and a half years. We're certainly going to miss the direction that you've given us.

MS HALEY: Your dictatorial attitude.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sometimes. Rarely.

MR. STELMACH: We certainly wish you all the best in your future endeavours, Mr. Chairman, and also take this opportunity to extend God's blessings on all of our staff as they head into the festive season. Hopefully everyone enjoys good health and takes some time to spend with their family. So thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: I guess we're not quite at the end of the agenda.

MS HALEY: Well, we are.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, the chair would like to ask whether there's any other business.

MR. BRUSEKER: There's just one other item. I'm still stuck on fax machines here. I've got another request here. One of the members' services allowances allows for a line to be put into your personal residence, and some members have taken advantage of that and some have not. I wonder if, while you're investigating the other cost of fax lines, you could see if there is any cost differential of putting a fax line into the residence as opposed to a regular line. I don't

know if the allowance now says that you can put a fax line in instead of a phone line or if there's any difference in cost. Could you . . .

MS HALEY: You can use the same line, Frank.

MR. BRUSEKER: No. You can get two lines. Like, I already have my own line, and I haven't bothered getting a second line.

MS HALEY: I got a second line put in my house. It cost me \$200 to have the line installed, and I pay about \$27 a month.

MR. BRUSEKER: But this should be paid for through the telecommunications budget of the Legislative Assembly office. Isn't it?

MS HALEY: Not with a fax.

MR. BRUSEKER: That's what I'm wondering. Is there a cost difference if you want to put a fax line as opposed to just a regular phone line?

MS BREault: In addition to a regular . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: No. Instead of.

MS BREault: Instead of. Well, you can use a regular voice line for fax machines.

MR. BRUSEKER: So it doesn't matter? You can just go ahead and put that in and use it for a fax instead?

MS BREault: As far as I know, it's compatible. There really is no specific thing called a fax line, as I understand it. It's more whether it's data friendly.

MR. GANO: Yeah. Technically, you can plug your fax machine in, plug your phone into the back of your fax machine, and have both a voice and a fax line.

MR. BRUSEKER: Yeah. Okay.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not disputing what's being said by the administration, but I went through this about eight months ago when we bought a new fax machine. We contacted Ed Tel of the day and all that, and the bottom line was that no matter what option we looked at, they said, "Your best bet is to get that additional line."

MR. BRASSARD: Well, they're selling telephone lines.

MR. WICKMAN: No, no. Because otherwise on our phone both lines are on one phone, and they pointed out the implications. Like Bettie Hewes' office for example; half of the time you phone there, it's busy because of the fact that they've got that type of system. Furthermore, Mr. Chairman, when I enquired and I had the extra line taken out of my home because it wasn't economically beneficial, I asked later on, "Well, can I just transfer that to the constituency office?" and I was told no, which is fine. I can accept that. We're paying the extra \$35 a month, so I think this item should go back for a report. It shouldn't just be left on the table.

MS HALEY: Perhaps there should be a review of all of the equipment and that type of thing that goes into constituency offices.

THE CHAIRMAN: So this matter will come up for a follow-up item on our next agenda that's prepared? Is that satisfactory to members?

HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Other business.

MS HALEY: There being none . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Date of next meeting.

MS HALEY: That's at the discretion of the chair.

THE CHAIRMAN: After consultation.

MS HALEY: Can we go?

12:10

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, before asking for a motion for adjournment, the chair feels it should respond in some manner to Mr. Stelmach's gracious comments. It's been just a very happy occasion for me to have been your chairman for the last three years and a bit. I have to say that I regret very much not being able to consider the possibility of continuing because I really would have liked, all things else being equal, to have continued in this very happy environment. It's been a pleasure working with each and every one of you and the other members who used to be on before you were on. The chair is happy that I've had the opportunity, so we'll be thankful for that.

Mr. Stelmach did mention health. I'm very happy that you've worked so well together the last two days to conclude our work in two days instead of the four that were allotted. I think I should share with you all that I may be having some surgery next week, so therefore I'm happy that we concluded this work. I don't think there's any question as to the outcome of the surgery, just some discomfort.

Anyway, I want to wish each and every one of you the best of the Christmas season, in case we don't get a chance to see each other before Christmas, and to wish all of you the best in the new year. Those who don't come back, as I won't be coming back, hopefully will wish us all very well. But those who do come back, you still have a lot of work to do, doing good things for the people of Alberta. I wish you all well in those efforts.

I also want to say that none of us here as members of this committee could be effective in any way without the really fine support and assistance we get from our staff. So thanks to them too.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: A motion? Mr. Severtson moves that the committee do now adjourn. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried. The committee stands adjourned.

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