



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Tuesday, December 10, 2013
1 p.m.

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC), Deputy Chair

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[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I show us at 1 o'clock. I would like to call this meeting to order and just check and see if we have a quorum. We'll go around and see who is with us in what capacity. Let's start with roll call, then. We'll begin on my left with Brian Mason. If you would announce yourself and sign in.

Mr. Mason: Brian Mason, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, on the Speaker's left.

The Chair: Thank you.
On my right let's go with Donna.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Donna Kennedy-Glans, MLA, Calgary-Varsity.

Ms L. Johnson: Linda Johnson, MLA, Calgary-Glenmore, substituting for MLA Everett McDonald.

The Chair: Thank you.
Let's go to the phones. Heather, I think you're there.

Mrs. Forsyth: Heather Forsyth from snowy Calgary-Fish Creek.

The Chair: Thank you.
Who else? Mr. Casey?

Mr. Casey: Yes. Ron Casey from Banff-Cochrane.

The Chair: Is Ms Smith there as well? Danielle, are you there?

Ms Smith: Yes. Danielle Smith, Highwood.

Mrs. Fritz: Yvonne Fritz, Calgary-Cross.

The Chair: Okay. That means we have Mr. Mason, Ms Johnson, Ms Kennedy-Glans, so three, plus myself is four, and we have Heather Forsyth, Mr. Casey, Danielle, and Yvonne, which makes us eight. Is that right? Okay. As late arrivals come in, we will announce them.

Hon. members, I have some housekeeping matters to deal with, but I'm going to deal with them after we've had the approval of the agenda, I hope, and approval of the minutes, I hope. Basically, the requirements to our service orders have to be updated as a result of the meeting we had on November 29th, but first we need to approve those.

Let's start, then, if we could, with the approval of the agenda. Do I have a motion? Ms Johnson has moved approval of the agenda. All in favour? Thank you. Any opposed? That is carried.

Let's go to the minutes of the previous meeting, November 29. I'm assuming you've all read them through. I'm looking for a motion to approve those minutes. Donna Kennedy-Glans has moved we approve those minutes. Those in favour, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. Thank you. Those minutes are now carried.

I want to now go to the housekeeping item that I just referred to. Hon. members, you would undoubtedly recall that we had some discussions last week which translated into some decisions that had to be made regarding our MLA administration budget in particular. But in a general sense we also had a good discussion about many other items, and as a result of that, we have to approve some changes to our MSC orders. These are being circulated to you as I speak, and I will come back to them in a moment. You're going to receive three items. They're going to be called working

A1, and the second document is working A2, and the third one is working A3.

We're going to welcome Mr. Quest. Would you sign in, please?

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Dave Quest, MLA for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

The Chair: Also joining us at this moment is Dr. Sherman. Please sign in.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Raj Sherman, MLA, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The Chair: By my count that means we're just waiting for one additional member, who is just rushing to his microphone, and he's going to sign in.

Mr. Young: Steve Young, MLA for Edmonton-Riverview.

The Chair: So we are at full capacity now. We welcome anyone else, by the way, who might be listening in, auditing our transactions, as it were.

You should now have received copies of working document A1 – it's titled so at the top – A2, and A3, and also what I call the green bar sheet, which is called Members' Services Allowance Budget 2014-15 Proposed Changes.

While you're just printing those off and getting them ready – I'll come back to it in just a moment – I will go now to member travel allowance, which is formally old business, item 4(a). At the last meeting, hon. members, Mr. Mason made a point here that resulted in some discussion about our per diem rates. It was decided at that meeting that we would bring it forward to the next meeting of this committee, and in the interim we would ask our staff, LAO staff, if they would please provide us with some crossjurisdictional overview of how other jurisdictions provide their members with per diem rates and that type of thing and in what amount.

Now, Mr. Ellis, you and I chatted earlier. I understand that you haven't completed that work yet, but for the purposes of the record could you just update us on where you're at?

Mr. Ellis: Sure, Mr. Chair. We initiated a jurisdictional survey with our counterparts across Canada, and basically we haven't got back all the results from that. It was a fairly short time frame since we last met. We anticipate getting those results, and then we'll bring them forward once we complete them.

The Chair: All right. Mr. Mason, are you good with that for the moment, then?

Mr. Mason: Well, I realize that it's a very tight time frame. I just wonder when we might meet again.

The Chair: Well, let's start with: when do you think you might get responses, bearing in mind that it is the Christmas season and all of that?

Mr. Ellis: We're optimistic that we'll get it before Christmas.

The Chair: Okay. As soon we get that, we'll update you accordingly, and we'll try and put something together that will be ready for your review and contemplation as soon as possible after that. I would suggest that probably, God willing and everything else being okay, we should have it all ready by the end of January, or at least we'd have a pretty solid update as early as we can in the new year.

Are we good with that? Does anyone else have a question about this issue?

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Chair, I just would like to ask why we're getting this now, why we didn't get it earlier on, the information that you're including on A1, A2, and A3?

The Chair: Sheets A1, A2, and A3 were just typed up this morning, actually, and we got them out to you just now. These are not substantive changes that require any huge amount of discussion, Heather. They are what I'm coming to next, as soon as I finish this, and I'll give you an explanation.

Is there anyone else on Mr. Mason's point about member travel allowance per diem rates? No? Let's just receive that as an update from Mr. Ellis, and thank you for undertaking this job. If any of the rest of you have anything you might want to send us regarding per diem rates in other jurisdictions – perhaps you have some information that you can share with us – please let us know.

On this item, Mr. Young.

Mr. Young: I think Mr. Mason's motion highlighted a couple of things, not only the rate itself relative to what is the economic reality of going for meals and other kinds of expenses but also the point about the alignment with the GOA in terms of the rates or, in lieu of that, the submission of the receipts. I'm reluctant to have that discussion about being out of line with the government in terms of the GOA rates, but I certainly welcome the discussion around keeping the rates the same. I think that alignment is important, but allowing the submission of receipts of the true costs should be part of that. I'll just put that out there.

The Chair: Let me just interject here. We're not having the discussion today because, as Mr. Ellis just indicated, we're not ready to. They don't have the information. But your points are noted.

Mr. Young: Good.

The Chair: Just to correct something, there was no motion by Mr. Mason. It was simply a suggestion that we take a look at a document that he circulated and get our staff to do some additional digging.

Mr. Young: I just want to say that also part of that discussion was to take it back to our colleagues and find out their positions, so that's what I was relaying in terms of where our conversations have been.

The Chair: Exactly. That's why as soon as we have that information in January we'll shoot it out to you, and you can then take it back to your own caucuses. You'll have some comparisons, and it'll be apples to apples, so to speak.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Ms Kennedy-Glans.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: I actually had the same comment, so I'll leave it.

1:10

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Any other comments on the per diem rate, item 4(a) on your agenda today? No other comments? None.

Okay. Then let us move on. Now, Heather asked a very good question. What I want to do is tell you that last meeting we had quite a significant discussion about a number of things primarily

pertaining to our office operations element, for one, and pertaining to other items that are reflected on sheets A1, A2, and A3. Those decisions were already made at the November 29 meeting, which you have now approved the minutes of, so these are just what you might call intended consequences that arose out of the decisions we've already made, Heather. This is what they look like when they're translated into what we now need, which is formal amendments to our orders.

Sheet A1, for example, deals with the constituency services order, and this is regarding the office operations element, where, for example, all the rural constituencies would see a bump up in their office operations elements, and so, too, would urban ones, bearing in mind what all members mentioned about the high costs of rent and so on in the urban ridings in particular. So that's A1.

Sheet A2 deals with a transportation amendment order. The essence of this is just the definitional change, in which we determined that we have certain rural offices and we have certain urban offices, and for purposes of the forthcoming budget we had to put the order in place that basically parallels what's already there, that is to say that we have a transportation order which was part of the proposal at the last meeting and the constituency services order. What we've now done is aligned the two so that the definition of rural and the definition of urban apply to both orders, and this brings that into effect along with item A3, which just shows you which ones are urban and which ones are rural.

Since this is just a specific and intended consequence arising out of November 29, I would appreciate it if we could get a motion to

accept and approve the three draft amendments to our orders as I've just outlined.

Mr. Mason: So moved.

The Chair: Moved by Mr. Mason. Is there any other discussion?

Hearing none, those in favour of that motion, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. That's carried unanimously. Thank you very much. That moves us along nicely in our agenda.

We are now going to go to the main thrust of what we're here for today, and that is new business, the Legislative Assembly budget. Before we get into this discussion in a large way, I want to take you, first of all, to the bottom line, which is what we're heading toward, and that is the budget-to-budget comparison, which, if approved, would show an overall net decrease of 2.66 per cent, or a savings of \$1.898 million dollars to the taxpayer if you will.

Would you please turn to the estimates summary tab, which is your second tab. Let me direct you if I could, please, to the near bottom line called total voted expenditure. Is everybody there? You will see that the first column deals with the estimate for 2014-15 in the amount totally of \$69,523,000 as compared with the current year that we're in, which is the estimate budget for 2013-14, of \$71,421,000. The dollar change is your third column, that shows a reduction of \$1,898,000, or in percentage numbers a total decrease of 2.66 per cent. That's what we're looking for, and if everybody is accepting of that, then we'll get a motion at the end of our discussion for the amount of \$69,523,000 for the incoming estimate for 2014-15.

That being said, let me take you to the top of that page quickly if I could. You will see that the first item there, labelled "A. Legislative Assembly Office Branches," has eight different categories to it, and those eight categories are explained – I'm going to be going through them all with you right away – as tabs underneath. The first eight tabs that follow all deal with item A. The next tab in your binder, which is item 9, is MLA adminis-

tration. There's only one tab for that. Then we go to item C, which is caucus budgets – and you see what that all is – and, finally, special funding, which is item D.

That being said, let us go into the proposal for our consideration regarding the overview for item A. That is your next sheet. The proposal here all has to do with section A. You all know that the branches of the LAO account for about 30 per cent of our total voted expenditure. All LAO budgets have been prepared on that basis, the parameters that we approved on November 29 at this committee, and all of them have now been applied.

Specifically, if we take a look at each of the subsets in the bullets, you'll see that the LAO branch compensation rates are going to be adjusted by plus 3 per cent for eligible employees – that's not MLAs but the employees – in-range adjustments, 3 per cent, and zero per cent for general market adjustment, which will be applied to the management and opted-out or excluded non-management employees of the Alberta public service.

The second bullet there talks about the current or anticipated rates for health benefits and pension plans and so on. The increase in employer contribution rates for the management employees pension plan and the supplementary retirement plan are 2.71 per cent and 1.64 per cent respectively. The health spending accounts of \$950 have been budgeted there. Operational expenses have been adjusted, where warranted, for inflation subject to a maximum of 2 per cent and based on the forecasts that you see there, the economic forecast for Alberta as well as the Conference Board of Canada.

Finally, for budgeting purposes we're projecting 75 sessional days and 80 committee meetings, and the budget reflects the trend, based on past actual data, in the daily sitting hours. The increase in sitting days and committee meetings will affect branches providing direct service support and so on to various committees such as House services and the committees branch. The bottom line for this first chunk is that the resulting impact of the application of the parameters above to all branches is an increase of 1.63 per cent just for this first paragraph, so to speak, of the entire budget.

Now, to get into some of the details, financial management and admin services, which Mr. Ellis looks after, will show an overall decrease of \$61,000, or 3.66 per cent, for 2014-15, assuming we approve that. That reflects a significant change from the 2013-14 budget. In fact, the percentage actually reflects a decrease in human resource expenses of \$54,000, or 3.35 per cent, and an operational expenses decrease as well of \$7,000, or 12.73 per cent. The primary reason is stated there. It's basically that the human resources expense is the result of not replacing a manager who retired but, instead, adding a nonmanagement staffperson and redistributing the roles and responsibilities amongst existing managers and staff. The decrease in operational expenses is as a result of reduced lease costs for multifunctional devices, that are now more the norm than the exception.

The second item, which is human resource services – Cheryl Scarlett is in charge of that – shows a modest increase of 1.65 per cent. That is a budget-to-budget change again, and this percentage reflects an increase in human resources expenses of \$32,000, or 1.81 per cent, with no change in operational expenses.

1:20

The third item is the office of the Speaker. There is an overall increase here of 2.05 per cent from the current budget. Just so you know, this reflects an increase in our human resources expenses. These are all in-range merit adjustments for the staff that work in the Speaker's office – it comes to about a 1.38 per cent increase – as well as an increase of \$5,000 . . .

Could you please correct your sheet? That should read "\$5,000," not "\$12,000." Does everybody have that?

Mr. Mason: Where is it, again, please?

The Chair: Under Office of the Speaker, the third line: "of \$12,000" should read "of \$5,000." That's a typo.

Mr. Young: It's on this sheet, the summary sheet, as well.

The Chair: Yeah.

. . . or 2.05 per cent in the operational. Some of our hosting costs went up as well as some of our periodicals: newspapers, reports, and that sort of thing.

The Legislature Library, which Val Footz looks after – and she is here with us as well – shows an overall decrease from this year's budget to next year's budget of \$27,000, or minus 0.99 per cent. This reflects a decrease in human resources expenses of \$43,000, or a minus 2.21 per cent decrease, but a small increase in operational expenses of \$16,000, or an increase of 2.02 per cent in that subcategory. Human resources have decreased overall due to a reduction in staff hours due to the completion of certain project work. Operational expenses have increased or decreased based on actual costs experience and a general transition of library reference materials from paper-based documents and items to electronic.

Item 5, House Services – this is Dr. McNeil's area as Clerk – shows an overall increase of \$135,000, or 1.73 per cent, for the incoming budget if approved. That percentage reflects an increase in human resource expenses of \$271,000, or 4.55 per cent, and a decrease of \$136,000, or minus 7.44 per cent, in operations. The increase in human resources is due to increased sitting hours, and the operational expenses decrease is largely due to reduced conference activity, which is partially offset by a small increase in travel.

Visitor services, which is looked after by our Sergeant-at-Arms, Brian Hodgson, shows a 5.02 per cent increase. An overall increase in expenses of \$124,000, reflecting 5.02 per cent, is proposed for '14-15. This reflects an increase in human resource expenses of \$129,000, or 8.44 per cent, but it also shows a decrease of \$5,000, or minus 0.53 per cent, in the operations end. The operational expenses have decreased, mostly because of a decrease in expenditures for office administration and supplies, which includes products for sale in the gift shop. It's anticipated that sales will be decreased during the transition to the new gift shop. Therefore, fewer products will be required during that changeover period.

Item 7, information technology services, is overseen by Cheryl Scarlett. The overall increase projected here is \$51,000, or 1.11 per cent, for 2014-15. This percentage reflects an increase in human resources expenses in the amounts mentioned and no change in operational expenses.

Finally, Legislature committees, which are supervised by Shannon Dean: the overall increase in expenses in this area is projected at \$103,000, or an increase of 11.28 per cent, going from the current budget to the new, projected one for 2014-15. This basically reflects an increase in human resources expenses of \$2,000, or 10.53 per cent, and an increase of \$101,000, or 11.3 per cent, in operational expenses. Please note that funding for two new legislative review committees has been included here, one of them being the Mental Health Act review committee and the other one being the public interest act review committee. So two brand new committees are being incorporated in here.

That, hon. members, takes us through section A. Are there any questions or comments regarding section A? Let me jot them

down. I have Mr. Mason, followed by Mr. Young. Anybody on teleconference who wants in right now?

Mrs. Forsyth: You can add me, Mr. Speaker. Last year we went through these individually, and now you've packaged them all in one. May I ask: can we not do what we did last year and go through each one separately, like financial management, human resources, office of the Speaker, et cetera?

The Chair: Sure. It's not a problem either way, Heather. I just wanted to give people the bigger picture for all of section A because it's basically the consequences, again, of the parameters approved on November 29.

We're now opening up the discussion for any aspect of item A, starting with Mr. Mason, followed by Mr. Young, followed by Mrs. Forsyth.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. My question is to Dr. McNeil. There is close to a \$300,000 increase in earnings. That's probably three or four new staff. Could you break that down for us?

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. The main increase in earnings relates, really, to the fact that, you know, we are sitting longer hours.

Mr. Mason: So is it overtime, then?

Dr. McNeil: Well, it would be primarily just increased hours for security staff, pages, *Hansard*. A component of that would be overtime. I just did an analysis of sort of the average sitting hours per day between 2008-09 and 2012-13. The average sitting time then was 5.1 hours per day. This year to date it's six hours. In terms of the night sittings in the period between '08-09 and '11-12 we sat on average about 25 per cent evenings. This past two years, in '12-13, 48 per cent of the days included evening sittings, and in '12-13 to date 55 per cent of the days included evening sittings. There's a significant increase. It's about, well, almost a 15 per cent increase in sitting hours.

As well, for the committees we estimated an increase from 70 to 80 committee meetings. I think we were probably a bit conservative in terms of that committee meeting estimate now because we're already up to, I think, the 71st or 72nd committee meeting in this fiscal year. That's the main component of the increase in earnings.

Mr. Mason: Is there any change to your FTEs?

Dr. McNeil: There's an increase of one FTE, and that relates to the visitor services area, which is really adding staffing to support the transition to the federal building and the increased programming that will be taking place.

Mr. Mason: Does that come under here? It's got its own budget, visitor services.

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. Sorry. That doesn't come under there.

Mr. Mason: So there's no change in your area to FTEs?

Dr. McNeil: No.

Mr. Mason: Okay. That's fine. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Young.

Mr. Young: Thank you. I'd like to talk about information technology services. You know, I've had lots of conversations with Cheryl about IT and what a wonderful job they do. My concern is that I'm kind of in a strange position. I mean, I think that's a very reasonable increase, 1 per cent, but I want to focus more on the ROI and where our Legislature is going. I kind of would like to see where we're going. This is sort of a stay-the-course kind of budget. We have a lot of paper exercised in our Legislature. I know there are some examples around the country and around the world that have really advanced this. Where are we at on that? I'm certainly not asking to spend more money, but I am sort of asking: where are we at in terms of where we need to go?

Mrs. Scarlett: Thank you very much for the question. You're right in terms of that we're trying to do all that we can to hold the line, if you will. Within that a large component of the IT budget is for regular maintenance and infrastructure, what keeps us going relative to behind the scenes as well as support in terms of the hardware and the software given that we are always trying to, if you will, not be leading edge but as far ahead as we can in meeting members' needs.

I know that there are a lot of members now that are very interested and have expressed: what more can we do for them relative to managing and co-ordinating all the mobile devices and better using our laptops? That particular project is one that we have started right now, that we are looking at in this next fiscal year in terms of taking and upgrading our operating systems to allow us more flexibility, to give more flexibility to the managers to work with their devices any time, anywhere, and work more to that paperless environment as one of the objectives that has been expressed.

1:30

Another big project that we're in the middle of, that you're all aware of, is our wireless initiative, again, which kind of goes hand in hand with – the new wireless initiative is the start of our rebuild of our infrastructure, that will continue over to the federal building because we have to set up shop there and start from scratch, but it also will allow us to better enable the technologies to meet some of those needs that have been expressed.

Mr. Young: Thank you very much. I'm very hopeful that we can move away from buying fax machines and photocopiers and put our budget towards that direction, so thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
Heather Forsyth.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have several questions, numerous questions, actually, so do you want me to start and then come back?

The Chair: Sure. Yeah. Go ahead. Let's go one grouping at a time. Just tell us which tab you're on, by number.

Mrs. Forsyth: Unfortunately, I'm starting with the office of the Speaker.

The Chair: Sure. That's good.

Mrs. Forsyth: The first thing I'd like to ask is about the increase in your hosting from \$11,000 to \$14,000.

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Forsyth: Can you explain to me why?

The Chair: Sure. Of course. Many of you may not know this, but we receive a number of delegations who come to Alberta. We seem to be a pretty hot spot for visits right now. With each diplomatic visit or official visit there's typically one or two members who come. They can be ambassadors. They can be consuls. They can be consuls general. They can be formerly elected or currently elected or whatever. We're finding an increase in that number, members. At the same time, we also provide each of them with a small token gift.

We're projecting that based on the counts so far, we will be increasing that part of the budget by those couple, three thousand, whatever it is, to accommodate the increased number of visitors who come here. On some of the occasions, too, we host them with cheese and crackers and that sort of thing. On rare occasions I might even host an occasional dinner for them.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Thanks. I appreciate that answer. Thank you.

I'd like to ask you about where the MLA conference travel is incorporated.

The Chair: Under House Services, tab 5.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Last year I asked you, when we were debating this budget, about the travel, and you indicated to me in *Hansard* that you were going to look at cutting back because of the fiscal reality we're facing. I see now we're looking at an increase of another \$43,000. So my first question is: in 2013-14, on your travel, what travel was cut back on that? Why the substantial increase this year?

The Chair: There are a number of answers here. I'll offer some of them as best I can remember them, Heather. First of all, we have no control over where some of these conferences might occur. So to give you an example, last year I travelled – and I can't remember, Clerk, if you went with me or not – to Victoria for the seminar. There were a couple of us who went to the semiannual, let's call it, seminar, and that one was in Victoria.

This year we have conferences out in the Maritimes, so you can appreciate that there's an increase just due to physical location. I'm just using the Canadian one as an example because we all know the difference between Victoria travel versus St. John's, Newfoundland, which we just came back from, or the one that we're just about to go to as presiding officers at the end of January, which this year is in Ottawa. So there's that. The same can apply to some of the conferences that occur in the United States. Clearly, it's cheaper to fly to one location versus another, so we looked at the map and said: okay; we have to accommodate that.

But generally speaking, Heather, two other things: one, you will see that there will be fewer delegates that I will be sending to these conferences as a result so that we can keep this increase down to a minimum.

One final thing is that there is an organization called COPA, which stands for the parliamentary conference of the Americas, so to speak. One of our members just got elected to the executive of that committee, and as a result he has to attend a semiannual meeting, coming up here in a couple of months, plus the annual meeting as an executive member. It's similar to the role that I have to play, because of the shoes that I've inherited, with ExCo for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. That's entirely a new budget item of several thousand dollars for the travel there and back, the accommodation, and that type of thing. At the end of the day, it comes out to the difference that you see on sheet.

Mrs. Forsyth: So last year. . .

The Chair: Sorry, Heather. David McNeil just has a quick supplementary on this as well.

David.

Dr. McNeil: Yes. The majority of that increase, that you see there, relates to the fact that in this past fiscal year we hosted the CPA regional conference in Edmonton, so we budgeted I think \$150,000 for that. We also budgeted I think \$15,000 because we also hosted the Parliamentary Counsel conference.

Mrs. Forsyth: But, David, wasn't that included? I remember distinctly discussing that in last year's budget, that it was included in last year's budget.

Dr. McNeil: It was included in last year's budget. I'm saying that those costs are removed from this year's budget, but we now have to budget to send members to the CPA conference, which I think is in New Brunswick. We're cutting back on the number of delegates we send to that, but, still, sending four delegates to New Brunswick: I think the estimated cost of that is about \$22,000. Also, we send two staff to the Parliamentary Counsel conference, which we didn't budget for in the travel last year. That's the major increase – I think it's \$35,000 – in that category for those two conferences, which we didn't budget for last year under travel.

The Chair: Because we didn't have to.

Dr. McNeil: But we reduced the conference budget by \$137,000 as a result of the fact that we don't host those two conferences in fiscal '14-15.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman, that's why – I just wanted to point out if I can . . .

The Chair: One second, Heather.

On this point, Brian, and then we'll come back to Heather.

Mr. Mason: Well, there's a \$13,000 increase in travel, but there's a \$137,000 reduction in conferences just a few lines down. I was just seeking an explanation and thank the Clerk for that.

The Chair: That's just exactly what he gave.

Back to you, Heather.

Mrs. Forsyth: I just want to add a couple of things on that. Of the \$247,000 that was budgeted last year – you talked about sending fewer delegates. Have you got a breakdown of the travel last year with fewer delegates?

The Chair: I don't have it handy, Heather, but I will have it probably by the end of December, at the end of this quarter. No. I'll have to wait, actually, until the end of January, won't I? We still have the Ottawa conference to go, and then that should pretty much get us up to speed.

Mrs. Forsyth: Just so I understand, from the \$247,000 that was estimated – and we had discussed that and approved your budget last year. You indicated last year that you would be sending fewer delegates to conferences. Did you spend less than what you budgeted for last year with fewer delegates?

The Chair: I believe so, but I'm not sure, Heather. I don't have the numbers just in front of me, but it's not just me who . . .

Mrs. Forsyth: I understand that. I understand this also includes MLAs. I guess, for me, we're looking at \$247,000 last year. We were supposed to send fewer delegates, but now we're looking at

an increase of \$43,000 more for travel, which includes you and, obviously, MLAs to attend conferences. I'm struggling with the \$43,000 increase when you've indicated that you're going to send fewer delegates. I appreciate the fact that we have a member that's been elected. I just can't rationalize the increase.

1:40

The Chair: Well, I can get David McNeil to try and explain it again, but there are a number of factors. It's not just one simple, single factor. If members will indulge me, I'll go through it all again if you don't mind. Is that okay? Just to answer her question. Okay.

Let's start at the beginning. First of all, we, Alberta, are not hosting the CPA regional seminar this year.

Mrs. Forsyth: Right.

The Chair: That means that someone else is hosting it. That means we have to send people to it, so there's going to be an increase of a few thousand dollars just right there.

Secondly, there are a number of location changes for other things such as the presiding officers' conference, such as the mid-year seminar conference. I cited the example of one that was in Victoria last year, and this year it's going out to the Maritimes, so there's an additional cost for travel because of geographic distance. You also have the ones that are hosted in the United States, which many of you have been to, and as those locations change, we have to update the numbers, the dollars, that are attached to that.

Then we have the member who's been elected to COPA. That line item, in other words, never existed before, so that's a brand new expense to us as well. I don't have the exact amount estimated for it. It's about \$14,000, Heather.

Then Dr. McNeil mentioned another figure, \$23,000, which is in *Hansard*.

It doesn't take long to get to the math if you read it all after the fact. That having been said, we didn't just go *carte blanche* and say: okay; we're sending the same number of members again. I had to do my best to cut it down to the minimum, but we don't want to lose our spot at some of these conferences, so I'm trying to ensure that at least one person, preferably two, goes to all of those conferences based on the draws that we make.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. I appreciate that. Thank you.

Can you provide a breakdown on the conferences that were attended last year, how many delegates went, and on the conferences you're anticipating this year and how many delegates you're anticipating sending?

The Chair: Yes, of course. That's why I said that as soon as we get through this next quarter, I'll be in a better position to answer that question. One of the difficulties in answering it right now is that we don't know yet who's going to put in their names for the conferences that are still coming up, who's going to go. I can tell you that with respect to the presiding officers' conference that's being held in Ottawa at the end of January and into early February, there are three eligible members because there are only three presiding officers: the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, and the Deputy Chair of Committees. The three of us are being budgeted to go, but I just got a note here from one saying that he can't go, so it might be just me and the Deputy Chair going.

It's a little bit fluid, but I'd be happy to provide that to you just as soon as we get more conclusive information on it, Heather.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Thanks.

I have a question to Dr. McNeil. He indicated the averages of the longer hours in sittings, yet we're sitting shorter days, so it seems that we're sitting shorter days, but we're working longer hours. At that point in time, if we're working longer hours, you're having to pay overtime and that. Am I right on that or not?

Dr. McNeil: In the parameters document we said that we'd have 75 sitting days. Now, to this point in the fiscal year we've had 38, and, you know, if we sit in February and March for 3 weeks, that would be another 24 days, so there are 62 days in this fiscal year. We always overestimate. Seventy-five days is the number we use for the number of sitting days in a fiscal year for budget purposes. But as I said earlier, we're sitting 15 per cent longer hours per day in the Assembly, and there's an estimated increase, 15 per cent or so, in the number of committee meetings. That's what drives up the cost in terms of the salaries and earnings, especially with respect to *Hansard*, security, pages, and so on.

Mrs. Forsyth: You alluded to a breakdown when you talked about – I think it was from 2009-2012 – the 5.1 hours versus 6 hours. Can you provide a breakdown for that period of time of the length of the days versus the hours?

Dr. McNeil: I'm not sure what you mean. You don't mean length of days; you mean the number of days that we sit, I think. Is that what you're . . .

Mrs. Forsyth: What I'm understanding from you: we're sitting shorter days but working longer hours, which incurs overtime, then.

Dr. McNeil: You mean we're sitting fewer days, not shorter days.

Mrs. Forsyth: Sitting fewer days but working longer hours, which then incurs overtime.

Dr. McNeil: Correct. Past a certain point, yes.

Mrs. Forsyth: So what I'm asking for is a breakdown for that over the last couple of years like you alluded to when you were talking about the 5.1 hours versus the 6 hours.

Dr. McNeil: Well, I can give you, you know – in 2008-09 we sat an average of 5.47; in 2009-10, 4.5; in 2010-11, 5.3; in 2011-12, 5.4; in 2012-13, 5.8; in 2013-14, 6.06.

Mrs. Forsyth: Those are hours, right?

Dr. McNeil: That's correct. That's the average number of hours per sitting day.

Mrs. Forsyth: Shorter days sitting, but longer hours.

Dr. McNeil: Fewer days, not shorter days. Fewer days.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Fewer days, but longer hours.

Dr. McNeil: Correct. For example, in '08-09, we sat for 70 days; '09-10 we sat for 60; '10-11 we sat for 44; '11-12 we sat for 49; and '12-13 for 39, which was an election year. Then '13-14 we've sat for 38 to date, but projecting ahead to the end of the fiscal year, if we sit in February and March for three weeks in each month, that's another 24 days. That comes out to 62 days projected for '13-14. If we continue with . . .

Mrs. Forsyth: Do you understand where I'm going with this question, Dr. McNeil? If you look at the days of 49, 39, or 38,

while the sitting days are shorter, we're incurring longer hours, which includes overtime.

Dr. McNeil: Fewer sitting days.

Mrs. Forsyth: Fewer sitting days, but longer hours, which incurs overtime.

Dr. McNeil: Correct.

Mrs. Forsyth: That's what I would like the breakdown on if I could, please.

Dr. McNeil: I just did. I just gave you that breakdown.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. So we're paying more in overtime and sitting fewer days.

Dr. McNeil: Well, I'm projecting for this fiscal year that we'll sit probably in the range of 60 to 65 days, assuming we start in accordance with our calendar. We've already sat for 38 days in this fiscal year.

Mrs. Forsyth: Versus 39 the year before and 49 the year before that.

Dr. McNeil: Yes. We have to remember, though, that '12-13 was an election year.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. I'm aware of that. I was there.

The Chair: Heather, I think there's also a balancing effect here. While it's true that there might be fewer sitting days and longer hours during those days, it's also true that we could do the opposite. In other words, the opposite could happen, and that would be that we would just sit more days but not as long each day. Either way there would be some additional costs doing that as well.

Mrs. Forsyth: I understand that, Mr. Speaker, because I'm sitting. I'm just trying to understand the more days versus the overtime.

The Chair: I hear you.

I have Dr. Sherman on this point.

Dr. Sherman: Just on this point, Dr. McNeil, I wonder: have you done an analysis on if we actually sat more days and shorter days, whether it would cost less or more? Just as a physician, Mr. Speaker, you'd probably have fewer cranky MLAs during the day if they weren't sitting till 2 in the morning.

The Chair: Something to pray for.

Dr. McNeil, do you want to comment?

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. Well, we haven't done that analysis, but intuitively, you know, if we sit shorter days and more days and are not required to pay overtime, there would be likely a marginal decrease in the costs.

Dr. Sherman: And your staff would probably be more productive because, you know, productivity greatly drops off after 10- and 12-hour days. Not only are you paying more, but you're probably less productive in that time that you're sitting in overtime in the wee hours of the morning.

Dr. McNeil: Our staff are productive day and night.

Dr. Sherman: Well, I know how productive they are. They're very productive.

1:50

The Chair: I have Ms Johnson, followed by Mr. Young, followed by Mr. Mason on this point.

Ms L. Johnson: On this point, if we are sitting more days, wouldn't there be more costs to have more MLAs in Edmonton? When I'm here, I'm here. I sit a long day, and then it's done.

The Chair: Well, I think that's what Dr. McNeil just said. There might be a marginal decrease, I think is the word he used.

Dr. McNeil.

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. I'm not taking into account the costs of the temporary residence allowance and so on although those are capped.

Ms L. Johnson: Those are capped. But in terms of mileage . . .

Dr. McNeil: In terms of mileage and so on there probably would be an increase in some of those costs, yes.

The Chair: Okay. Is there anybody else that hasn't spoken yet on teleconference that wants in at this point?

Hearing none, let's go to Mr. Young.

Mr. Young: The scope of this committee is to effectively take estimates based on what the House does. We're not picking on how the House is going to sit or how long. You've done reasonable estimates based on historical patterns and based on overtime and all that kind of stuff. Is that a fair assessment? You're not making recommendations. That's outside of this committee's role. Are these reasonable estimates based on what we've seen and what we expect to see in the future?

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. We laid out our assumptions in the parameters document, and these estimates are based on those assumptions within a certain range. I think they are realistic assumptions in terms of what it costs to operate the House.

Mr. Young: I appreciate that, and you've done a heck of a job. I just want to make it clear that it isn't within the scope of this committee to decide how long we're sitting. It's about what a reasonable budget is based on reasonable estimates. Thank you for that. I just want to make it clear for the rest of the committee members.

The Chair: I don't think the question was about policy. It was about numbers. So we're within the realm of questions that we are authorized to take and answer.

Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. That was the point I was going to make. This committee doesn't determine the schedule of the House. The government does. Maybe if we sat more days for a shorter period of time, it might save some money, but in a lot of ways I think we're fishing for minnows with a tuna net. A couple of thousand dollars here and there is not . . .

The Chair: Okay. Are there any others?

Heather, have you completed your list of questions, or do you want to jump to another section now?

Mrs. Forsyth: I have several more questions. I just want a clarification from Dr. McNeil if I can, please. He indicated that

there was no increase, if I'm right, on full-time under that, no changes to FTEs in House services.

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. I probably misspoke there. There is a difference showing one FTE change. That relates to the fact that the number for last year was incorrect because we didn't account for one FTE in the security and ceremonial branch. The funding existed last year, but we mistakenly didn't account for that FTE last year. In terms of House services overall it shows a one FTE increase, but that is the result of an error that we made last year in not including that one FTE that had been budgeted for.

Mrs. Forsyth: So is that the \$305,000 difference in the security and ceremonial branch?

Dr. McNeil: No. That \$305,000 difference relates to, as I said earlier, the increased costs in relation to security and ceremonial staff, pages, and in the *Hansard* branch in terms of the increased hours for both the Assembly sitting and committee meetings. That's where the bulk of that increase comes from.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Moving on to overall visitor services, again, we're looking at an increase in travel of \$4,000 and an increase in hosting of \$1,000. I guess Brian Hodgson would have to answer that question.

Dr. McNeil: Yes. Correct. He's now moving to the table.

The Chair: Mr. Hodgson and Al, why don't you just introduce yourselves quickly and the capacity in which you serve for purposes of the record, starting with Brian Hodgson.

Mr. Hodgson: Brian Hodgson. I'm the Sergeant-at-Arms and the director of visitor, ceremonial, and security services.

Mr. Chapman: Al Chapman, manager, visitor services.

The Chair: Go ahead, Brian.

Mr. Hodgson: Your question again, Mrs. Forsyth, was . . .

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, you have an increase in travel of \$4,000. You have an increase in hosting of a thousand dollars. Under travel you are going to \$72,000 from \$68,000, and hosting is \$33,000 from \$32,000.

Mr. Hodgson: On the travel that is as a result of our attendance at professional development opportunities that, hopefully, will position our staff to take full advantage of the potential in our new visitor centre, including the gift shop.

Mrs. Forsyth: Hosting?

Mr. Hodgson: We have a new committee, an arts advisory committee, which is comprised of members from the arts community from around the province, and an educational advisory committee. Both of the memberships for these committees are unpaid, but we do provide, in the case of the educational advisory committee, expenses, reimburse them for the cost of hiring substitute teachers to cover them off. They provide input to us in terms of our educational outreach programming from a pedagogical point of view. Again, they are unpaid, but we do cover their meals and accommodation.

Similarly, the arts advisory committee will advise us on items and other merchandise that we might stock in our gift shop that represent Alberta authors, artisans, craftsmen, and painters. Again, these costs: we're not paying anybody for them, but we're simply

reimbursing, you know, reasonable travel and expenses for their attendance here a couple of times a year.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. If I may, Mr. Chair, while we have Mr. Hodgson. . .

The Chair: Yes. Please proceed.

Mrs. Forsyth: Last year, Brian, you talked about the new visitor centre and what you're anticipating and that you were seeking partners for these exhibits. What partners have you brought to the table?

Mr. Hodgson: We haven't brought any to the table as yet, but I'm optimistic based on past successes that we've had in partnering with community service organizations and corporate entities. I'd be very optimistic, indeed. The question is about when we are going to move in and the nature of the exhibits to ensure that there's an appropriate partnership. For the information of the committee one of the first exhibits we anticipate is a curated exhibition of Group of Seven works that feature Alberta as the subject matter. Now, there are any number of commercial entities and other groups that we might approach. We haven't approached any yet because, you know, we're not sure of the timing of that exhibit. Similarly, we have made arrangements to exhibit in 2015 one of the 17 copies of the Magna Carta, and there's significant interest in that. There are any number of commercial entities, I think, that would be very keen to be involved in those.

Mrs. Forsyth: My last question on visitor services is in regard to the Lord and associates consultants.

Mr. Hodgson: Yes.

Mrs. Forsyth: Will you be tabling that report?

Mr. Hodgson: I'm not sure what report you're referring to.

Mrs. Forsyth: I asked you last year – or, actually, it was Mrs. Jablonski – and you related the payments to Lord and associates, who are consultants in the visitor centre project.

Mr. Hodgson: Yes. I can tell you that to date we've spent on Lord and associates \$630,000 of a budgeted amount of \$710,000. We anticipate incurring a final \$80,000 over the '14-15 year.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thanks.

My last question is on legislative committees. Mr. Chair, you alluded to the two new committees that are forming. I can appreciate the one under the public interest disclosure act because the act clearly indicates that it has to be done by a special committee established by the Legislative Assembly. Having said that, it does not say that on the Mental Health Act, so my question would be why the Standing Committee on Families and Communities cannot deal with that act.

2:00

The Chair: Thank you.

The person in charge of this is Shannon Dean. Shannon, could I just get you to sign in, your name and title, and then answer the question if you would, please?

Ms Dean: Certainly, Mr. Chair. Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel and director of House services.

I'm not sure, Mrs. Forsyth, what provision you're looking at in connection with the Mental Health Act review, but section 54 of the Mental Health Act requires a committee to begin a comprehensive review of the act within five years of the coming into force of section 8 of the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. Section 8 came into force on January 1, 2010, so that means that a special committee of the Legislative Assembly has to be struck by January 1, 2015.

Mrs. Forsyth: I see that under the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, Shannon, it clearly states that "a special committee established by the Legislative Assembly must begin a comprehensive review of this Act." It does not say the same thing under the Mental Health Act. It says that "a committee of the Legislative Assembly must begin a comprehensive review." One is establishing "a special committee." The second one just says: "a committee." What I'm suggesting is that I can appreciate the public interest disclosure because it clearly states in the act "a special committee," but it doesn't say the same in the Mental Health Act.

Ms Dean: Well, certainly, we've had situations where one of the policy committees has been deemed to be a statute review committee. Yes, you're correct that that could occur in this instance, but there are also the costs associated with conducting the review itself. In particular, advertising costs are the key component that we would have to budget for.

Mrs. Forsyth: That is budgeted under leg. committees, a \$72,000 increase in advertising, on the following page. I understand that. It's also budgeted \$16,000 more for travel and \$11,000 more for hosting. We've got \$80,000 for the Mental Health Act select special review committee. What I'm suggesting is: why can't that be reviewed by the Standing Committee on Families and Communities? You've got increases under Leg. Committees, Summary of Budget Estimates for hosting and \$72,000 for advertising.

The Chair: Heather, I think you would know that that's not our call. We don't determine what those committees do. We just try and provide for the costs related to them.

Shannon, did you want to add something?

Ms Dean: All I can say is that we have additional work that's mandated by statute, and the key component that will cost extra money is the advertising component. There will also be hosting expenses and possibly travel costs.

Mrs. Forsyth: I don't want to be argumentative, honestly. I see that that is included under the legislative committees: \$72,000 in advertising costs, an increase of \$11,000 in hosting, \$16,000 in travel. The Speaker has made it clear that it's not your call. I guess who we take that up with is whoever decides, which would be the Minister of Health, about the Mental Health Act select special review committee because you've budgeted \$80,000 for it.

The Chair: Dr. McNeil has a point to make here, Heather.

Dr. McNeil: Regardless of whether, you know, that's a separate committee or whether it's done by an existing legislative policy committee, those costs will still be incurred. If you hand it to the Families and Communities Committee, those costs will still have to be incurred regardless of whether it's a separate committee or that legislative policy committee. Those numbers still have to be in the budget to account for those activities regardless of which

committee does it, whether it's a separate committee or one of the existing legislative policy committees.

The Chair: On this point I have Brian Mason. Heather, just one minute.

Go ahead, Brian.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman, I just want to clarify. There are two pages relative to this budget, and the numbers are almost identical though there is a slight difference under the estimate for this year. Do I understand this correctly? These are the same budgets, just allocated differently, one by function and one by committee? So this isn't two budgets? This is one budget, just stating the numbers sort of differently?

Dr. McNeil: Correct.

Ms Dean: That's correct.

Dr. McNeil: In terms of the discrepancy, we have an update page. We discovered that there was an error in that second page.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. There's a \$5,000 difference.

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. We've got a document to update that.

The Chair: Heather, go ahead.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, I guess I'm again struggling on this. By law, as Shannon has indicated, it's very clear on one committee, not so clear on the other. The Standing Committee on Families and Communities: Mr. Quest is the chair. We just did a review from the government on Irlen syndrome. All of the committees have increased by \$2,000. If you go down, we've got Committees-General – I'm not even sure what that is – and then we've got the standing committees on families, on economic future, and on resources. You've got the Mental Health Act select special review committee for \$80,000 and the public interest disclosure act, which I can understand. As you said, it's not your call. I guess that's something that we discuss with the government.

The Chair: Shannon, do you want to go ahead?

Ms Dean: Whether it's a legislative policy committee that conducts the mental health review or whether it's a new committee that's struck would be determined through a motion that gets approved by the House.

The Chair: The work still gets done either way. We have to accommodate an anticipated expenditure.

Ms Dean: Yeah. There are additional costs contemplated associated with that statutory review.

The Chair: Yeah. Regardless of who does the work. Brian Mason on this one.

Mr. Mason: I just want to understand. If we budget in anticipation of an event which ultimately doesn't come to pass, then the money is simply not expended, right?

The Chair: Correct.

Mr. Mason: Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Heather, anything else from your end?

Mrs. Forsyth: No. I'm fine, Mr. Chair. I'll wait till we get to the next.

The Chair: Okay. Is there anyone else with a question under the bigger picture of item A, which is the eight topics under Legislative Assembly Office branches? Dr. Sherman.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just don't get the legislative committees line. That's the one outlier, an 11.8 per cent increase in spending. I'm looking at the detailed breakdown of the summary of the budget estimates. It's page 2 of 2.

The Chair: Under tab 8?

Dr. Sherman: Under tab 8. You know, 57.5 per cent of the budget, \$581,000, is for advertising for the committees, so the majority of the budget is for advertising. Just a couple of questions. The increase is a \$72,000 increase. So the increase for that particular ministry is a \$103,000 increase. The majority of that, \$72,000, is an increase just for advertising. What type of advertising has been ordered for the various committees, and is there a line-by-line breakdown of advertising costs for all the committees? What percentage of the \$581,000 advertising budget will be spent on the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund? That's a lot of money for advertising.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Sherman.

Do you or Rhonda want to start, Shannon?

Ms Dean: Well, I'll pass it on to Rhonda, but basically those figures for advertising are allocated each year based on historical data in terms of cost. Rhonda can advise as to, you know, what the scope of advertising campaigns means in terms of the figures.

The Chair: Rhonda, would you sign in with your name and title, please?

Ms Sorensen: Certainly. Rhonda Sorensen, manager of corporate communications and broadcast services.

The Chair: For whom?

Ms Sorensen: For the Legislative Assembly Office. For you.

The Chair: Thank you. Just to be clear.

2:10

Ms Sorensen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Dr. Sherman, as you know, when you sit on committees, the scope of the advertising is determined by the committee members themselves. The best we can do is budget for, as Shannon indicated, what has historically been done. Then if the committee chooses to advertise less than that, of course, those funds would not be expended.

Dr. Sherman: Has there been an analysis of the money spent? How many people in the public are actually engaged? Just a review: are there more efficient ways of advertising in light of technology versus the usual newspaper ads, which can be very expensive?

Ms Sorensen: Well, certainly, those types of things are done within each committee. That's kind of outside the scope of the actual budgeting process. But within the direction of every committee we do look at measurement statistics and try and determine, based on our best practices as well as industry standards, what are the most efficient ways to expend public dollars.

Dr. Sherman: Last question: can the LAO give guidance to the individual committees as to what's the most effective and efficient and cost-effective way of advertising? I don't know. Sometimes the committees seem to get a bit out of control. If they just submit their budget and there's no oversight from the Legislative Assembly Office, can we get just something like that to give us some guidance? Is there a regular review process?

Ms Sorensen: Again, Mr. Chair, if I may, for every single committee we do present a communications plan, which does exactly that. It provides recommendations. Then it's up to the committee to choose whether or not they follow those recommendations.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Anyone else on the teleconference end who might have a question pertaining to item A, the Legislative Assembly Office branches, and the eight branches that come in underneath there?

Mrs. Forsyth: Just on the advertising, again, as someone who sat on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee, that committee travels and has to do their annual report every year – and I could be corrected on this, but I think last year or this year it was in Edmonton – and those numbers under advertising are already incorporated in that. What Dr. Sherman was asking for was the rationale for the huge increase in advertising dollars on the committees. For example, we spent some money to let people know about our review of Irlen syndrome. I'm just wondering what reviews they're looking at to warrant the increase of the advertising dollars of – what is it? – \$72,000.

Ms Dean: If I may, Mr. Chair, the estimated increase of \$72,000 is largely attributable to two statute review committees, that typically, historically speaking, require province-wide advertising in dailies and weeklies.

The Chair: Okay, Heather?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yeah.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there anyone else on section A? Do we sort of have the spirit of agreement to let section A go, then? Okay. Thank you very much.

Let's go to section B. That's your next tab, which is tab 9, MLA administration. Basically, all of this page was already dealt with in great detail on November 29. Our purpose here is to just provide it to you in an official capacity because it is part of the overall budget, but we have hashed this one all through and come out with some significant savings. I think the overall summary says it best. If you flip forward to that, page 4, it will show you that insofar as MLA pay and members' allowances and all that other stuff is concerned, we have trimmed the budget by \$1,162,000 to reflect an overall decrease in MLA administration of 3.18 per cent. I don't want to preclude any questions, but we spent a few hours on this.

Okay. Brian Mason, a question?

Mr. Mason: Do you want to just refresh my memory on that discussion? Was this the pay freeze?

The Chair: Yeah. It was the proposal – remember? – that Scott and friends brought forward at the last meeting. It showed the overall decrease, the MLA pay freeze. It was the document, Brian, that looked like this. It's in the binder which I just quoted from,

actually. Dr. McNeil will just show you more specifically where that is.

As Dr. McNeil shows Brian where to find that information, it's the same stuff that was presented on November 29, which we approved.

Are we good with that, then, Brian? Okay.
Anyone else on section B?

Mrs. Forsyth: I just have one question, Mr. Chair. Sorry to be such a pain.

The Chair: Not at all.

Mrs. Forsyth: I recall most of this conversation, but I don't recall the increase in hosting by \$1,000.

The Chair: Which page are you on, Heather, just so we're all with you?

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm on MLA administration, page 1 of 1, under operational expenses. In 2013-14 it was \$9,000, and it's up to \$10,000 this year.

The Chair: David McNeil has it handy.
Go ahead, David.

Dr. McNeil: That was just to reflect the actual cost of supplies for the Chamber. It went from \$9,000 to \$10,000. It's just based on our actual expenditures for that purpose.

Mrs. Forsyth: So that's a Chamber expense?

Dr. McNeil: Yes.

Mrs. Forsyth: When you say supplies, can you just give me an idea of what that means?

Dr. McNeil: I'll ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to follow up on that one.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Hodgson: Yeah. We respond to the wishes of the members as it relates to beverages in particular. You're aware that we offer the widest range of specialty coffees and soft drinks. That's not as a result of anything that I would have said because if it was me, you would be just getting water.

The Chair: Thank you, Brian. It's nice to have coffee and tea.
Okay. Very good. Any other questions on tab 9, which is MLA administration?

Mr. Mason: Well, I'm sorry. Maybe I'm just a little bit confused. Maybe we could just get an assessment from Dr. McNeil about the impact of the cuts in (a) human resource expenses and (b) operational expenses. Those are very large reductions. What's the impact going to be?

Dr. McNeil: I think Scott is probably in a better position to respond to that question.

The Chair: Scott Ellis, we're looking at tab 9, the first page after the budget estimate, titled MLA Administration.

Just while Scott is looking that up, please know that what follows in your binders, titled MLA Administration, 2014-15, is absolutely identical to what was circulated and discussed on November 29 and approved. The only four words that are deleted are "proposal for MSC consideration." Those of you who are here

can see that that's the red-ink proposal. That top line, by definition, has been removed because it's now been approved, and it just reads MLA Administration 2014-15, and it is identical.

Scott, are you with us now on that? Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Ellis: To answer Mr. Mason's question, the human resources expenses have gone down dramatically. The primary reason is that under the members' allowances line item, that was presented at the last meeting, that talked about the temporary residence allowance and the fact that an order had been put forward and approved to change the maximum amount claimable for temporary residence to \$1,930 a month, or approximately \$21,160 per year. That had a significant impact on the budget and reduced it by an amount of, I believe, about \$641,000.

The other significant decrease was with respect to the pay to members that had previously been budgeted at the 1.5 level in 2013-14 and was not moved on, and subsequently in 2014-15, because we didn't have an increase going forward, it was a reduction in the budget of 1.5 per cent for pay, and then there was a corresponding impact because of the benefit cost that would also go down as a result of that pay increase not being implemented.

2:20

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any other questions from anybody on item B, MLA administration, under tab 9?

Hearing none, do we have general agreement, then, to proceed with item B? Yes?

Now we're going to go on to item C, then. This is formula driven. We're dealing with government members' services here. The next tab will deal with Official Opposition services, and the next tab with Liberal opposition services, and the next tab after that will deal with NDP opposition services. So the next four tabs, in other words, are the different caucuses.

I have Donna Kennedy-Glans to start, followed by Brian Mason, and then I'll go to the phones.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just have a question about the line item committee support. I'm just wondering why that number isn't calibrated and then just included in the private members' allowance. It seems like a different administrative burden to keep track of that budget line item and then have another line item for private members' allowance.

The Chair: Let me go to Dr. McNeil for starters. Thank you.

Dr. McNeil: The reason that is a separate allowance is that that allowance was created when the policy field committees were created, and there was an allocation not based on the number of members in caucus but just a straight dollar allocation to the individual caucuses. It started out with I think it was, if I'm not mistaken, \$640,000 to the government caucus, half of that to the Official Opposition, and half of that again to the third party at the time. Then there was an amount for independent members. I think it was \$90,000. So the number that you see there is just the original number to which inflationary factors have been applied over the last – what was it? – five or six years, I guess.

It was definitely and purposefully not allocated on a per-member basis; it was based on a dollar allocation. That was an agreement that was reached among the House leaders at the time in terms of what those numbers should be. That's why it's separate. That principle has been maintained since it was implemented, when the policy field committees were implemented. I'm

not sure exactly what year that was, but it was '08, '09. I just can't remember specifically.

The Chair: A supplemental, Donna.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: We may be out of the bounds of the scope of this committee, and I respect that if we are, but it perhaps might be useful from an administrative perspective because we're keeping balance of two things here, and it takes time to do that. I just ask: is it worthwhile to reconsider how we administer this? That's my only query.

Dr. McNeil: Well, I guess that's up to the committee to decide. I don't have any observations. You know, there was a principle on which that money was allocated in the first place, with the members deciding. It was based on an agreement among the House leaders. Essentially, I think three House leaders at the time agreed on that allocation, and it just carried forward on that basis. If members desire a change in that approach, then it's up to – I guess we wouldn't have any recommendations one way or another because I don't think that's our role.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Yes. I was not one of the House leaders, but I was certainly present when this was brought in. It's a different calculation. It was based on the addition of – it was additional work that members had to undertake. Previously the policy committees had only been government members. Then these were established as committees that all parties participated in, so there was a recognition that there needed to be research support for the caucuses, that wasn't best reflected in a per-member calculation.

The Chair: Thank you.
Back to Donna. Then I'll go to the phones.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: I'll let go of this. I'm not questioning the need, the purpose; I understand that and admire that. I'm more questioning the administration. We're administering a separate amount of money, and it just takes time to do that. That's my only point.

The Chair: Thank you.
Anybody on teleconference who wants to come in on tab 10?

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Sure.

Mrs. Forsyth: I will be bringing a motion forward on this if I may.

The Chair: On tab 10?

Mrs. Forsyth: Under government members' services and Official Opposition, yes.

The Chair: Do you want us to go through the others first, and then you come back to yours?

Mrs. Forsyth: Oh, sure. Whatever is easier for you.

The Chair: Sure. Just a moment. Heather, if your motion applies only to government members' services, tab 10, then we should hear it now. But if it applies to all four caucuses, maybe just wait till we get through the other couple of tabs quickly, and then we'll come back and hear your omnibus.

Mrs. Forsyth: All four caucuses.

The Chair: All four caucuses. Okay.
So I'm still on tab 10. Any other questions on tab 10? None. Okay.

Mr. Mason: I do have a question.

The Chair: Sorry. Brian Mason has a question.

Mr. Mason: I'm assuming that there is a drop here for the government caucus as a result of the two members in exile.

The Chair: Uh-huh. There is a change, as you can see, under line 1, private members' allowance. In the current year we were budgeting \$2.334 million, and we're projecting a reduction to \$2,100,000, in round numbers. That does incorporate two things. It incorporates the recent cabinet changes, which were announced at 4:40 p.m., and then we sent all of this out to you with that update in mind at 6:48 or 7 o'clock p.m.

So we held this back by a few hours as soon as that announcement hit so that we could incorporate that into here as well as one net change that still has to be made, and that's regarding Mr. Sandhu, who we just found out a few hours ago has been accepted back, I think, into the – or invited back. I'm not sure what the term was, but I saw something on it just before we came into the meeting today. So we still have to incorporate and include that somehow. That's not reflected here, but the first part is.

Mr. Mason: It's hard to keep up, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: David, did you have a comment on this? [interjections] Dr. McNeil has the floor, please.

Dr. McNeil: Mr. Chair, I've just been provided with an update in terms of the summary page that would reflect a change in the PC caucus, to add one more member, and that would have an impact on the overall budget in reflecting Mr. Sandhu's return. We can distribute that if you would like. So the final number that the committee votes on would cover the existing number of members in each caucus. Right now we have two independent members budgeted for in this budget. This would leave it as one independent member, adding one more member to the PC caucus.

The Chair: But you're talking about only tab 10 for government members.

Dr. McNeil: Correct.

The Chair: Okay. Just tell us what the numbers are. We have Heather's motion yet, too, which I think is – I don't know what it is, Heather, but it's going to impact this potentially if it goes through.

Which numbers change under tab 10, David? Can you relate it specifically to tab 10?

Dr. McNeil: Yes. The bottom line on tab 10 for government members' services would change from \$2,958,000 to \$3,033,000.

The Chair: To \$3,033,000?

Dr. McNeil: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Does everybody have that?

Mrs. Forsyth: Can you repeat that again: \$2,958,000 to . . .

Dr. McNeil: To \$3,033,000.

Mrs. Forsyth: So, if I may, the private members' allowance goes up \$75,007.

Dr. McNeil: Correct.

Mrs. Forsyth: And then the committee support goes up \$107,152?

Dr. McNeil: No. The committee support doesn't go up at all.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay.

Dr. McNeil: Just the \$75,007.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay.

The Chair: So instead of 28 private members it would be 29, David?

Dr. McNeil: Correct.

The Chair: Yeah. Okay.

Sorry. Did I lose track here? Do we have somebody on the teleconference that wants to add anything under tab 10 before I go to tab 11?

Hearing none, let me go on to tab 11, Official Opposition services. We have 17 private members in the Wildrose caucus, and this is the same formula applied. Of course, there's the additional item of the Calgary caucus office that you see there. I wonder if there are any comments anybody has under tab 11.

Linda Johnson.

2:30

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is about the Calgary caucus office, as to what that is.

The Chair: It's, basically, something that's allowed and has been allowed for the past number of years to the Official Opposition, to have a presence in Alberta's largest city, Calgary.

Heather, did you want to comment any further about the function of that office?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, like you alluded to before, it's been something that's been around forever. It used to be the Liberal caucus office. It's an office that we have in Calgary for meetings, et cetera. We don't have the luxury, obviously, of McDougall Centre.

The Chair: We had quite a discussion on it last year, and it went through. So we're maintaining it here again.

Brian, on this point.

Mr. Mason: Could we save money by . . .

Ms L. Johnson: Using constituency offices?

Mr. Mason: No.

. . . giving the Official Opposition a suite in McDougall house? Maybe they could share.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Brian, if you remember, we've had discussions on that previously, and we've asked for that. We brought that up last year, and that was pooh-poohed, so . . .

The Chair: Not our committee's decision. We just try and accommodate the costs, whatever the decisions are.

Ms L. Johnson: I would make the observation that the use of constituency offices works quite well.

Dr. McNeil: I would make the observation that that would be a total violation of the rules regarding constituency offices. Constituency offices are nonpartisan offices of the Legislative Assembly. So that would be totally inappropriate, to use a constituency office for that purpose.

Ms L. Johnson: Oh, I see. Sorry. Okay.

The Chair: Caucuses have been known to get political on occasion.

Okay. Any other questions under tab 11?

Hearing none, let us move to tab 12. This is the Liberal opposition. Again, the same formula is applied here as applied under tabs 10 and 11. Any questions on tab 12?

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'll again make a request of the Speaker's office. It is important for the leader of every political party, whether we have a seat in Calgary or not, and I'm speaking for the member to my left as well.

Mr. Mason: No, you're not.

Dr. Sherman: Well, maybe I won't speak for him. I'll speak for myself.

If you would consider advocating on our behalf to get an office in McDougall house. The government building is there. If they have a spare office, we'd love the opportunity to sort of have space, that's already paid for, to be able to participate in the democracy of this province. We do have an office in Calgary, that we rent out of our budget. The building will be demolished. It's going to be sold. We do have staff that's there. I regularly hold meetings there. I don't want to add an extra financial burden to your budget, but if there is existing office space that we could rent, a little cubbyhole somewhere in the government building, I'd appreciate you giving us the opportunity to use that space, at no added cost to the taxpayer.

The Chair: Thank you. That could be a discussion somewhere in the near future should the committee want to raise it. If you want to bring it on as a new item, we could do that, Raj.

Let's go to Brian Mason on this point.

Mr. Mason: I just wanted to follow up on that. Does that mean that your caucus money is used to rent an office in Calgary? You use the caucus fund to do that? Are we allowed to do that?

The Chair: Your question is to Dr. Sherman? Raj, do you want to tell us how you are paying for it?

Dr. Sherman: Yeah. We have one staff that works in Calgary. I regularly meet in Calgary with stakeholders. And, yeah, we have caucus staff that's there, and I think we pay – what? – 500 bucks a month rent for a cubbyhole in the basement of Art Central.

Mr. Mason: Okay. So just to clarify with the Clerk: we could do that, too, if we wanted to?

The Chair: It's an allowable expenditure.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you. Good to know.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, do you want to comment?

Dr. McNeil: That's a correct assumption, yes.

The Chair: Okay. Any other questions on tab 11? Anybody at all?

Neither hearing nor seeing anyone, let us go to the last one in this section, which would be tab 13. That would be the NDP opposition. The same formula, again, as with the first three caucuses is applied here. Are there any questions regarding tab 13?

Neither hearing nor seeing any, that concludes this section of our budget other than Heather's request to . . .

Mr. Mason: We've got independent members, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry. Independent members. My apologies. We have two. Well, Sandhu comes out now. Is that right, David?

Dr. McNeil: Correct.

The Chair: So that one would be deleted, right?

Mr. Mason: Do you need a motion to delete that?

The Chair: Well, if we just have agreement here, let me pose the question. Does everybody agree to delete page 1 of 1 regarding expenses that otherwise would have pertained to independent member Mr. Sandhu, representing Edmonton-Manning? Are we agreed to disregard this sheet and note that his participation in the government caucus is about to resume, as I understand it?

Dr. McNeil, you have a point to raise here. Could you please raise it?

Dr. McNeil: Yes. In terms of the document just handed out, you'll notice, as discussed earlier, the change in government members' services to reflect an additional member in the government caucus and that the independent member's services for Mr. Sandhu, the proposed budget for 2014-15, the estimate, now is zero. It's reflected on that page.

Mrs. Forsyth: Where will it show the \$107,152 under committee support? Will it show less on the budget?

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. There's no money for committee support. That's the amount that's allocated to independent members, but that money is not transferred to the PC caucus when Mr. Sandhu moves back to that caucus.

Mrs. Forsyth: Right. Just the \$75,000.

Dr. McNeil: It just goes – yeah, the \$75,007.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Everybody has been given the replacement sheet of the summary of budget estimates, which is basically one of the very first sheets in your budget – and it's also been e-mailed to everyone – to reflect the updated change of Mr. Sandhu. So two things have essentially happened to your summary of budget estimates sheet. Under item C, where it reads caucus budgets, if you would follow me for a moment, please. If you look at the summary of budget estimates single sheet under the first column, 2014-15 estimates, the sheet going into this meeting at 1 o'clock read, under government members' services, \$2,958,000. That number should now read \$3,033,000.

The other change is just a few lines down still under item C, caucus budgets, where it reads independent member's services, parenthesis, Mr. Sandhu, MLA. The sheet that you had coming into the meeting at 1 o'clock had an item under the first column totalling \$183,000. That number goes to zero on the replacement sheet.

Accordingly, our bottom line, which is the total voted expenditure, will now change from \$69,523,000, grand total estimate for

2014-15 budget, to read \$69,415,000. Is everybody clear on that? It's a very straightforward change to accommodate that change.

All right. Now, Mrs. Forsyth . . .

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may, Chair. Because we were not aware of Mr. Sandhu re-entering government members' services, that will not be reflected in the motion that I'm presenting. If I can just have a 10-minute coffee break to have a new motion typed up to reflect the changes and the numbers?

The Chair: Sure. Just so we can think about it, not knowing what it's about – I just have to deal with independent member Mr. Allen's sheet, which I'll do in a minute. Let me do that first, Heather, and then you can give us the spirit of your motion, and then the official motion will come to us in 10 minutes. Okay. We'll take a comfort break in a moment.

The last sheet here – my apologies for not flagging it – is the independent member Mr. Allen, who's included underneath tab 14 as an independent member. Are there any questions regarding the costs projected to include him?

Neither hearing nor seeing any, that concludes it.

Heather, would you mind just sharing with us the gist or the spirit of your motion?

2:40

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. I have no problem with that. I'm actually moving on behalf of Ms Smith that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services amend the 2014-15 estimates for the Leg. Assembly of Alberta in section C by reducing it to – let me give you an example for myself because the government member is changing and we're just running the numbers. The amount for Official Opposition services would go from \$2,309,000 to \$2,248,000, so it would be the same as 2013-14. And that would go right across the board with the NDP and the Liberals and the independent. It's the government members' numbers that we are trying to change on our original motion.

The Chair: Okay. So we'll deal with that after the break, but Dr. McNeil just has a quick comment here.

Dr. McNeil: Can I just ask a question, Mrs. Forsyth? Does that mean that you're saying that you want to have the per-member allocation remain the same as it was last year at \$73,055? Is that the essence of your motion?

Mrs. Forsyth: The total – let's use the Official Opposition. What we're suggesting is that the amount for Official Opposition services goes from \$2,309,000 to \$2,248,000.

Dr. McNeil: Okay. But the principle is the fact – you're saying that you don't want to increase the per-member allocation?

Mrs. Forsyth: We're freezing at 2013-14 numbers.

Dr. McNeil: Which was \$73,055. Is that correct?

Mrs. Forsyth: Correct.

Dr. McNeil: That's the essence of your motion?

Mrs. Forsyth: Correct. What we're doing is just freezing at the 2013-14 numbers all the way through except we have to work on the government. We're also looking at that because they've got fewer private members over independents and cabinet members.

The Chair: Okay. I think we've got the gist of it. Let's take a comfort break if we can. That will give Heather and her crew a moment to get this all together.

I show 2:43 on my clock. Let's reconvene at 2:55 p.m. We are recessed until then.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 2:43 p.m. to 2:55 p.m.]

The Chair: Hon. members, I show 2:55 on the BlackBerry clock, so I'd like to ask members to please reconvene.

Yvonne, do we have you back?

Mrs. Fritz: Yeah. I'm still here. I didn't leave.

The Chair: Ron Casey, do we have you back?

Mr. Casey: Yes, you do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Heather, do we have you back?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes, sir.

The Chair: Do we have Danielle back? No, not yet. Okay. No worries.

Let me reconvene the meeting here. We've got everybody back here other than Brian Mason, who might be just outside still, and Steve Young. Both are expected to come back.

Let us go on. Do we have the motion ready for circulation, Heather?

Mrs. Forsyth: I understand that we do. Unfortunately, I'm not there, Mr. Chair. I'm relying on staff there if I may.

The Chair: Yeah. Okay. Do we have anyone from the Wildrose staff here?

If not, let's just hold this in abeyance and go to the final item that we have until that motion is ready to come forward. Can we go to the special funding tab? Do I have general agreement to do that? That's our last item, tab 15. Let's move to that just to give the Wildrose a few more minutes. Perhaps, Heather, if you could have one of your staff let your Wildrose staff know that they've got a few more minutes, and we'll deal with item 15.

Let's go with item 15. This is also known as item D on your summary budget estimates sheet. It essentially deals with the Edmonton federal building and the employee market adjustment contingency and the contingency funding regarding possible changes in remuneration. That being the case, are there any questions under tab 15? It's pretty straightforward.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry about this. I guess I'm just wondering – we went through this last year through Members' Services, and we approved money for this. I was going through *Hansard*. I guess I'm struggling with the fact, in the visitor services, of consulting services. I asked the question previously on consulting. I don't even have the consulting firm. Why are we paying for consulting services for both visitor services and the gift shop now when the building was supposed to be finished in 2011? We're looking at 2014. It would be my first question, again, on visitor services, when they're not making any money, really. If somebody could please rationalize this for me, I'd appreciate it.

The Chair: Brian, do you want to address this, please? Then we'll go to Dr. Sherman unless Heather has a follow-up, quickly.

Mr. Hodgson: Well, we're phasing our consulting expenditures based on the progress that the project is making, so it would be, you know, that we're keeping pace with how the building is progressing. I don't know if that answers your question.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm just trying to flip back to when I asked the question previously, and you talked about the consultants Lord and associates.

Mr. Hodgson: Yes.

Mrs. Forsyth: You've already paid them, if I have my numbers correct, \$630,000.

Mr. Hodgson: Correct. Yeah.

Mrs. Forsyth: And now you're asking for an additional \$80,000 for the consulting services.

Mr. Hodgson: Yeah. That relates to the gift shop, which we anticipate will produce revenues that will offset some of our programming costs. Those costs have to do with the design of the gift shop and the production of a business plan.

Mrs. Forsyth: Can I ask why we wouldn't have a business plan before this? We're just looking at having a business plan now when we know this was something – I mean, originally, we were going to move into this building in 2011. Now we're talking about a business plan – I'm flipping madly – and I understand visitor services. Somewhere in here I read – if not, it was last year – that the majority of the business that the gift shop does now is for MLAs.

Mr. Hodgson: That's correct, but it's our earnest desire and goal to expand our revenue stream to meet our objective of having a greater proportion of the sales driven by non-MLA individuals. The size of the shop, at 2.1 times its current footprint, kind of led us to the conclusion that our current business practices demanded a business plan because the operation would be more complex and the customer mix, if I can use that expression, ultimately will change. Our intent is to provide the same high level of service to members but to grow our sales so that the majority of our revenues are found from sources other than MLAs.

Mrs. Forsyth: The consulting services and the business plan and the design and construction are not only under visitor services, but we've got consulting services on the committee rooms, we've got consulting services on visitor services, we've got consulting on the gift shop and also on information technology. Was this not part and parcel of the original planning, when we were looking at this building in 2011?

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. The original target date was not 2011. It was the fall of 2012. Because of the change in projected opening date, if you will, you know, we've had to restage the progress on these various consulting activities to line up with the projected building opening. Ideally, we would have spent all the money we would have had to spend by 2012, but that's not the case. We've had to readjust our spending plans to reflect the change in projected opening date of the building. I mean, this is a very highly technical, complex situation. We have a facility in the west end of Edmonton where we're prebuilding a lot of the equipment that's going to be necessary for the various activities that are going to take place in that, especially related to broadcasting, to our IT operations, to the visitor centre, and so on. It's just a question of

scheduling these things as a function of when the building is projected to be open.

The Chair: Okay. I have Dr. Sherman, and then I'll go to the lines.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past couple of years the LAO has spent approximately \$4,408,000 on the federal building. In the upcoming budget we have another \$3,395,000, a total of \$7,803,000. Just a couple of questions. Will there be more costs that are not budgeted that you foresee in our move to the federal building?

Secondly, getting back on the consulting receipts, are these contracts publicly tendered? How are the costs arrived at for consulting fees? Is it just a sole-source contract, or is there a competitive tendering process on the contracts?

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. The contracts are publicly tendered in all cases, so, you know, we've picked the best bid, if you will, taking into account both the costs and the credentials of the people that are bidding. So that answers, I think, your second question.

Your first question. Other than operating costs, assuming that we'll be in the building sometime in 2014-15, you know, these sorts of capital costs, if you will, for the most part will disappear from the budget, and the only costs that you'll see after that will be the operating costs. For example, we're going to have four committee rooms. Each of those committee rooms has to be equipped with the kind of stuff you see around here in terms of the sound enhancement system plus the capability to broadcast to TV from those rooms and so on, so there's a lot of infrastructure required to get ready to go into there as well as the whole IT infrastructure that exists now in this building that will have to be redeveloped over in that building while we maintain the services here. There's a lot of expensive equipment that has to be purchased in order to duplicate and enhance the capabilities that we have in this building.

Dr. Sherman: Just a last question. With the capital costs it is my understanding that these were not budgeted for when they actually had the big \$275 million or \$300 million contract for the building. These capital costs were not budgeted for in that original budget to build the building.

Dr. McNeil: That's correct. They were costs that the Assembly had to incur to operate as we do. We're being provided with sort of a base building and a certain amount of funding to upgrade the base building to accommodate us, but all the infrastructure within the base building we have to pay for because it's our operation, and we want to own that.

3:05

Dr. Sherman: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Brian Mason, but let me go to the lines. Anybody on teleconference who wishes to come in on tab 15?

Not hearing anyone, let's go to Brian Mason, then.

Mr. Mason: Just a question. Will none of this equipment be transferred to the new building? Is it going to be surplus? What's going to happen with the existing infrastructure for the committee rooms, for the IT department, and so on?

Dr. McNeil: I think Cheryl is probably the best person to answer that question.

The Chair: Cheryl, identify yourself because it's your first go.

Mrs. Scarlett: Cheryl Scarlett, director of human resources, information technology, and broadcast services.

It's a very good question. With respect to the AV equipment what you see here now in terms of this, what's connected under, beneath, what's running it behind the scenes there, interestingly enough, right before we heard about the federal building, we actually were working on a plan to take and replace this equipment. Then the federal building came upon us, and we knew we weren't going to be here, so we changed gears.

The bottom line is that this equipment is past its due date. You can no longer find replacements anymore. I think some of what we experienced at the last meeting in committee room B in terms of pieces failing and it all hooking together – we need to upgrade it regardless. Really, what we're doing is taking it, and we'll be over in the new building, and we'll have four rooms instead of two, and we'll have broadcast capabilities much greater than we have right now.

But in terms of the AV it's strictly the current-day cost of taking what we have here and putting it over there.

Dr. McNeil: All this equipment here would be surplus because it's – I don't know – 15 years old, 12 years old. I just don't remember exactly. In fact, there are issues in getting replacement parts now. So all of this equipment will be surplus.

Mr. Mason: Okay. What about the IT department?

Dr. McNeil: Cheryl can answer that question, I think.

Mrs. Scarlett: Again, in terms of the IT some of what we are needing to acquire is new. We acquire every year in terms of meeting, trying to keep up with our storage capabilities, and replacing our old equipment that keeps us running. I'm not talking about desktops; I'm talking about the actual servers behind the scenes. Most definitely, we are expanding our facilities. We need to make sure that we are able to take and connect the Legislature Building through to the pedway, this building, our visitor services area, and the federal building, so we do need some additional. We need also to take and build it in such a way that we can run parallel because the transition between the two operations will take some time. However, once we have made the cut over, the older equipment we will be using for an off-site redundancy operation in case we need a backup, so it's all going to be used.

The Chair: Just before we go on, there's Dr. Sherman and a couple of others here.

Heather, would we have your permission to circulate your motion now?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes, by all means.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. Let's do that, then, quickly, so that members have it and we're ready to go as soon as we finish tab 15.

Dr. Sherman: Dr. McNeil, just a last question: when can we expect to be in those offices? Will it be in the summer of 2014?

The Chair: Who has the latest projected date? I'm not going to hazard any guess on this one.

Dr. McNeil: My understanding is that we would have a clean building probably at the beginning of December in 2014. Now, what does that mean? That means that that's the point at which we

can start to move stuff over there. There may be an opportunity to get in that clean building beforehand to start building some of the infrastructure like the IT infrastructure, like the broadcast infrastructure, but we don't know yet exactly how much time we would have before that. I would think it would be the spring of 2015 before we would be fully operational and move everybody over there and, you know, be functioning in an effective manner. We don't have control over that at all.

Dr. Sherman: Lastly – I don't know if you can answer this question – with all these delays, when you sign a contract to build something, somebody has to be held accountable. There has to be some penalty for somebody for not delivering on time. In fact, I see that the cost has gone up to \$350,000,000 from \$275,000,000. Is this all just infrastructure? This has nothing to do with you?

Dr. McNeil: That has nothing to do with us. We're just reacting to what we're told as far as the availability of the space. We know what we need to do in that space, but in terms of its availability and the issues surrounding its construction, we're not involved in that aspect at all.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Anyone else under tab 15? Anybody on teleconference? I'm not hearing anyone. Anyone here in person? Do we have general agreement to go ahead with tab 15 for the purposes of our budget, the special funding requirements? Everybody agreed? Okay. Thank you. Anyone want to disagree? No one? Thank you.

All right. Now, Mrs. Forsyth, you have a motion that you wanted to bring forward. It's been circulated. Is there anybody who does not yet have a copy of it either here or who hasn't received it by e-mail?

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may, Mr. Chair, are we going to come back to request 2? We're done with request 1 under special budget requests. Are we going to come back to request 2 on the contingency funding?

The Chair: Well, I'm asking: is there anything else you want under tab 15?

Mrs. Forsyth: Oh, well, I'm sorry. I thought you were talking about the relocation to the Edmonton federal building.

The Chair: No. I was talking tab 15 in general. There is a second part. That's the contingency management part, Heather.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. I wonder if I could get some explanation on what you're trying to achieve here.

The Chair: Well, my understanding is that there are some adjustments that may be required that would be set in parallel to pay increases for LAO staff, constituency staff, and caucus staff, depending on the negotiations that are under way.

Dr. McNeil: You'll recall – I think it's in Bill 46 – that one of the provisions of that bill is related to a lump-sum payment of \$875 to public service employees as we attempt to parallel, you know, what applies in the public service in general. This is just a contingency fund in place in the event that that \$875 is applied in the public service. Therefore, it would be applied to caucus employees, constituency office employees, and Legislative Assembly Office employees. As we've done in the past, we've put a contingency amount in there so that our budget would cover that

possibility. But if it doesn't apply, if it isn't applied, then that money would go back to the Finance department. It would not be expended for any other purpose.

Mrs. Forsyth: This hasn't got anything to do with what the government is trying to achieve with the zero, zero?

Dr. McNeil: Well, it relates to that particular piece of legislation. You know, we have to be in a position that if that is applied in the public service, then we wouldn't want to not have those funds available for our own employees in the caucus, in the constituency offices, and in the Legislative Assembly Office.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Brian Mason, under tab 15 still, this same item?

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thanks. Same item. I guess I'm going to ask what the policy is or what the authority is for mirroring in our budget or our compensation for LAO employees what happened in terms of the government provincial employees. Is there some authority that automatically links the two?

Dr. McNeil: No, there's no authority per se, but our policy has always been that we would parallel what happens in the public service. The final analysis is up to this committee to decide. I mean, this committee has authority to decide if you want to deviate from that policy.

Cheryl can probably add to my comments.

Mr. Mason: I think I get the general gist of it. Is our budget based, then, on a zero per cent increase for LAO employees next year?

3:15

Dr. McNeil: Correct.

Mr. Mason: All right. I would submit, Mr. Chairman, that that's something that needs to be a decision of the committee. I'm not aware of something that ties us in a mandatory way to what the provincial employees receive.

The Chair: Cheryl, do you want to go on this one, please?

Mrs. Scarlett: Just for further clarification, as an example, for the constituency employees in their employment contract, that was approved in terms of the principle of the constituency compensation plan by this committee, it says that those employees shall be eligible for the market adjustment as that parallels that of the public service of Alberta – in that particular case, it's the non-management group – and eligible as well for annual in-range merit adjustments based on satisfactory performance.

All along, in terms of our parameters we've been talking about, the market increase, parallel to those guidelines, is zero for this year, and the in-range adjustment is typically 3 per cent. Within the constituency budgets as part of that whole formula there was a zero per cent market, but there was a 3 per cent in-range adjustment applied to that component of the constituency budget.

Mr. Mason: Okay. That's for constituency staff. What about the LAO staff as a whole?

Mrs. Scarlett: Okay. Within the LAO budgets, then, again, as they were presented, it's zero per cent cost of living and, again, the in-range adjustment for those eligible employees. When we say that, there are some employees who presently are at the top of

their range, so they would not be eligible for any more movement upwards, but specifically in each branch for those employees that were eligible for continued movement up, there was an amount reflective of the 3 per cent.

Mr. Mason: Now, Bill 46 had the numbers in it. That takes effect in the event that an agreement is not reached between the government and AUPE by the end of January. What if they negotiate something above zero? What do we do then?

Dr. McNeil: Well, we would have to either try to find it within the budget or come back to this committee to request additional funds to, you know, pay for that, to pay those costs, and we've done that in the past.

Mr. Mason: I'm not going to grandstand by making an amendment to give a 2 per cent increase, but I do want to say with regard to that that I find it very difficult to support this budget because I don't agree with the principle of zero per cent, which has been called a cost-of-living increase, but, of course, that would be a mischaracterization, in my view, because the cost of living is rising faster than that.

I guess I wanted to raise this question because I don't think that if the government imposes a policy on its employees, it's automatic that it's the LAO that does that. I mean, I do think that the committee needs to give direction. I don't think that there would be any prospect of success in making an amendment at this stage, but I do want to express my opposition to that principle.

The Chair: Specific to that item of the budget, you'd like to record your opposition to it?

Mr. Mason: Yes, please.

The Chair: That's been noted, and now it's in *Hansard*.

Dr. McNeil: Just to be clear, this committee approved a set of parameters in which that assumption was there. That's why we came to the committee with the parameters in the first place at the beginning of October saying: here's what we propose to develop the budget on the basis of. You know, that's why we did that, so that the committee members could adjust those parameters. Given that the committee approved that set of parameters, that's the basis on which we proceeded with the budget proposal.

Mr. Mason: I just want to have a clear undertaking that should the negotiated settlement be higher than zero, we will be back here with an adjustment for our own staff.

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. We've done that in the past in terms of when there were unexpected adjustments.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.
Anyone else under tab 15, item B?

Mrs. Forsyth: I have one comment and one question, Mr. Chair. I just want it on record that I don't support request 1. I'm sorry. When you were calling for the vote, I was trying to make sure our motion was correct. I apologize for that.

My other question is more general. What happened to the 4 per cent contingency from last year?

Dr. McNeil: It was not applied. Those funds returned to the Finance department. They were unexpended.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Anyone else on tab 15, either the A part or the B part, so to speak?

Not hearing anyone, then we can move back now to your motion, Heather. Are you ready?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Do you want me to read this into the record?

The Chair: Does everybody have a copy of it? Sure. Go ahead.

Mrs. Forsyth: Ms Danielle Smith to move that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services amend the 2014-15 estimates for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in section C by reducing

- (a) the amount for Government Members' Services from \$3,033,000 to \$2,953,000;
- (b) the amount for Official Opposition Services from \$2,309,000 to \$2,248,000;
- (c) the amount for Liberal Opposition Services from \$849,000 to \$827,000;
- (d) the amount for NDP Opposition Services from \$774,000 to \$754,000; and,
- (e) the amount for the Independent Member from \$183,000 to \$178,000,

so that the amount identified as "Subtotal" would be reduced from "\$7,148,000" to "\$6,960,000."

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. The motion is there. It's been approved as to form by Parliamentary Counsel, so we can now have the discussion. Does anybody wish to speak to this?

Heather, do you want to lead off since it's your motion?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, I think it's setting an example in our fiscal time of what is happening out in the real world and what we've seen recently happening with bills 45 and 46. I think it sets a good example for Members of the Legislative Assembly. If we're asking the public sector to hold the line, then I think we should hold the line also.

The Chair: Thank you.

I know Dr. Sherman has to dash away to do a speech, which he's told me about. Would you like to comment first, then? Brian, if you don't mind?

Mr. Mason: I don't mind.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'm opposed to the motion. These are monies that don't go to MLAs and don't go to benefits for MLAs. These are monies that go to staff to help support the work that we do. For a healthy democracy it's absolutely essential for opposition parties to have the researchers, the communications staff. You know, we have a caucus of five. The administration component: there's a basic fixed cost in these small budgets to represent Albertans from all over the province on a variety of issues. We're already operating on a shoestring budget for our staff. We underpay our staff; we overwork them. They're staying late.

I don't believe that we are a poor province. We're a wealthy province. The government has a billion-dollar surplus in the last six months alone. I believe a lot of this has just been a created crisis, really, to download responsibilities onto the backs of the common working folk, who are the staff in the Legislative Assembly, the staff in our respective caucuses. These are not the million-dollar-paid CEOs, who are getting million-dollar severances again and again. In fact, the Premier has probably spent more money on these darned election signs that she put up than our whole budget for the Alberta Liberal caucus. The work

we do is absolutely essential. I would like to be able to fairly pay my staff. Inflation and things are very expensive. The majority of our funds go to paying our underpaid staff, so I oppose this motion.

I simply believe there is money in the coffers. This whole thing with the two conservative parties claiming poverty: I don't buy it. Personally, I think that the working staff should be paid adequately and fairly in a province that's so wealthy and so expensive in which to live.

Thank you.

3:25

The Chair: I have Mr. Mason next.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I also oppose this. You know, I do think that the smaller opposition parties really have to make every penny count in the work that they do. The motion doesn't affect all the caucuses exactly in the same way, so I can't support it. I just would make the point that we established at the last meeting and voted on the parameters that the administration was supposed to use in order to calculate these budgets. That's already been decided. I wouldn't say that this is necessarily out of order, but it certainly is contradictory to the decision of the committee at the last meeting.

The Chair: Thank you.

Anyone on the teleconference that wishes to chime in at this point?

Not hearing anyone there, let's go to Donna Kennedy-Glans.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: I just have a quick comment. I'm really pleased to see a budget put forward that does have a net decrease. I think that sends a strong message, and I'm grateful that this was put together on that basis.

The Chair: Which is where I started. Yeah.

Okay. Anyone else on the motion as it reads?

Mr. Quest: Just briefly, Mr. Chair, I'm not going to support the motion either. Just going back to what Dr. Sherman said, we're now talking about actually reducing caucus staff. That would be probably the only alternative. I'm looking at this, and with the MLA pay cut and the MLA pay freeze I think that, just to agree with Ms Kennedy-Glans, we've made a pretty strong statement. We are actually reducing the overall budget, and I think, frankly, enough is enough. Those are my comments.

The Chair: Thank you.

I was just looking at the sheet here. Donna, you're quite right. Even if we approve the overall budget as presented, with or without this motion it would still be an overall decrease in our MLA budget by more than 3 per cent.

Nonetheless, are there other comments on this motion before we call for the vote?

Are you ready for the question, then?

I don't hear anyone else wishing to participate, so let me call the question. Those in favour of the notice of amendment, as it's titled, as proposed by Calgary-Fish Creek on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition, should now say aye. Those opposed should say no. Accordingly, the noes have it, and that motion is defeated.

Now, I want to take you to the main issue, which is our overall Legislature budget. I'm not going to repeat everything I said, but please know, members, that I'm going to ask someone to give us a motion

to approve the 2014-2015 Legislative Assembly budget estimates in the total amount of \$69,415,000 as the total voted expenditure.

Is someone prepared? Dave Quest is moving that motion. Is there any other discussion?

Mr. Mason: As I indicated, I think that overall the budget is good. It's a responsible budget, but I cannot agree with the wage freeze that's embodied in it, and as a result, I'll be voting against the budget.

The Chair: Anyone else?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, just on the record, I think that by the number of questions I've asked, Mr. Chair, you can well imagine that I will also not be supporting this budget.

I will say, though, that I think your staff has done a great job of preparation, and I want to thank them for doing that.

The Chair: Thank you.

On that point, Heather, I want to echo the same sentiments because I worked closely with them over the last week, and I can tell you that they stayed up into the long hours to try to get this pulled together in 10 days for us. We met twice privately in preparation for this meeting, and they were chipper as always and helpful and informative and helped to brief me as well. Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you and your staff for doing your best with this budget. We support the intent to be fiscally prudent. We will support the budget. I asked you to trim all other possible expenses and pay your staff accordingly and fairly.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. We try to do that, Dr. Sherman. At the end of the day, with the motion coming forward, we will trim our budget by \$2 million.

Those in favour of the motion to approve our budget estimates with that reduction should say aye. Those opposed should say no. Two noes. The ayes have it.

Mrs. Forsyth: Can we have a recorded vote, please?

The Chair: The two that identified themselves as saying no should identify themselves now again, starting with Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Brian Mason, MLA for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

The Chair: And the other one?

Mrs. Forsyth: Heather Forsyth, Calgary-Fish Creek.

The Chair: Good. On the phone, please identify yourselves and record your vote, starting with Ron Casey.

Mr. Casey: In favour.

The Chair: And Yvonne Fritz. Mrs. Fritz, are you there? Yvonne? Not there. She may have stepped away for a moment.

In person, those who are voting in favour of the motion, starting over here.

Mr. Young: Steve Young, MLA for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Donna Kennedy-Glans.

Ms L. Johnson: Linda Johnson, Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Quest: Dave Quest, Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Dr. Sherman: Raj Sherman, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The Chair: Is there anyone else who wishes to vote?

Not hearing anyone, that is declared carried.

We are done with the budget. Thank you, members, for a very, very, thorough couple of meetings. This budget will now go forward to the Treasurer unless there are some changes, in which case we will identify them for you and perhaps meet again, but I think time is running thin in terms of us getting something to the Treasurer for inclusion in the overall budget.

We are now at the date of the next meeting. I honestly don't know when that will be, so I will do what I always try to do, and that is to connect with you or just announce a date if it's urgent and we have to meet sooner rather than later. Do I have agreement on that process?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.

Now we'll take a motion to adjourn. Do you want to stay? I saw Linda Johnson's hand go up to move that motion. Do you want to make that motion, Ms Johnson?

Ms L. Johnson: Yes, please. I so move that we adjourn.

The Chair: Ms Johnson has moved that we now adjourn, with happy wishes for a good Christmas season to all. I'm sure – did you mean that as part of your motion as well?

Ms L. Johnson: Absolutely.

The Chair: I thought you might. Those in favour of the motion to adjourn, please say aye. Those opposed please say no.

[The committee adjourned at 3:33 p.m.]

