



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Monday, February 6, 2017
9:03 a.m.

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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9:03 a.m. Monday, February 6, 2017

[Mr. Wanner in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning. There's a lot of snow in southern Alberta.

I would like to call this meeting to order. My name is Robert Wanner. I'm the MLA for Medicine Hat.

Before we get started with our business items, I would ask that members and those joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record, and then I'll call on the members joining the meeting via teleconference to introduce themselves. We could start with Dr. Turner.

Dr. Turner: Bob Turner, Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mrs. Schreiner: Kim Schreiner, MLA for Red Deer-North.

Mr. Dang: Good morning. Thomas Dang, Edmonton-South West.

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

Ms Dean: Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and director of House services.

Mr. Ellis: Scott Ellis, director of financial management and administrative services.

Mr. Reynolds: Good morning. Rob Reynolds, Clerk.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

Cortes-Vargas: MLA Cortes-Vargas, Strathcona-Sherwood Park, the deputy chair.

Mr. McIver: Ric McIver, MLA, Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Orr: Ron Orr, Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Taylor: Good morning. Wes Taylor, MLA, Battle River-Wainwright.

The Chair: Thank you, everyone.

Now the members who are with us via teleconference.

Mr. Nixon: Jason Nixon, MLA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Ms Luff: Robyn Luff, MLA for Calgary-East.

Mr. Piquette: Colin Piquette, MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. Good morning.

The Chair: Good morning. Thank you, everyone.

My apologies. I just arrived on an airplane. It was very cold on there.

The meeting agenda and the other documents were posted last week to the committee's internal website for members' information. If anyone requires copies of these documents, please let the committee clerk know. The microphone consoles are operated by the *Hansard* staff. Please keep mobile devices on silent – and that would start with me – for the duration of the meeting. Audio of committee meeting proceedings is streamed live on the Internet and recorded by *Alberta Hansard*. Audio access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly website.

I believe the agenda has been circulated. Are there any additions or changes to the agenda? If not, would a member move adoption of the agenda, please? Member Estefania Cortes-Vargas. All in

favour of the motion, say aye. Opposed, say no. The motion is carried. I presume that includes the members on the phone. Thank you. [A cellphone rang] I can't believe who would have left their phone on in the room.

Mr. McIver: I didn't hear it.

The Chair: I didn't hear it. Did you? No.

Now, also, members should have received copies of the November 25 meeting minutes. Are there any errors or omissions to note? If not, would a member move adoption of the minutes of November 25? Member Estefania Cortes-Vargas. All in favour, say aye. All opposed, say no. Members joining us on teleconference, all in favour? Thank you. The motion is carried.

Now, as noted in the minutes, the committee approved the budget parameters or guidelines that this committee wished the Legislative Assembly Office to pursue in the next fiscal year, and the details of those expenditures and revenues are with us today in accordance with the parameters that the committee approved in November. You should have a copy of the budget documents. If you require a copy, the clerk can provide you with one.

Now I'll just make some high-level observations and comments, and then I will turn it over to the Clerk and the various staff. The budget summaries are presented by program. You will also note in the details that the full-time equivalents of staff are included. Also included in this package will be the MLA administrative budgets as well as the caucuses' expenditures. All of the summary information is broken down by branch, with an overview and estimates documents specific to each. Following each branch's brief presentation, I'll open the floor to questions from the committee.

Now, at a very high level my general observations would be that I believe this is the second – and it may be the third – consecutive year that the office has operated on a zero-growth percentage. Some of the various initiatives that we've talked about at this committee and that certainly I've identified in my capacity as Speaker: this budget does stay within the spending envelope. You will see, as the course of the year unfolds, that items may be moved to higher priorities. As Speaker we would continue to do those regional outreach activities into various regions of the province. We also have some systems improvements that are incorporated into this budget. I want to just thank the staff for the efforts they've done to again bring a budget in line with the directives that were provided earlier.

At this juncture I would turn it over to Mr. Reynolds, the Clerk.

9:10

Mr. Reynolds: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to echo your comments, I want to say that it's a pleasure to be here. This is my first budget as Clerk. I've been here many times; you know, like, a long-time listener, first-time caller. I have been present for these before, and it's a pleasure to be here now. It's an honour to present this budget, which is really the work of the dedicated staff of the Legislative Assembly Office. Most of the senior managers are around the table here, and they'll be speaking to their portions of the budget. I want to say that it's a pleasure to, if you will, lead – I'm embarrassed to use that word – this team of dedicated professionals. Quite frankly, they honour me and I think they honour members with their service to the public, and I want to thank the Speaker for his support as well.

Now I'd like to go over parts of the budget. If you could just raise when your eyes start to glaze over from the detail, that would be useful, but I know you'll enjoy these presentations.

That concludes the humorous part, Dr. Turner.

An Hon. Member: I'm still waiting for it.

Mr. Reynolds: Yes. Thank you so much.

I just want to say that a sharp-eyed observer of the budget may note that while we have kept to the parameters that were approved November 25, 2016, with respect to what the budget should contain, there is an overall increase if one goes to the summary of budget estimates by program, which would be at the front of your binder. That will have all the LAO divisions plus the caucus budgets. Now, the increase is \$112,000. That's on the line Total Voted LAO Expenditures. In mine it's sort of – I'm not good at colours – a beige-ish line, and in the blue column it would say \$112,000. I apologize if you have black-and-white copies. In any event, that is an increase that's based on a Canada 150 celebration. We're anticipating a grant to cover that in the amount of \$192,000, and this is something that Brian Hodgson and Al Chapman can speak to later. We have built that into our budget.

Now, if you look at Total Voted (LAO & EBC) Expenditures – EBC stands for Electoral Boundaries Commission – and if you look at the next line below that, Revenue, and if you look under Change, it says \$192,000. That's the grant we're anticipating. If we do not in fact receive a grant, we will make a decision by March 31, you know, on how much to go ahead with for the Canada 150 celebration, because at that point we would then scale back the operations. This is an increase. It will be offset by a grant, or we won't spend the money. Now, the number was \$192,000. However, there was an \$80,000 reduction in the government members' caucus budget when Mr. Anderson was appointed to cabinet. That's how you get \$112,000: \$192,000 minus \$80,000. Even I could do that.

With respect to the other sections I think it's important to focus on the fact of the bottom line. There's been some reshuffling of divisions in the Legislative Assembly Office, so if you look at things, some divisions may go up, and other divisions may go down. It's the bottom-line number, I would think, that might be of importance to you, which shows, as I said, no increase apart from the anomaly of the grant for the Canada 150 celebrations.

Now, another thing that you wanted us to look at – and the Speaker was concerned about this – was something called FTEs, full-time equivalents, which are a measure of employment. You know, the bugaboo used to be that you don't want to increase the FTEs. In our budget you'll see that there may be an increase in FTEs across sections, which is not due to the fact of hiring more people, really. It's a function of how we reprofile, if you will, or recategorize the employees. As we go through this, you'll see areas where the amount under Other Labour and Services has been reduced and the earnings, generally speaking, in nonmanagement salaries has increased. There's no overall increase in the amount budgeted; it's just putting that money, really, where it belongs to recognize that these people are employees and that this is employment income that can be categorized as FTEs.

The government has changed somewhat, I understand – and Cheryl can speak to this if you have any questions about it – the way they define FTEs, and we've tried to meet that definition, or we've tried to categorize our people according to that definition.

Now, the other thing is that we feel that this provides you, the members, a better view of our operations when we shift the categorization of FTEs. This is not going to be changing every year; this is sort of I don't want to say a major shift, but it's how we've redefined them. So going forward, it will be a benchmark.

I could go on further, but I think that maybe if we go through the individual sections briefly – I don't want to anticipate your questions, and of course we're more than happy to answer your questions at any time. I don't know if there are any questions now, before we move ahead to the branch summaries, Mr. Chair, but we're certainly willing to take them.

The Chair: Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Chair. Yes, actually, you piqued my interest with the FTE explanation. I see the total number is up two from two years ago, but down seven from last year. Now, is it fair to say that some of the recategorization is because positions that were contracted out are now in-house? Is that true? Or is it just recategorized from one area of endeavour to another, presumably from MLA administration to Legislative Assembly Office?

Mr. Reynolds: I'll let Cheryl respond to that, but what I'd say is: not really from MLA administration. Cheryl, you can go ahead.

Ms Scarlett: Yes. I think as you go through branch by branch and look in those areas where you see the flags relative to how we had presented the budget previously, existing staff were being paid under the operations budget. In an effort to be consistent across the board and, if you will, follow more the model of the public services, how they present their budget, we have taken and transferred the dollars reflective of the total staffing component, moved that up to the top of the budget. So it's just an internal transfer.

Mr. McIver: It's not contracted-out positions brought in-house?

Ms Scarlett: No.

Mr. McIver: Okay. That's my question. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So if I understand correctly, Cheryl, there's no increase or decrease in FTEs in terms of actuality, I guess. It's just how we show them in the line items.

Ms Scarlett: Yes, that's the intent in terms of one offsetting the other.

9:20

Mr. Reynolds: Well, there are positions that are being brought on. I mean, as we'll discuss there, there's one position that's being created in financial management and administrative services as a result of the FMAS review. I think that's about it.

The Chair: I would say, Mr. Dang, that I've raised this, had several discussions with staff. This is more accurate. It's more consistent with provincial reporting. It actually reflects that there are no additional expenditures in here. It's lived within the envelope, and the amount that's allocated, in its broadest sense, for personnel and human resources is essentially the same. So the point I said at the outset: it's reprioritizing within the envelope and the parameters that the committee suggested to do. I hope that answers your question.

Mr. Dang: Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions?

Dr. Turner: On the same topic there is a decrease of 32 FTEs in MLA administration. Maybe Ms Scarlett can . . .

Mr. Ellis: That decrease relates to constituency office staff, that are funded out of the MLA administration area. I believe that last year we had an estimate based on what we felt was the average, if you will, FTEs in each of the constituency offices. This year we've gone a little bit further and tried to discern exactly what the hours were, and that's resulted in that decrease.

Dr. Turner: This is an important consideration for all MLAs. This does not mean a cut in the allocation of constituency assistants.

Mr. Ellis: Well, I guess that's up to the member. The resources that are allocated to pay constituency staff have remained the same. There's no change there.

Mr. Reynolds: Dr. Turner, we don't assign the constituency assistants. It is the member's responsibility. It's not, under the orders, the caucus' responsibility. It's the member's responsibility. So it's up to the member to choose to hire someone if they want.

Now, the funding for a constituency office is not affected by this budget. It's done by a formula, and it's according to the parameters. The fact that there's a reduction doesn't have anything to do with the amount of money that's available for a constituency office. Does that answer your question?

Dr. Turner: Yes. Thank you for that clarification. I think this is important information that needs to be disseminated because these constituency offices actually are providing a very good service to Albertans, I believe.

Mr. Reynolds: We would entirely agree. Perhaps afterwards we can discuss what you have in mind. We'd hoped that members would be aware of the role of their constituency offices, but if more communication would be appreciated, perhaps you could let us know what you might be considering.

The Chair: Any other questions? Yes, Ron.

Mr. Orr: Not a question; just a comment that hasn't been said yet. I just really do appreciate the Clerk and the managers' efforts to have held the line on the budget. I know how hard it is to, you know, feel like you're rewarding and encouraging your staff, and I know there's always pressure there, but I think that in our current Alberta economic environment you've done a fantastic job to balance this all out. I just want to say, at least from my point of view, that I appreciate your effort. I think it's a good example for the rest of the province. Hopefully, as we move forward, the rest of the budget will be able to follow your lead. Your effort, though, and your conscientiousness are appreciated. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much.
Mrs. Schreiner.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, I as well would like to thank the LAO for producing the budget document, and I'd like to thank the LAO for all the hard work that they do. Thank you to the dedicated LAO staff for incorporating our feedback during the parameter discussions last meeting.

I have a couple of questions. On page 3 of the budget parameters in the summary it says that "the LAO will look at areas where economies can be made while recognizing the need to provide services to Members." I was wondering if you'd be able to highlight for me specific efficiencies that are reflected in this budget, please.

Mr. Reynolds: We can do that now, or as we go through with the different branches, the different managers can talk about what they've achieved. You know, part of it is that, I mean, there's a slight restructuring with respect to House services and Parliamentary Counsel that might in some way provide a better view as to how expenditures are accomplished. We'll get to it. That might be the best way to approach that.

The Chair: Yeah. I think I would agree. I think there are several that will be noted in here as we go through; things like mail. There

are smaller items that piece together that have been reshuffled. That was the point at the outset, reprioritizing while still maintaining the same level of service. I think that's a good suggestion, and if at the end we still haven't answered your question, please address it again.

Mrs. Schreiner: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions or comments?

Dr. Turner: As with my other colleagues I want to congratulate all of the departments, really, on doing a great job in keeping this place running well and on budget. I'm particularly appreciative as an MLA of the service that I get from the various departments.

I'm going to ask sort of a generic question about how the budget is actually created. I've been looking through the budget, and I don't see anything that looks like a business plan or a priority outcome, measurable outcomes, and I'm just wondering if that information was used in terms of creating this budget. I'm actually particularly interested in visitor services because that is probably the most businesslike portion of this activity.

The Chair: Well, thank you for that. Again, I think that as we move through the budget and each service unit, you might well hear some performance indicators that are used. They are there, I can tell you, and I think that in numeric terms that data is available. We probably will see a continued, you know, enhancement of that kind of data. I know that we have it because I've seen it, and I think we'll touch on the generalities of that today. If there are specific ones, each of the managers may well be addressing it.

Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Reynolds: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, if you looked at our annual report, you would find that there are a number of statistics there when you see comparative statistics: Alberta Branded sales – that's what we call the gift shop – computer and network equipment, employee compensation, financial services, House and committee proceedings, information and records management, Twitter activity, website activity, YouTube activity, library services, supply and services requests, visitor statistics, and then the audit of the financial statements, if you're interested in that. Those are some of the statistics that we publish with respect to our operations.

Dr. Turner: I do appreciate that response, but I'm basically looking forward to the discussion, maybe, on the individual departments. I had a specific question about visitor services, but I think that can wait until . . .

The Chair: Let's address that when we get to that point.

To the members on the phone: do you have any general questions before we begin to move through the details?

Hearing none, I'm assuming there are none.

9:30

Mr. Reynolds: I think, Mr. Speaker, that what we'd start off with is financial management and administrative services.

The Chair: I'll just add that this is an area that we'll be focusing on this year, and I'll just turn it over to Mr. Ellis to proceed.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just looking at the two pages that fold out nicely for you under the FMAS, financial management and administrative services, area, on the left-hand side in the green shade you can find some of the brief descriptions of the branch operation. I hope that's useful for people or for members for whom this may be their first budget meeting. It provides some background into the types of services that our branch provides and gives you a

better sense as to what's generating some of the costs that we're presenting here today.

I think that all members are aware that there was a review done of the FMAS branch, and we now have recommendations that have flowed forward as a result of that review. Resources have been put in place in the financial management and administrative services branch with which to implement those recommendations in that report. There are dollars, resources, in the budget. Those are partially offset by some reductions in actual premium costs for our management employees pension plan; however, the resources that are necessary for the implementation of the recommendations are included. There are some minor adjustments in some of our operating expenses, but overall we're showing a \$78,000 increase, which is solely due to the additional resources flowing out of the FMAS review report.

The Chair: Questions? Observations? This, I can say, will be an area that we will be focusing considerable time and energy on this year. Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah. I guess I was just wondering if you could elaborate a bit on some of those costs and efficiencies that might have resulted because of the review. I understand that they're factored in already, but if you could break them down a bit.

Mr. Ellis: We just received the results of the report recently, and each of the recommendations is outlined there. We have not as yet had an opportunity to go through in detail and decide how we're going to effect those recommendations. At this point I don't have any more specifics other than to say that we have added some resources. How we deploy the resources is going to be dependent on what our approach is to the recommendations and how we meet the expectations of those recommendations.

Mr. Dang: But you do believe that this is sufficient to do all the . . .

Mr. Ellis: I believe it's a good step, and I think that we can accomplish a lot with it. Whether it's enough to get us all the way there, I really don't know at this point, but I think it's a good step.

Mr. Dang: Thank you.

The Chair: Mrs. Schreiner.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was just curious. What kind of budgeting system does the LAO use to develop their budget? Do you use a priority-based budgeting system?

The Chair: I'm going to venture with some caution into that question. There are various terminologies that are used in various systems. I can say that what we have is a system based upon probably more of a spending envelope approach. You have an allocation of dollars. I think that in part relates to the question that maybe Dr. Turner was asking about: what are the performance indicators that would say that we're achieving what you as a committee and the Legislature would like to do? I would say that we do have a priority-based system.

Thus, my comment at the outset and now is that, as an illustration, this is an area that we will be shifting additional resources to in this coming year because based upon the feedback that we'd received from the MLAs, there were some opportunities for innovation and improvements. You will have received, I think, for example, a letter just in the last week or so, a change in financial reporting information that we think will be a vast improvement from what it was.

You'll see a series of issues. I think we have a broad enough mandate in here to adjust to priorities.

I don't know, Mr. Clerk, if you'd like to add to that.

Mr. Reynolds: I'm not entirely sure what the question is getting at, but we budget for a department based on the functions and services provided by each division of the LAO, and combined with that – because a large portion of the budget deals with services to members. I mean, those are all driven generally by formula, so a large part of the budget we have no control over in the sense that it's based on directions from the Members' Services Committee. We're also driven by the parameters that are set by the Members' Services Committee prior to preparing the budget. There are a number of aspects that go into it.

Dr. Turner: I'd just like to ask a supplementary question. I'm actually specifically interested in the FMAS review. I mean, one of the outcomes of that is going to be greater efficiency in terms of financial reporting. There's a lot of overlap and a plethora of forms that seem to defy definition there, and I would hope that with the resolution of some of those difficulties we actually are going to be able to save some money in terms of administrative costs. That's something that the LAO has control over. That's not the MLAs specifically. So where do those kinds of efficiencies get reflected in this budget?

Mr. Reynolds: Well, you raise an interesting point, but in terms of this budget we're going for an increase in personnel, as I indicated at the start, because we have to implement the changes. Sorry; you were looking at your screen there.

Dr. Turner: That's okay. I can hear and look.

Mr. Reynolds: Okay. We're looking at resources to implement the changes, and that was part of the review, indicating that there would be additional resources required to do that. We would need some experience with the operations, I would say, before we could accurately reflect efficiencies, as it were. I mean, it's very early. Mr. Dang was asking how we had budgeted for the report, and I think the report is dated January 31, which I think was the same date we set out the budget materials.

So it's evolving. You know, the first step is, as I said, an increase right now to implement the changes because by changing to the – well, we're looking to change to an electronic format of processing, but someone actually has to prepare what is the hard copy form into an electronic form and manage the transfer of that, which is essentially where we see the additional position coming in.

The Chair: I think it's to say, just to add to that, Dr. Turner, that the focus will be, yes, on efficiencies but also on a quicker response time, levels of service to the members to help us achieve what we want to achieve. I think within the existing spending envelope, within the parameters that are provided, we've shifted those resources to reflect that, but it may well be that in the course of these various changes that take place over the next three, six, 12 months, you will in fact see, in addition to some effectiveness improvements, some efficiency improvements.

9:40

I think this was a word or a direction of anticipating that the exact efficiency that we get from any electronic systems improvements, et cetera, we're not able exactly to identify yet; thus, the reason for presenting in the format that it is. I'm cautiously optimistic that we will see both an efficiency as well as an effectiveness improvement. I know this is an issue that many MLAs are concerned about, but

they're there. Thank you to all of you for the compliments you've made to our staff. I need to tell you that they are very dedicated to ensuring that each of you gets the support and stuff that is necessary.

Are there any other specific questions? I recognize the point being made about the efficiencies. I hope we've touched on that adequately, that you could see through to support that.

Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Orr: A different question altogether: can you just help me understand some of the overhead expenses, which I don't see in any of the – I assume it's under infrastructure, but if you can just comment on that, lease space utilities, I mean some of those expenses that would be maybe pure overhead. How are they handled and where?

Mr. Ellis: The LAO is similar to other government departments in the sense that their space is provided through the government, in essence, and a lot of the costs that go along with maintaining the buildings that we see here, our offices, et cetera, are provided by government. We do have evaluation adjustments. It's in our financial statements that represent those costs, but they're not costs that we actually pay for. So a lot of those costs would not be present. We do have things like phones and those kinds of things, but we separate those out typically into the branches and charge the branch that's responsible for those particular costs.

When you talk about leases in a constituency environment, that would be under the MLA administration budget, and members have the ability to negotiate their own terms and conditions for their constituency office, and those costs would be reflected in the member's services allowance.

Mr. Orr: I appreciate that, and that's kind of what I expected to hear. I just sort of wonder if – you know, an accounting figure to give us a true picture of what the total overall costs are. I mean this is an operational cost. I get it. I guess we can kind of add it in ourselves, but there is a big piece there in a way that's missing, sort of to go back to the original question about a potential business plan, that kind of thing. Anyway, thanks for the clarification. I'm clear on how it works, and that's kind of what I thought, but thanks.

The Chair: Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, just a quick follow-up to Mr. Ellis's comments around the line items associated with the costs they don't actually have to incur for space for the LAO inside buildings. Is the Federal building a government building? Is that what he's referring to, or would that be an example of what Mr. Ellis is referring to as well as, of course, the LAO staff that are working within the Legislature? Are there any other buildings outside those two buildings that the LAO currently work out of that would apply to what he was talking about?

Mr. Ellis: The LAO has space in a number of buildings that we don't pay for, and that would be the Legislature Building itself. We have space in there, obviously the Chamber and those members' offices that are there. The Edmonton Federal building: we have multiple floors in this building that are provided by the GOA. Then we have some space in the pedway whereby we operate our visitor services program areas. All of that space is provided to us through the GOA. There are certain situations where the LAO on behalf of caucuses and on behalf of members enter into lease agreements and pay directly for the costs associated with that. Those would not be GOA funded.

Mr. Nixon: One quick follow-up, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nixon: Caucuses inside the Federal building or opposition caucuses inside the Federal building or, you know, to use other jurisdictions as an example, where the Leader of the Opposition would have an office inside the Legislature: those individuals would still be officed inside a government building, correct?

Mr. Ellis: Yes, they would be.

The Chair: I'm smiling because we've had several discussions about this topic to the point Mr. Orr has made. The building-related costs as a general rule I would say, other than those that Mr. Ellis has referred to, are in fact managed and costed primarily in Infrastructure on the GOA side. For example, this room would be costed, other than the equipment in here – the electronic equipment is in the LAO budget, but the space itself, the fact that the lights are on, is largely in Infrastructure as with the balance of the building as well as the Legislature.

Mr. Nixon: Yes. I get that, Mr. Speaker. I think I got clarity that the room that you're sitting in right now, my office upstairs, et cetera, are technically all within a government of Alberta building.

The Chair: That's my understanding. Correct. Except as to your office that's in your constituency: that's shown as a cost to the LAO.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you very much, sir.

Mr. McIver: I'll be brief and in no way mean to diminish the comments of any of my colleagues. This is a classic discussion, a discussion upon which is based a multimillion-dollar annual consulting industry where the debate is whether it's more efficient to centrally provide services or whether it's more accountable and transparent to provide them department by department. Consultants make millions of dollars every year taking centrally provided services and moving them to a more accountable and transparent department by department, and then when they come back, they make millions more turning them from a more transparent and accountable department by department service into a more widely provided and, consequently, more efficient central delivery service.

I actually don't mind the discussion. I really don't. I think you just confirmed that this is a discussion that we've had before. If there's a good reason to change the way we do it now, I'm severely open to hearing those arguments. I haven't heard it yet, but I'm still listening.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Taylor: I was kind of curious. We're moving things over from a paper-driven system to an electronically driven system. How is it that we need more resources now that it's going to be done electronically as opposed to one that we're setting up with paper?

Mr. Reynolds: Well, I don't know if eventually that – sorry, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Reynolds: I don't know if eventually that's going to be the system, but it's really the transference to an electronic system that's requiring the resources right now to make sure that the paper documents are actually available in an electronic form that they could be processed.

Now, the other reason is that we're not entirely sure, you know, where the resource will be. As I pointed out, we got the consultant's report on January 31, which was the same day we sent out the budget documents. Based on the feedback from members, it appears that additional resources may be needed in FMAS, so this position is essentially in the very short term looking at the transference of hard-copy documents to electronic processing. In the longer term that may be repositioned somewhere within the department to meet the needs of the members.

Mr. Taylor: Didn't they already exist in both formats, both electronic and hard?

Mr. Reynolds: Scott, you can speak to that. Go ahead.

Mr. Ellis: The electronic distribution is one aspect of it, and that was relatively easy to do. However, behind the scenes we also changed the format of the detailed information, which required some software changes and some customization, if you will, to put it in that form. The existing management reporter that we use couldn't accomplish that all on its own, so we had to do some additional work that allowed us to put it into a format that was more usable and then transfer that into an Excel file to send out to people. So there was some software work that needed to be done.

9:50

You know, there are usually some one-time costs, if you will, to try and implement changes. That's what we saw this particular time. It took some resources from ITS to make the changes that we need and to put us in a position where if there are future changes that we might want to make as well, to make it even more effective in terms of getting that information to the members quicker.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions or comments? I have human resources.

Mr. Orr: Just one question for HR. Just explain the lingo for me. Earnings: does that mean actual pay? Is that what earnings means?

The Chair: What page are you on?

Mr. Orr: Financial management administration services, 020, the budget page.

Ms Scarlett: Correct.

Mr. Orr: The line items there.

Ms Scarlett: That's the base salary.

Mr. Orr: Okay. I just wanted to make sure that I understood that. I guess my question then is: if we're sort of holding the line on that, I think I heard from the – no. This is department by department. Let me study it a little bit more. I'll let it go.

Thanks.

The Chair: Okay. Cheryl.

Ms Scarlett: Good. Moving on to the next tab, human resource services. Again on the left side of the page you'll see a branch overview that describes the primary functions and responsibilities of human resources on behalf of all members and constituency caucus and LAO staff.

In terms of the adjustments in the budget, again it has been flagged that as a result of a decrease in the premium for management

pension, there are some savings there. There was a slight increase in our dental premiums, as you're all aware. However, we also were advised this year that the premiums or the cost of participation for the LAO in the employee and family assistance program will now be the responsibility of the LAO to pay.

By way of a brief background, the members and staff of the Legislative Assembly are eligible to participate and take advantage of the public service employee and family assistance program, which is a wonderful program where, in confidentiality, if you feel that you need to touch base and seek out some assistance, you can phone there, and we encourage all to take advantage of that. Obviously, there are some costs for maintaining that service, and there was a decision by the government that those costs would be transferred now to each department and, because we also participate in the program, to the LAO. The addition of the \$50,000 is representative of approximately what we believe our costs will be, based on participation in this program for the upcoming year.

Overall, when you offset the decreases in terms of the core services in HR and the increase in paying for the employee and family assistance program, that's why you see that in this particular budget line there is a \$33,000 increase. However, similar to what was expressed at the beginning, any of these adjustments, and in this case an increase, have been offset by other components of the budget, so overall there is no net increase.

I think to some of the questions in terms of the services, the Clerk expressed that the majority of us here in the branches are responsible for direct support and service to members and staff, and that is indeed the case in human resources. Our primary objective is to deliver our core services in a timely manner, which includes ensuring that everybody is paid on time; that their benefits are administered; that time sheets, when they come in, are processed promptly.

In terms of performance measures ours are directly related to quick turnaround times but also the kind of thing you can't quantify. We're always looking for ways to reach out to our members and staff with day-to-day, individual, one-on-one support in terms of any questions that you may have relative to your pay, benefits, and any other assistance that you need related to employee relations and higher emphasis this year on employee education and some webinars and reaching out even more to our constituency office staff to offer them training in HR areas.

Also, I think some of you have seen that we're putting more emphasis on education related to health and wellness and supports for those for everyone, and like everyone else, we are always looking to see how we can better streamline within our branch, how we might be able to better use automation in terms of the end product and making things easier for you to get more in an online format more easily deliverable. It doesn't necessarily change what happens behind the scenes, but we're looking for easier ways to build in automation so that you can take and maybe get your information easier any time, anywhere. One of those that's on the radar and we're hoping to fit in sometime might be the automated direct deposit statement, as an example.

The Chair: Any other questions or comments with respect to this section? Just to touch very briefly on the point that Cheryl indicated, you know – staff training, orientation, et cetera – as we move through this next 12 months, one small area will be a concentrated, focused effort in making sure that constituency office staff are aware and have assistance available for the various financial processes that may begin to unfold in the next 12 months. That's in that report, you know, concentrating on training and orientation efforts. There's one example of some of the activities that would be in this budget.

Are there any other questions or comments on human resources? Is that where we are?

Ms Luff: Yes, Mr. Speaker, on the phone.

The Chair: Yes. Hi, Robyn.

Ms Luff: Hi. This is a clarification question. It may be a small detail there, but I just happened to notice that the budget for office equipment rental and purchase went down by \$29,000 and that other labour and services went up by exactly \$29,000. I'm just curious if maybe you could provide some clarification on what happened, on what we didn't need to rent, and what other labour we are receiving.

Ms Scarlett: Thank you. Again, just in terms of looking at our actual real costs over the years, we've had less of a need for replacement of the equipment that's referenced there and was budgeted for. However, more of an emphasis now and some of that additional training and development is where those costs will be transferred to. We've gone out here and will be continuing to bring in speakers in support of employee and member health and wellness, trying to put more emphasis on supports for speakers at the constituency seminar related to wellness, mental health issues, other supports that are out there, so just a transfer of dollars to put them where the needs are most at this time.

Ms Luff: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Cortes-Vargas: I was just curious. Looking through the annual report, there were a few comments that said, you know, that moving to the Federal building will provide us with some flexibility in how we organize. What has been the effect of having moved to the Federal building? Is it providing more space? Is it providing efficiency in certain ways? I'm just curious because it's been a year now. It was a huge move, and the number of boxes that you listed that were required to move is a huge undertaking under a year that was also bringing in a new government and so many different things at the same time, so I appreciate all of the work that has been done not just for the budget but to transfer all of that work. I'm just curious. After having been in those offices for a while now, what are you seeing as some of the benefits and/or?

10:00

Ms Scarlett: For starters – and I'll let others jump in here; these are just my thoughts – in terms of within the office, we moved from one office space to another office space, a desk and an office. A desk is a desk that way. In terms of the core systems the systems that we had previously did not change. It's just a different locale.

In terms of being in this building, though, some of the significant changes, that we are continuing to take and live and enjoy and respond to, evolve around some of our new facilities, and I think that the second floor is a good example. You know, we have more space. It is being used significantly more than what we had before. The technology is significant. The support of the technology and the infrastructure has been something that is much greater than what we had and enjoyed previously, but that also takes resources in terms of keeping the infrastructure going but also the security, the management of the venue itself. I would say that that also expands relative to Mr. Hodgson's area.

The Chair: Well, I was just going to say that Mr. Hodgson and the Clerk could also add to this very good question. It seems to me from what I saw in those first months to what we've been able to see – this is one illustration of it. For my part, as we all desire and search for better engagement with the people we serve, here's an example of where this is one more opportunity for us to take advantage of engaging with people and the use of technology. Mr. Hodgson can speak in greater detail on this as well.

But also as a part of it – and I know it's caused a little bit of extra time – we've been meeting in spaces with various groups in our community that simply were difficult to be able to host and arrange for, which we can now do here. I hope that that kind of activity and use will in fact increase significantly in the future. I just want to emphasize the point that if we want to find other and new ways to get our public better informed, this is just one of the tools that we can use.

Mr. Reynolds: Yeah. Can I just make a . . .

The Chair: Yeah. Go on.

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very interesting question and one that one would have to think about for a while. I'm not sure if it has many budget implications. I can tell you that as a culture, with respect to the LAO it was a very interesting move because the LAO had been in the Annex for – what? – 25, 30 years. I'm looking at Cheryl.

Ms Scarlett: Thirty-five, 40.

Mr. Reynolds: Cheryl is not older than me. She's been here longer. Yes, 25, 30 years. It was quite a move, quite an adjustment. Culturally, it was significant for the LAO, I mean, coming just after an election. You have this, as you pointed out, move, and then the Clerk left. So there were a lot of changes. But I'd say that on a cultural level, I like to think – it's just anecdotally.

Whereas the LAO had been on four floors in the Annex, we're now on two floors, well, generally speaking. You know, we have additional facilities which have expanded the role of the LAO, and that's in Brian's and Al's area with respect to visitor services. I mean, we have the public display areas on the main floor. We have Alberta Branded. We have different facilities. I like to think that it brings us as an organization closer together. Physically it does because we're on two floors, but it gets the sort of co-operation going. It's easier to really speak to people, and I think it makes more of a coherent organization, in my view.

I don't know if you can measure those things, but those are my thoughts about it. It's something that would be worth while having a discussion about sometime. A very interesting question.

Perhaps, Mr. Chair, Colonel Hodgson has something here.

The Chair: Brian, did you have something to add?

Mr. Hodgson: Well, you know, the visitor stats sort of speak for themselves. We opened the Visitor Centre on the main floor of the Federal Public Building on July 1, 2015, and our visitor numbers for that year, 2015, were up nearly 33 per cent. We took on 14,000 square feet of space, excluding the education centre in the pedway, that was referred to earlier. There's a demand for our programming. You've all been through the Visitor Centre, so you can see there's significant expansion from what we had before. Going along with that expansion, of course, was a human resource plan developed to, you know, offer the programs that the space demanded, that we're still fulfilling. I don't know if that speaks to your point. There's been a very significant expansion.

The Chair: I think the point that you're making, Estefania – and I agree with the Clerk – is a good one and ties back to the earlier discussion, that we're now going to be, I think, continuing to refocus on, to give you some fairly specific numeric and other qualitative outcome measures: we were here; this was our target; we either exceeded it, or we didn't meet it. I think you're going to see that

there are some huge opportunities here that we all need to work on and find ways to make not only efficient but also effective.

Mr. Clerk, are there any other questions on this one?

Mr. Reynolds: No.

The Chair: To Cheryl on HR?

Cortes-Vargas: No, thank you.

The Chair: Ron.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. Just one. I notice that out of all the other different budgets, this one – I'll raise it here because it's probably the most obvious. I guess the question I have is on the trend from the actuals – and I include the '16-17 forecast as an actual here – to the estimate figure, particularly with regard to operations. I have no problem on the human resource expenses side with the increase; that's been justified and explained. But I just wonder. From \$105,000 actual and significantly less than that the previous year, in '15-16, to a budget of \$160,000 seems like a really wide range of gap there. I mean, I know; I've been on budget committees before. I understand the comfort or the feeling of safety, that you've got lots of room, and I credit the fact that you're not just using it all, that you are being disciplined. But I just wonder about the budgeting process. I mean, surely human resources isn't such a volatile department in terms of some of these operational expenses that there needs to be that big a gap between – I just wonder at the rationale for keeping it or why we go from \$105,000 to \$160,000 when, quite frankly, you know, a 10 per cent range would put it at \$115,000 or so. So just more of a budgeting process question, I guess.

Ms Scarlett: Thank you. One of the major variances here is in our advertising line, as an example. Depending upon the number of vacancies that we have and the amount of advertising that we need to do in any given year, that has varied. One of the things that we very much are trying to do – and I think that we'll be in a better position to come back to the table and perhaps look at that budget line next year. There has been the trend – and whenever possible we are trying to take advantage more of the online recruitment. So there is the potential there for that. Now, obviously, like other years, if there are not the expenses there, then we will be frugal and not expend the money. But I take your point.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. I'm not questioning your frugality. I mean, I think you've proven that. I just question the validity of a budget space in terms of the actual expense trend. It doesn't really need that much, seemingly. And I'm not saying that you're going to spend it. I just, you know . . .

Ms Scarlett: No. I appreciate the question, absolutely.

Mr. Orr: . . . think that it's something worth taking a look at. For me, I mean, I've always argued in budget committees that budgets are living documents. I mean, they live from one year to the next, and you grow and expand and you take into account what you anticipate, but they should actually try to come close to what you really anticipate you're going to expend rather than just have a nice safety cushion, which is maybe what it looks like, a little bit. Anyway, just my comment.

10:10

The Chair: Thank you.

The good news of that is that we're on the positive side, not the negative side, in terms of our estimation.

Mr. Orr: That's true.

The Chair: The Legislature Library, Valerie Footz.

Mr. Reynolds: Sorry.

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry.

Mr. Reynolds: Before Ms Footz starts, I just want to say that you'll note that the library has reduced their budget by \$28,000. I just want to also point out – sorry, Val, if I steal your thunder here – that these are very challenging times for libraries. Part of our core business is, really, to perform services for members and their staff to ensure that they can be as knowledgeable as possible, and the library provides excellent service, I would say, in that area. The other thing is that they face increasing cost pressures when you look at the costs of materials coming from the United States primarily. With the fluctuating dollar, it becomes a challenge to pay for that.

But I've probably stolen Ms Footz's thunder. There you go. Sorry.

Ms Footz: Well, thank you, Rob. Just like all the other branches to date, on your left-hand side you'll see a general indication of what the mandate of the library is. I will also note that we also serve the civil service as they happen to come in, and we are also open to the public, and that isn't stated here. But you remain our primary clients, and everything we do – oh, it sounds like Bryan Adams – we do for you.

There are some changes that we've made, and, again, most of them – it's actually interesting that you bring up the impact of the Federal building. One of the things that we were able to do as a result of that is to shift around our collection. Alberta government documents are our most heavily used collection, and the move to the Federal building allowed us the opportunity to make sure that all of those were in the library proper. Therefore, we were able to reduce our paging hours by .75, and that's why you'll see our FTEs as down. We were able to save some hourly wage staff from having to retrieve from different areas because we just didn't need it, so that was an efficiency that we were able to make based on that.

The other thing that contributed to our overall decrease was the reduction in the MEPP premiums that we had. We had a change in staff of our systems librarian. As we backfilled that, we had a vacancy, so we saved some salary at that point, which will even out this year.

There were also some changes in the memberships that we had. The Canadian Library Association folded after 60 years in existence, so now we don't have to pay for membership to that.

Overall, all of those things combined into a \$12,000 decrease. Then, operationally, those were things that we, again, had a little bit more control over.

In response to requests from members to have electronic copies of services such as new books in the library and selected periodical articles in the library, we were able to reduce the number of copies of that that we print, and we expect that trend to continue as members change how they want to access information. There are fewer actual books that are being published in Canada of specific relevance to members, so there are fewer things that we have to buy.

Again, anything that you want, we will make sure that you have. We, again, try and anticipate as much as we can, but, as the Clerk mentioned, there are changes in inflation that we can't necessarily predict, things like the currency exchange rates, and that's also for the British pound as we buy Westminster-type support materials.

All of those things – again, microforms, which really are more than microforms: it is partly what you would expect, but it's also some digitization partnerships that would go in there.

The one increase that we're asking for is under computer software, and that is for bibliographic citation software. As we put together historical articles on the Legislature Building, we're able to build a database of sort of Leg. Building-specific historical materials that could be accessed in a moment.

Overall, we were able to find these reductions to help offset other branches' needs.

The Chair: I must tell you that it's the quiet little gem that exists in the Legislature that we all really need to appreciate. It's an outstanding service.

Ms Footz: Thank you.

The Chair: If you want to make policies based upon evidence, they have the evidence that you need.

Any questions on the library services?

Mr. McIver: I would just think it's worth remarking that someone bought a new software program in government for \$5,000. That's a lot fewer zeroes than I'm accustomed to seeing on these things.

Mr. Reynolds: Those are the efficiencies we're trying to deliver.

Ms Footz: Bang for your buck. There you go.

The Chair: It's about that culture that we talked about.

Any comments from members on the phone?

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. I have a question, actually.

The Chair: Go ahead, Colin.

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. You know, something was said before, and I want to concur with the other members on what an excellent resource the library is. I've always been really appreciative of the courtesy and efficiency with which they deal with requests.

I was looking at the line item here for microforms. I see that it's dropped about \$5,000. I'm wondering, you know – and forgive me my ignorance – if that's like microfilm. I didn't think that that was really still current technology. I'm just wondering if they maybe wouldn't mind elaborating on that, what's meant by microforms and how it continues to be relevant.

Ms Footz: All of the research that we have done has shown that, overall, microforms are the most consistent format available. If you think about electronic formats – you know, how often the PDF changes and the kind of support needs that are ongoing for adaptive technologies and so on – microforms are stable, they don't need to be backed up, and they can be accessed anywhere. When you're looking at material that isn't heavily used but still very important to retain historically, microforms are cheaper. The interfaces: you put it into the machine, and you press a button. So for our needs to date, microform has been the most stable, cost-efficient option for us.

We are continuing to look at partnering with other organizations in terms of digitizing historical documents of use. It is something that we're not prepared to do on our own just because of the ongoing maintenance. When you look at some of the bigger players in the Edmonton area even or across the province, there's just no way that we could support the kind of infrastructure that's needed. We're looking at partnering with, for example, the University of Alberta so that we can make use of their technology but, again, put in the priority documents that members would want.

So you were right, Mr. Piquette, but there still is some need for that as we edge on to making more things available digitally. Does that answer your question?

Mr. Piquette: Thank you for your answer.

Ms Footz: Okay.

The Chair: Are we ready to move to parliamentary services? Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There are a number of aspects to parliamentary services that include different branches. There's House services, headed by Shannon; communications, headed by Rhonda; Parliamentary Counsel, once again, headed by Shannon; *Hansard*, which is Janet and Shannon.

Anyway, what I'd like to direct your attention to, the bottom line of this, is that we actually have, where you see Total Operational on the summary page, a decrease of 2.46 per cent, or \$43,000.

10:20

I'm not trying to obfuscate anything, but there have been a number of changes in how parliamentary services is organized. When I was Law Clerk, I had responsibility for interparliamentary relations. That transferred over from legal services to the Clerk's office. Some of the legal services were provided under the committees branch, which is now in Parliamentary Counsel, so you'll see an increase in Parliamentary Counsel, but you'll see, accordingly, a reduction for House services.

I mean, what I'd say is that it all rolls up into the larger number, so we've been able to achieve some efficiencies. Of course, there's Brian Hodgson's area of security and ceremonial services, which, I believe, shows a reduction as well.

The Chair: Shannon.

Ms Dean: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will just elaborate on what the Clerk had to say in terms of House services and Parliamentary Counsel. There's been a restructuring, but at the end of the day we are a hold-the-line budget in both those areas as well as in the *Hansard* area.

There's been a lot of discussion about performance measures and outcomes. I must say, Mr. Chair, that for the most part this particular branch or larger roll-up area responds to the needs of the Assembly and committees of the House, so we are driven by those needs. I can provide you all sorts of statistics in terms of what will appear in our forthcoming annual report – we've had 384 Assembly sitting hours, 212 committee hours, 88 committee meetings, 552 tablings – but at the end of the day it's all driven by the process and the needs of the members and committees.

I just want to touch upon what the deputy chair had raised in terms of this move from the Annex to this building. With respect to the House services staff and the *Hansard* staff it was a huge change in terms of adjusting our systems, our processes, et cetera, et cetera. I think the other thing to commend the staff for is the fact that we're in space that's three times the size we had in the Annex, and we're still working with the existing staff members. The other thing that we're doing is that we're expanding the webcasting for the committee meetings. Again, we're doing it with a status quo budget, actually a 2 per cent reduction. These are performance indicators that I will highlight in response to that.

The Chair: Hon. members? Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Just a couple of numbers, at least for me, that are obvious and that a couple more words on wouldn't hurt us here. The first is in the human resources expenses. Earnings of management are down \$205,000, and earnings of nonmanagement are up \$351,000, so there's got to be a little more meat to put on the bones there somewhere, I'm presuming, a little more explanation.

Ms Dean: I believe that's easy to explain by one less director position, a corresponding increase in nonmanagement on the legal side.

Mr. McIver: It's on the legal side? Okay. Thank you for that. Less management, more workers, as it were.

Ms Dean: Well, it's simply this. I was director of House services; now I'm director of House services and Law Clerk.

Mr. McIver: You're working twice as hard. Thank you.

The other one, at least for me, is obvious, and again it's a reduction, so this isn't in any way a complaint. It's just the \$50,000 reduction in office equipment rental and purchase. Is there any more to say about that?

Ms Dean: I think some of that's driven by the fact that we're not hosting the heritage fund public meeting in the same way that we used to because we have on-site equipment for that. We used to have to bring in outside providers for the broadcast. I can't speak to anything else.

The Chair: I think that in part it might also be the point that Ron raised earlier. You know, if you look at the past practice, it was under-expended in this area, so where efficiencies were found, it was shifted to a higher priority. That may well be a part of this situation as well.

Mr. McIver: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess I just have a couple of clarifying questions similar to the vein of some of Mr. Orr's earlier. I see that under computer equipment and under Grants two years in a row now there's quite a discrepancy between the estimate and the actuals or the forecast here. I was just wondering whether we can clarify why they're still being budgeted the way they are.

The Chair: Who's prepared to speak to this matter?

Mr. Reynolds: So you're saying that the discrepancy on grants is from the budgeted \$7,000 amount to the \$4,000 amount? You're asking about the \$3,000?

Mr. Dang: Yeah. Percentage-wise, that's quite a large discrepancy for the two years in a row.

Mr. Reynolds: Well, yes, \$3,000 in the big scheme of things, when you go to the budget estimates, where everything is done in thousands, would be 3. Nonetheless, it's an important point with respect to the expenditure of public monies, and we'll look at the grant portion. As I understand it, there may not have been take-up. Under the grants portion we provide for CPA scholarships, for essays. I believe that also there's something with respect to the Girl Guides – is it? – that we provide an award to. It may be that we haven't had take-up on all the grant things we budgeted for. Obviously, we haven't, and we'll take another look at that. I think that we wanted more in case we did have a more robust CPA scholarship. I'd have to go back and check, Mr. Dang, but I think that we haven't had a full take-up on that program. I can certainly get back to you on that.

Then – I'm sorry – your other matter was the computer equipment?

Mr. Dang: Yes. The same sort of question, I guess: there's a fairly large discrepancy between the estimates and the forecast two years in a row there.

Mr. Reynolds: Cheryl?

Ms Scarlett: Again, just taking a look at the roll-up line, the variance that you're looking at here would be in the range of \$7,000. That would be a reflection of a prior year, probably tied to the Federal building in terms of some additional specialized equipment that fell under the broadcast start-up and implementation here. As we go forward now, we're more into maintenance.

Mr. Dang: Right. Thank you.

The Chair: If there are some more details – that is a pretty detailed question – we'll certainly get any elaboration to the responses you received after the meeting if that's agreeable.

Mr. Dang: Sure. Thank you.

The Chair: Ron.

Mr. Orr: Yes. Thank you. Other labour and services: a fairly nondescriptive statement. I guess it concerns me a little bit when I see that label on what is far and away the largest budgetary item under the operational side, by about 10 times anything else, well, except for maybe travel. Some details on that and maybe in the future a breaking out of whatever the biggest components of that are. But the \$1.1 million undefined: I guess that is my question.

The Chair: Who's prepared to speak to that matter? You're on the summary, page 2 of 2, other labour and services, budgeted this year for \$1,138,000, correct?

Mr. Orr: Yes. I appreciate the fact that it's down. It's just that my point is that it's the largest item in the column under operational expenses, and it's essentially undefined. It doesn't tell us what it is.

The Chair: Shannon.

Ms Dean: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There is an element of that that's for outside legal fees, but it's very small. The large majority of that is broadcast services, and I'll let Cheryl expand upon that. That's about \$500,000, or is that \$669,000?

10:30

Ms Scarlett: A component of what you're looking at there is related to the evolving broadcast. As Ms Dean referenced, one of the initiatives that we are continuing here is the build-out of the second floor, and that includes the evolution of the technology capabilities to broadcast and video stream not only Chamber proceedings but in the very near future our committee proceedings. Part of that evolution involves equipment but also contractors. Right now we have external contractors that provide those services. As we try to build out here, we will be going to a transfer to in-house expertise so that we can work towards meeting the endeavours of members and getting the messaging out for both committee and Chamber. As part and parcel of this, then, this year you will see that there is also an offset as some of those labour and services charges have been moved up to the human resources expense line because as we move forward this year, we will be bringing on more of our own staff, which will offset the decreases there.

Mr. Orr: Okay. Thanks.

Ms Scarlett: So it is a little bit of a moving target as we continue to evolve.

Mr. Orr: Sure. Eventually, maybe, you know, the main points could be broken out as it stabilizes for you, but I appreciate the explanation. Thanks.

Ms Scarlett: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other questions on parliamentary services?

With the agreement of the members, if you'd like, we could take a five-minute break. Would that be agreeable? Okay. Back at 20 to 11.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 10:32 a.m. to 10:43 a.m.]

The Chair: I wonder if we could call the meeting to order. Take your seats.

I believe we finished parliamentary services and were about to move to visitor services. Is that correct? Rob or Brian.

Mr. Reynolds: Mr. Chair, I'd be pleased to turn it over to Mr. Hodgson.

Mr. Hodgson: Well, good morning, folks. Visitor services has prepared the budget that you see before you. I did speak to some of the causal factors that were used in developing this budget. As you can see, notwithstanding the increased operational tempo and visitor numbers that I spoke to earlier, it's interesting to note that in 2016 there was a 10 per cent increase in event attendance at some of our principal events – Family Day, Canada Day, and Celebrate the Season – and a 16 per cent increase in the number of visitors to the Legislature Building, but we're still managing to realize an overall reduction of about 1.35 per cent.

Rather than going over ground that might not be necessary, I would certainly entertain any questions that you may have in relation to the budget.

The Chair: Hon. members? Dr. Turner.

Dr. Turner: Yes. First of all, I really want to congratulate visitor services. I'm continually amazed at the quality of the services provided by visitor services, particularly the Leg. tours and the school visits. The School at the Leg. program: several of the schools in my constituency take advantage of it. I realize that I'm fortunate in that regard in representing an Edmonton constituency. Also, you know, the Alberta Branded store really is doing, I think, a great job highlighting Alberta artists primarily, and they've been very helpful to my constituency folks in terms of the pins and flags, et cetera. So I'm really pleased with it. The Canada Day celebrations and all these things are fine.

I'm going to ask a question about a change in services, but it's not meant to be critical in any way, and that relates to, actually, the school visits. Each of those is accompanied by having a picture taken with your MLA, and that's great; it's good. I get to take those pictures back to the school, and we actually discuss civics in grade 6 classes. It's been really good. But this year there's been a change, where there had been a professional photographer – and I believe he retired – and he's been replaced by very competent photographers, but we're no longer getting the photos printed. The cost of that has been shifted to the constituencies, and I'm just wondering where we're at with that.

Mr. Hodgson: Well, that change was a result of our attempt to utilize contemporary technology and still effect some cost savings. It was the case that members had a myriad of choices they could make in relation to what photographs they wished to have taken with groups that had come here from their respective constituencies. Some wanted choirs. Some didn't want choirs. Some wanted school groups. Some wanted certain school groups but not all. What we are doing now is having a visitor services staffer with a digital camera take a digital image for every group

that comes and sending that digital image to the member, both at their office here and to the constituency office. Thereafter, you know, they can arrange – if they wish to buy photo folders from Alberta Branded, we can certainly supply those. So I guess we've increased the level of service and realized a significant saving of about \$40,000.

Now, not every member, I'm sure, would like it, but, you know – the other thing, too, is that Ken Chow, I think, was keen to retire. The quality of his photographs: we had certainly had a few members observe that it wasn't what they thought was as good a quality as they would like. That's the background behind it. We're trying to be more efficient, provide better service, and save money. So that's what was driving it.

Dr. Turner: I just wanted to ask a question about Alberta Branded, and it may be that I'm just not following it. Is there a report in the budget about – I asked this before – like, the business plan? I guess that in terms of how we're doing, the total revenue looks like it's . . .

Mr. Hodgson: The actual amount was \$450,000. We're estimating \$390,000.

In terms of the business plan we're driven by the strategic objectives of the LAO, but a principal feature of the operation of Alberta Branded is service to members in terms of their promotional item needs and other gifts. Members, of course, are offered a discount of 40 per cent on merchandise. LAO staff get 20 per cent. Broadly speaking, we're attempting to change the mix. Originally it was about 60 per cent of our sales that were to members and 40 to the public, but we're attempting to improve the level of service to members – and I think it's a good deal more convenient because it's in the same building as most of them – while improving the sales to sort of outside customers, if I can use that expression.

10:50

Dr. Turner: So total revenue, you're projecting, is going to go from \$450,000 to \$390,000?

Mr. Hodgson: Yeah. That's a conservative estimate. You know, it's very difficult to predict. We do have a fiscal year-end bulge typically, and we had a very strong performance in Alberta Branded over the Christmas season. Some of it is driven by the attendance at the various temporary exhibits. For the Magna Carta last year we had over 22,000 people come, and then we offered giftware that was consistent with that exhibition, and it sold well. Sometimes it's hard to predict. I think we're pretty competitive and provide a pretty good level of service to members.

Dr. Turner: Thank you.

Mr. Taylor: For other labour and services, Mr. Chair, it was kind of asked – I'm wondering about that. There is a \$170,000 increase/change in that. What's in that? Why the change?

Mr. Hodgson: I'll ask Mr. Chapman to speak to that, who's the manager of visitor services.

Mr. Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That comes back to the original comment made by the Clerk earlier. We're looking at increased programming for Canada Day this year, so that bump up is the Canada Day number, which is then offset by some grant.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Thank you.

Cortes-Vargas: Just going back to the photographer, it's just, like, a small question. One of the features of the photographs was the

labelling for the schools. I've had comments from various teachers that the replacement in this new movement away from having the photographer is that there's a piece of paper that's lifted up with the name of the school versus having the actual I think it was like a plaque, where you could have the name of that school, which looks significantly better. I'm just curious. Is there also a replacement as to how you're going to be labelling the photography? It's an interesting process because there's a set precedent and expectations of what these pictures look like, myself included. I've had these pictures taken when I was in school, and people know what they look like. It's the consistency and changing them from year to year and having multiple generations. You look back, and you see a piece of paper labelling the school versus an actual plaque. It's the presentation of it. I'm wondering what the plans are to address this kind of concern.

Mr. Hodgson: Well, in the general sense we're responsive to the needs of the members, of course, subject to certain constraints that are imposed in the budgeting process. What you're suggesting doesn't seem to me, on the face of it, at least, to be, you know, a really significant, difficult issue to sort of come to terms with.

Al, do you want to speak to that?

The Chair: Mr. Chapman.

Mr. Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We did look at that. It took over an hour a day to do those little plaques that you talked about, depending on how many schools were coming in, because you had to put the little letters and everything on individually. We had actually pushed that back to the photographer to do that work. We wouldn't do it.

When we moved across, I talked about, "Could we do something digital?" because you can put digital across the bottom. We're still looking into that. For now we're holding the paper up, but the photo that they're actually supposed to put through to the school was without the paper held up. That was just for us to identify the school in the subsequent picture. That was a test photo, the one with the paper in it, and in a couple of cases the test photo turned out better than the actual photo because kids' eyes were closed and LASS guys were in the back of the picture. We're still working out the process.

Cortes-Vargas: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you. That's important feedback to get. We really appreciate that, and I can tell you that we're going to look at that then, and we will try and design a photograph that meets the needs of the members because this is important to you. We will work on that and get back to you.

The other thing is that when we did transfer over to, if you will, staff-inspired photos, I just want to say that Mr. Chow provided excellent service to the Legislative Assembly and to the Legislative Assembly Office, and we are appreciative of his efforts over the years on our behalf, but it is an area where we thought efficiencies could be achieved. Obviously, we've got a few changes to make to meet your expectations, but we'll certainly get on that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Those issues like that are much smaller. I think we hear what people are saying, and we'll work with finding some solution that I think meets your needs.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other questions with respect to visitor services?

I just want to echo an appreciation to the staff. You've heard me say this before, but with the supportive staff and the Clerk and the Sergeant-at-Arms we are continuing in our adventure of regional outreach with the Mace to all sections of the province as one more strategy in terms of getting a higher degree of engagement with the Legislature as all 87 of us, and I just want to thank the staff who are a part of that. That's just one more thread in the rope of trying to make the connection stronger, and any of the feedback we've received thus far has been very positive about that. We're hoping to do a couple more of those this year. Thank you for that.

Are there any other questions with respect to visitor services?

Mr. McIver: This is just a brief compliment. This is one of the few areas where we can actually say thank you for driving revenues up. I appreciate that. I think that's a good thing. Also, the staff there should be complimented. Any time I've gone by to see an exhibit or anything, they've been tremendously professional, friendly, helpful. It never ever felt like an inconvenience to them. It felt like they wanted to help. So if you would relay appreciation for what I believe is very good work, I would appreciate that.

Mr. Hodgson: Thank you, sir. I'll do that.

The Chair: Thank you. I know that the staff will welcome you back, Mr. McIver, and I'm sure they would welcome that you continue to buy product at a higher level in this upcoming year just to keep that revenue number climbing in the correct direction.

Mr. McIver: Excellent advice, sir.

The Chair: Moving along to IT. Cheryl.

Ms Scarlett: Thank you. Again, in the summary is a brief descriptor of some of the basic, core services that are provided by the IT group. This is a zero overall net increase, as you will see, but this is one of the areas where, if you will, we have, based on the current model for budgeting this year, taken and made the adjustment in terms of existing staff who have been paid through the bottom half of the budget. Those costs have now been appropriately transferred up to the top, so really one just offsets the other.

Again, similar to the messaging here in terms of performance indicators, this branch is, as you all know, responsible for providing the secure infrastructure for all members and in support of the constituency offices, caucus offices, and the LAO branches, so our services and infrastructure extend all throughout Alberta. The emphasis this year continues to be also on employee training. Again, we've been holding a significant number of webinars to reach out to our constituency office staff. We will continue to do that.

We are actively involved, obviously, in terms of the ongoing build and development here of the second floor. Particularly, the push right now is related to the video streaming for committees and continued support of the video streaming as it relates to the Chamber broadcasts. In addition, we've got a very small AV group that works together with the other branches in support of the activities here on the floor and within the rooms, whoever is using them, whether it's us or whether it's our representatives from the government booking that.

Yeah. I'll stop there.

11:00

The Chair: I can tell you that when you're out in Medicine Hat and something doesn't seem to show up on the IT screen, it's extremely

appreciated to be able to have somebody to reach out to. Again, I think I speak for all of the members. The courtesy that the staff have shown to myself and I know to others, because they've told me, it's very much appreciated.

Are there questions with respect to IT that you might have? There was another point that I wanted to make, but it's gone.

Mr. Orr: Is it safe to assume that computer services and computer equipment are being rolled into one line? Is that what I'm reading?

Ms Scarlett: Correct.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. Okay.

The Chair: How about on the phones? Any questions with respect to this area?

Estefania.

Cortes-Vargas: Yeah. Just out of curiosity. I mean, IT is an ever-evolving group. Every year there's an increase in software. Are there any changes that you're foreseeing in the main services that you're providing to members and, you know, what that looks like? I'm just curious about some of the main themes in it as well, especially when some of the conversation is in modernizing some of the processes. I don't know how much that goes into IT and the work with the other departments.

Ms Scarlett: Thank you for the question. In terms of some of the comments that have been offered up so far and within each of our branches here, looking to see how we can better use technology to streamline processes, our IT group is actively involved in all those initiatives. We're there definitely as a partner to try to assist us all in terms of the branches moving forward. Within that, one of our primary objectives is to make sure that with our base infrastructure we are current. It's a rapidly changing environment, and just staying ahead of the bad guys is an important component of that, but also we try to make sure that you as members and staff across Alberta are provided with the technologies that allow you to do what you need to in terms of reaching out to your constituents.

Within that, aside from the normal evergreening cycle of our hardware and our software, we have some movement here. We'll be progressing and moving up to the next version of Windows in the next cycle, and we need to keep up with our operating system. So it's ever evolving. Some of the special applications that support your staff in the constituency office are due for upgrades, and as they do, we will take and work with them in terms of the training so that they understand the tweaks and the enhancements that they bring as well. We're always working to try to deliver to you, whether it's through IT itself or with the other branches, the technologies, as I mentioned earlier, so that you can take and receive them in a more mobile kind of environment any time, anywhere, and that's also supported with the equipment that we give you as well.

Cortes-Vargas: Okay. I just really want to take a moment to recognize that there's a system within IT where they have a ticketing one, and they usually are able to give an answer extremely quickly, which has been in many cases really beneficial for my work because when a computer is down, it means, like, it's hard to communicate. I can't access OurHouse and all of these things. The processes which they've put in place are really clear, and it's really easy to understand what the processes are. So I wanted to take a moment to thank them for their services and for their continual support. I appreciate those kinds of processes. I know that they have a ticketing one, and they get back to you immediately. It's always been

helpful because as soon as phones are down or Internet is down, it's an immediate concern to not be able to contact the constituents that are reaching out to us.

Ms Scarlett: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just to build up the IT systems as part of the discussion we had earlier about FMAS, you're going to see an enhancement of various processes and systems in the next 12 months.

Mr. McIver.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you. The one thing that I wonder because I think all the equipment is there but we just haven't allowed it to happen is: is there any chance we'll be able to offer guest services for Internet in our constituency offices at any point? Everything is there except permission to do it.

Ms Scarlett: That is indeed part of the plan and something that we will work as quickly as we can to turn on. Again, a balance to make sure that we've got the type of controls internally to meet your needs, but providing a guest network access in your constituency office is something that we're very close to be rolling out.

Mr. McIver: Good. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. If no further questions, we'll move along to – I'm sorry. Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. I just have a quick question here. I see you have 17 full-time equivalents and you've got a budget for a change of \$816,000 or 65 per cent. How many more additional people are you looking to bring on? By the way, you do a great job with IT.

Ms Scarlett: Thank you.

No additional increase in staff this year. Again, what you're seeing in terms of the variance from the top half of the budget to the second half of the budget is that there are nine full-time equivalent positions that have been previously funded and reflected under operations. We've now transferred that up to clearly reflect the current budgeting model.

Mr. Taylor: Okay.

The Chair: Again, it's been noted in several of the other – this is much more reflective of the actuality of what it is, and you're going to continue to see this.

Now, I know you'll want to move quickly past the next one so that we can get to talk about yours, but are there any questions with respect to the Speaker's office trying to do our part to provide service to the Legislature? Same staffing arrangements and some slight reduction. Any questions? How about from the telephone members?

Hearing none, we'll move along to MLA administration.

Mr. Reynolds: That's legislative committees?

The Chair: Oh, you're right. Sorry. Legislative committees first. Rob.

Mr. Reynolds: That's fine. Mr. Speaker, I turn it over to Shannon Dean if there are any questions. You'll notice that there's a reduction in this area, and it's achieved by looking – Shannon did an extensive review of where the expenses actually were and pruned it based on the result of that analysis. I'll turn it over to Shannon for brief remarks.

Ms Dean: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. We're proposing a 5 per cent decrease in that budget. We're proposing to reduce some travel expenses as well as some advertising expenses. I would note that our forecast for this current fiscal year was under budget, but the rationale there is simply because there were a number of statute reviews that we budgeted special committees for, but those statute reviews were undertaken by standing committees, so we found some efficiencies there. Again, that's a decision that's made by the Assembly, but at the end of the day we still have to budget for these statute reviews.

As we go forward next fiscal year, there are two statute reviews that need to be addressed, one dealing with the Missing Persons Act and one dealing with the Conflicts of Interest Act, so we've got two special committees budgeted for that.

I will leave it there unless the committee has any questions.

One thing to keep in mind with this particular budget is that it goes through a cycle dependent upon where we are in the life of a Legislature. Committee activity tends to rise in the first one to two and a half years in the life of the Legislature, and then it declines as we get closer to the next election.

I'm happy to answer any questions anybody has.

11:10

The Chair: Any questions on the telephone?

Hearing none, moving along to MLA administration. Who would like to speak to this one?

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll let Scott Ellis and Cheryl Scarlett speak to MLA administration. Really, yes, there's not a lot to say. You could read the notes that are included there. It is 50 per cent of the LAO budget. It consists of those components that we provide to members. You can see the aspects under the member's services allowance: the constituency office element that we were discussing earlier, the communications element, promotional element, matrix-based element. In any event, it's a large figure.

Scott, Cheryl, I'll let you comment on MLA administration if you'd wish.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Clerk. The top part of the budget summary is dealing with human resources expenses and changes that occurred in that particular area. There's one relatively minor increase in our pay and benefits to MLAs. This is not a pay increase. It is a benefit cost increase, and I believe it is in the dental premium area. So this is, you know, a premium change that we have no control over but continue to provide that service to members.

Moving down, there was an additional staffperson who became eligible for what we call the Fort McMurray allowance, which is basically a government program that provides additional pay to those who meet the requirements of that particular program. We mirror that program and provide that additional pay to constituency staff who may be working in that area and meeting the requirements for that particular program.

The next area, where there's a larger increase, is in the constituency office staff benefits funding. I think this is attributable to increased constituency staff participation in the pension plan in particular. We're seeing that that's having an impact because of the additional premium costs. I should note that members and their constituency staff benefits are not charged to their MSA, you know, so that's something that saves the members a lot of money in terms of their MSA. It is budgeted here. We're experiencing some increases in terms of staff belonging to that pension program, and that's why there's a need for additional resources in that benefits funding.

Moving down to operational expenses, the first line there is in travel. This is a situation where typically when there's an election and we move forward into our experience with members and claiming for travel expenses and whatnot, sometimes we find that there are changes. There's perhaps an increase, perhaps a decrease. Our experience thus far has been that the use of travel and expenses has gone down since the election, so we've tried to reduce that to a more reasonable level. Typically we budget based on, for example, automobile expenses. Members are entitled to claim on a per-kilometre basis. For rural MLAs it would be 80,000 kilometres per year. For urban it would be 35,000 kilometres a year. So we basically budget at that level, recognizing that if all members were to do that, we would have to fund it.

Now, there are other areas of travel as well – cab, rentals, taxis, airfare, buses, et cetera – so that is something that changes from time to time in terms of how members utilize those particular allowances. In this particular case we're noticing that costs are coming down, actual expenses are coming down, so we felt we could adjust our budget to reflect those cost decreases.

The Chair: I think that's an acknowledgement to all 87 members of the times that we live in and the need for us to reduce wherever we can. It's good to see.

Are there any other points you'd like to touch on, Scott?

Mr. Ellis: Just quickly, Mr. Speaker, telecommunications is also an area that we are seeing reductions in, so we've tried to reflect our actual expense experience and reduce our budget in that area. One increase is in the insurance area. This is, I guess, a negative of moving into the Federal building in that we've inherited a lot of furniture, equipment, et cetera, and now have had to add that to our list of equipment for insurance purposes and are finding that we have an increase in our insurance premiums as a result of that. So that increase is reflected in the budget. However, overall, in terms of total administration for MLA admin, we're showing an overall decrease of \$9,000.

Moving into member's services allowances, there are some minor changes there as a result of a change in electors and change in the estimated population. Overall, that equates to \$16,000, but that's spread amongst all 87 constituency budgets, so it's a minuscule change there.

The Chair: Mrs. Schreiner.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Ellis, I have a question about the travel allowance, the auto allowance. You were talking about the difference between rural and urban.

Mr. Ellis: Correct.

Mrs. Schreiner: I was wondering if you could tell me how you determine whether the constituency is a rural or an urban constituency.

Mr. Reynolds: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. If I could, just to step in for Scott here, it's right in the Members' Services orders in the sense that if one goes to page 47 in your green book, under Transportation Order, section 6, it says, "Travel Limits by Private Automobile." Then it says

- (a) for a Member representing an urban electoral division as identified in Schedule "A."

Schedule "A" is conveniently on page 49. It lists the urban ridings, and then there are the rural ridings after that.

Mrs. Schreiner: Right.

Mr. Reynolds: So that's where they're listed. That would be what Members' Services approved with respect to the distinction in the constituencies. If you're asking, "Why do we do it?", it's because it's in the order, and it would be up to Members' Services to, if you wish, reassess the division between urban and rural.

Mrs. Schreiner: Yeah. Thank you for that. I was just wondering what the formula was to determine rural and urban.

Mr. Reynolds: Yeah.
Scott, go ahead.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. My recollection is that they considered, you know, the population in determining urban versus rural, that they looked at whether it's a municipality or it's not, at how many municipalities would be in that area, those kinds of considerations. There are a number of factors they considered and came up with this designation, if you will, of urban and rural. Sorry. I don't have any more information other than that right now, but we could go back and certainly look at that. That may be something that could be part of the review that the subcommittee is currently undertaking, either seeking more explanation and/or any changes that they feel are warranted.

11:20

The Chair: Yeah. I would agree. That might be an appropriate place to review that matter.
Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: I think there are some comments from the other side. I don't have anything on this.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. McIver: On the review, if I might, we're in the midst of doing an electoral boundary review right now. At the completion of that, if one was going to take a look at which ridings are rural and urban based on the demographic changes that have happened in the last decade or two, after the new boundaries are set might be a good time to do that, and a good time to put them in place might be one day after the next election, when those new boundaries are in place.

I respect what my fellow member is asking. It's a reasonable question. But even if we did look at it now and make changes, then those changes would have to be relooked at and remade after the boundary changes. I hope, in step with what you asked, that if indeed we would choose to look at this, in my estimation the time to do it would be after we get the decision on the electoral boundary changes. Then we'd be able to look at the demographics and see if there's anything worth changing.

The Chair: Mr. Orr.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. I think I'll leave my comments to the review, but this is definitely a significant issue that I want to talk about at some point. It probably belongs in the review, so I won't say it now.

Mr. Reynolds: Mr. Chair, if I may, with respect to Mr. McIver's point typically what happens is that after the Electoral Boundaries Commission reports, there has to be a government bill introduced. I think there has to be a motion, and then there has to be a bill introduced. After that passes and becomes an act, it doesn't come into force, as you know, until the date the next election is called. But in the interim that would be something that Members' Services would look at because there are a number of areas where constituencies are mentioned, et cetera, in the Members' Services orders, and we'd have to make the necessary changes.

Just to reinforce Mr. McIver's point, assuming that the report comes out and assuming that an act is in fact passed, Members' Services would then be faced with the issue of changing certain names and titles, et cetera, and any other consequential changes arising from the Electoral Boundaries Commission report and subsequent act, and that would come into force – Shannon, correct me – generally speaking, on the same date, the date the election is called.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions with respect to that matter? On the telephone?

Hearing none, I'm going to make a suggestion to the committee that we deal with government services, in my tab 10 through to tab 15 . . .

Mr. Dang: Mr. Chair, sorry.

The Chair: Yeah, Mr. Dang. I'm sorry. Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Dang: I do have one question about the administration that was related to what we were just talking about. I'm just curious about the two retention program allowances that are budgeted there. I understand that they parallel the public service, but I was just curious if those things are automatically applied to constituency staff pay, or are they at the discretion of the member, basically?

The Chair: Cheryl, can you speak to that item?

Ms Scarlett: In terms of, I think, what you're asking about, there is presently in place a freeze for the public service on market and merit. Is that what you're talking about?

Mr. Dang: No. I mean for the 55th to 57th parallel retention program and for the Fort McMurray allowance. I understand that that parallels the public service in terms of there being additional compensation for those employees up there, right? Is that automatically applied to pay, or is that at the discretion of members?

Ms Scarlett: It is automatic, and that's why it is funded in this line and not put in the individual constituency budget.

Mr. Dang: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions on that matter?

Then if we could move to those tabs for government services, tab 10 through to tab 15. You have the same tabs as I do, correct? Any questions with respect to those? That's government members, Official Opposition members, PC opposition, Liberal opposition, Alberta Party, and independent member services.

Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a couple of questions that I wanted to clarify about a specific line item that shows up in all of the caucus budgets but only has a value in the Official Opposition budget. We're looking at the Calgary caucus office here, which in the 2017-18 estimate is \$90,304. I just was wondering: first off, how long has this line item existed, and what was the history of this expense?

The Chair: I'm going to rely on staff to . . .

Mr. Reynolds: Well, I can chime in with a little. I can't say when it became a line item necessarily, but I believe it was adopted in 1994 as a result of the 1993 election, when the Liberals had a rather formidable Official Opposition and they were the only official opposition party. I believe that at the time they thought that there

should be an office in Calgary to represent the Official Opposition, and if I'm not mistaken, I believe their rationale was that the government had McDougall Centre and that McDougall Centre offered a government presence in Calgary that the Official Opposition weren't entitled to use. That has remained since 1994 with the Liberals and now the Wildrose as the Official Opposition. I will see if my colleagues have anything to add on that, but in a nutshell that was it.

Scott? Shannon?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I might have more to say in a minute, but one thing to add to the Clerk's comments is that there were NDP members as well in 1993.

Mr. Reynolds: Actually, there weren't NDP members in 1993. I hate to correct you, Mr. Nixon, but the NDP were not returned in any seats in 1993. They were, if you'll pardon the expression, wiped out.

Mr. Nixon: I was misinformed. Thank you, Mr. Clerk. It sounds like it will be a lot like the same story in 2019.

The Chair: Wow.

Are there any other questions on these items here? Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Chair, thank you. I guess I'm still curious about the I believe it was \$80,000 indexed to inflation in '94 or whatever it was. I'm curious: what are the parameters for the spending of the monies? Were there any restrictions or motions that were made around that, and is there any specific intention for the space in that area as well?

Mr. Reynolds: I assume that you're talking about the Calgary caucus office again?

Mr. Dang: Yes.

Mr. Reynolds: Scott, do you want to venture in?

Mr. Ellis: These funds, both the leader's office allowance and the per-member funding as well as the office funding, are put into one total amount. That is then provided to the caucus to spend as they see fit within the parameters of the guidelines. In this particular case, we typically want to make sure that they do in fact have an office and are using an office if they've been given resources to do that specific task. However, it's up to the caucus how they spend the monies. I believe that that is about all I have. It's up to them. We do get information from the caucus separating out their budget amounts for the purposes of comparing actual to budget. That's information we get directly from the caucus. So they could, for example, budget a particular lease line for that particular office, but that's not something that the LAO undertakes to do on their own.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Chair, if I could, I don't believe that, actually, to be correct. Sorry, Scott. There was a motion made in 2012 by Mr. Young, I believe, in this very committee that said:

Moved by Mr. Young that the budget allocated for the Calgary caucus office under Official Opposition services be restricted to rent and operations for the office and that the expenditures be consistent with the LAO expenditure guidelines.

So I believe that those funds are supposed to be specifically allocated for a Calgary office and operations.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. Perhaps I stand corrected there. I mean, it's implicit in the funding that there would be a lease there, and we've always made sure that there is one.

11:30

Mr. Dang: Yeah. I guess I'm just curious because that allocation of funds is supposed to be explicitly for Calgary usage, right? It's my understanding of what that motion was to read and my context from *Hansard* as well.

Mr. Ellis: Just offhand I don't know what the actual lease costs, including operating costs, would be.

Mr. Dang: Thank you.

The Chair: The date of that?

Mr. Dang: It's page 164 of *Alberta Hansard*. It's on December 19, 2012, Members' Services Committee.

The Chair: I think I'll certainly be looking at the details. I know that staff will look it up just to clarify the history on that matter. I can tell you that I'm not aware of the details of that at this point but certainly can find out.

Mr. Dang: For sure. If we could have that returned to us, that would be very appreciated.

The Chair: Are there any other questions with respect – hi, Mr. Orr.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Is it permissible to pursue this a little bit?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Orr: I just wonder if Mr. Dang could clarify: what's the concern when you make the phrase "explicit for Calgary use"? I'm not sure I followed you there. That's all I'm saying.

Mr. Dang: Yeah. I don't think I have any explicit concerns about the Official Opposition actually using those funds for that or anything. I just want to clarify that that motion was made in the past – right? – so we'll just have some exploratory questions.

Mr. Orr: Okay. Sure. Yep. Thanks.

The Chair: I'm understanding that it's just clarification, if I understand correctly, of (a) what the intention of that motion was, what action was taken, getting it clarified. I didn't hear anything specific, unless I missed it, with respect to the expenditure per se. It's process. Is that correct?

Mr. Dang: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are there any other questions or comments with respect to these items, that specifically or others?

Mr. Nixon: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Yes, Jason.

Mr. Nixon: Just one thing I'd like to add to the Clerk's comment is the major point that prior to – you know, I don't have the date in front of me, but earlier on in our system the opposition had access to places like Government House, McDougall Centre, those types of places. Mr. Mason himself is quoted a few times both in Members' Services and in the Legislature discussing the change that governing caucuses made to not allow opposition into those types of facilities. That was one of the major reasons that this was brought forward, to be able to give opposition a presence to counter the

governing caucus's tremendous advantage in access to governing facilities.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's a useful comment. I would want to point out that the government does have a caucus office, separate from any other office, that we have to pay for out of our budget ourselves, that isn't given a line item such as the Official Opposition does receive. In that budget we've been told explicitly by senior staff and administration at McDougall Centre that the government caucus cannot use McDougall Centre for the same types of resources and reasons that a caucus office would typically have such as outreach or legislative work. I don't believe that we are able to use McDougall on the rationale that the Clerk and the hon. member have mentioned. Of course, we have to accept that that is the purview of Executive Council and their office there. I don't believe we have that same presence that a full caucus office would be able to afford, and I think that we have an interest in some accountability and transparency around these matters. I don't know if this is an appropriate time . . .

Mr. Nixon: I actually agree, Mr. Chair. I find it quite alarming that . . .

The Chair: Mr. Nixon, could you go through the chair? I don't think Mr. Dang was quite finished yet.

Mr. Nixon: Oh. I thought he was. Sorry, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No. It's hard to tell. We just don't have the normal visual contact that you and I have in the House, so we're both at a disadvantage here.

Mr. Nixon: Certainly. Go ahead, Mr. Chair. I'll gladly hear the rest of Mr. Dang's comments.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If Mr. Nixon is staring me down, he's normally quite a bit of a larger man than I am, so I usually take that with some respect. But I do think that perhaps the government caucus is interested in looking at the feasibility of expanding caucus services for all caucuses, not just the Official Opposition but the third and fourth parties and, perhaps, the government as well, in Calgary. I don't know if there's an appropriate time to make a motion for that. I don't know if this would be the appropriate time, but I think we might be interested in an exploration and feedback about that.

The Chair: I would say that I'd like to go to Mr. Nixon before that; however, Mr. McIver has raised his hand. With your permission I wouldn't accept the motion at this point.

Do you have any other . . .

Mr. McIver: I was going to make a comment, Mr. Chair. Thank you. You know what? I think there's a reasonable point raised here, that the rationale for the Official Opposition's offices, that they're not able to use the McDougall – I think the concern from the hon. member that the usage flexibility is different for the government on McDougall Centre than it is for the Official Opposition on their office is a concern, and probably they should have similar abilities to use those offices in the interest of political fairness. I'm not sure that it has to be a major concern. It may just be a clarification in the rules that needs to be done, but I think that's a reasonable thing to explore.

The Chair: Depending on if and what the hon. member might introduce as a motion, you might get an opportunity to clarify that point.

Mr. Nixon, go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: I'm looking for some clarification as well. I find it a bit alarming that we went from a situation in our province where all parties were able to utilize places like Government House and McDougall Centre and that somewhere along the way we changed, and only governing caucuses could use those facilities. That's fine. This body made some changes to be able to make sure that the opposition could do its role as the opposition because of that. Now we're hearing from government MLAs that under this government it's gone even further, and they're not allowing the government caucus to even use these facilities.

As we discussed earlier in these proceedings, today all of our caucuses already use government buildings in our roles, including our offices. The LAO, who we've talked about a lot today, uses government buildings. So I'm not sure who's made this decision that your caucus cannot access McDougall Centre or Government House. I actually am not sure if that's entirely true. I'm not saying that what the member is saying is not entirely true, but we do know that the government has held caucus meetings at Government House, has meetings quite often in other areas within the Federal building that are not used by all parties. So I'm not sure if it is true that the government caucus's advantage from being the governing party, which is one of the core reasons that this was put in place for the opposition, is truly not there anymore.

The Chair: Member Cortes-Vargas.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you. I just want to comment on one thing. I can confirm as an hon. member that we have in fact as a caucus gone to the administration, the GOA administration, at McDougall to see if we can, you know, with some of the Calgary MLAs that are not ministers, use the facilities for a meeting with a stakeholder, a caucus use of a space. They have indicated quite clearly and consistently that we are not to use a GOA facility for caucus activities, the distinction being that a minister can use those facilities because they are a minister and they would be conducting GOA activities. I just want to provide that distinction.

What we're saying is that if the understanding is that the government members – this whole budget is how we are supporting the caucus members, and it provides the funding for caucus members to be able to go out to Albertans and do the work there, and the McDougall Centre is not one of the things at their disposal to be able to enact their duties as a caucus member. Again, I would just say that that is confirmed by the GOA administration. In fact, it cannot be done through the LAO. You can't go as a caucus to request those spaces.

11:40

It brings an interesting perspective to all of this, which is that we have a very specific line item for one caucus. All caucuses usually have activities within Calgary. They do outreach, and they do that activity. I guess it's a question of fairness. Within every other budget allocation those expenses are coming out of the first one, which is caucus staff and operational costs. For the Wildrose caucus there's an additional one, in which it says – let me just pull it up.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, can I be on the speakers list, please?

The Chair: You're here. Just hold on.

Cortes-Vargas: It says that the Calgary caucus office is \$90,304. That is different because that same line item isn't consistent across the board.

We're not thinking, you know, of adding another line item. What we're saying is: is there a way that we can investigate a Calgary caucus office space, managed by the LAO, to be offered to all caucuses according to size and using what's already indicated in the budget as what's supposed to be allocated for a Calgary caucus office? My understanding, having read through some of *Hansard*, as Mr. Dang pointed out, is that it in fact was in 2012 and '13 that a motion was put in place by Members' Services to make sure that the expenses of a Calgary caucus office line item were going down to operational costs and expenses. Technically, it would serve differently. It would be more transparent to say that the costs associated with running that office have to be the operational expenses, and I think that's what that motion tried to clarify. That was the discussion that was had within the committee then.

I think the funding is operating inconsistently in the different caucuses, and I think there's a need to make sure that all caucuses have the ability to do their work within Calgary effectively and fairly. I think it's worth a discussion within this committee setting to see how we can best accomplish that within the budget parameters that we already exist in.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Cortes-Vargas.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: First of all, the Official Opposition gets way fewer privileges than the government, so if the government whip is now suggesting that we should go through the process to make sure that the government's privileges are exactly the same as the Official Opposition's, I actually might welcome that discussion though I think in the end the government will disagree.

Another example is the 10th floor of the Federal building, the fifth floor of the Federal building, all of which the NDP caucus have used in the past and are only able to use them because they are the governing party. I do find it, again, very, very alarming and shocking that it appears that the NDP government has changed policy so much that they don't even let their backbenchers continue to do what the former government backbenchers did. I would suggest that the government whip's concern is with the Premier, then, and the government of Alberta, and I do encourage her to raise that with her as soon as possible.

With that said, I'm not really sure – I guess we need to hear what the motion is. The idea that we are now trying to make sure that all the caucuses are equal without the governing party making sure they're equal – I mean, are we going to get access to Government House now, all of the opposition parties? I sure do notice that there are a lot of government MLAs flipping pancakes at breakfasts outside McDougall Centre.

You know, the idea that all of a sudden the NDP caucus, now that they're in government, does not have the same access and extra privileges associated with the facilities that are available to them, I would suggest, is ludicrous.

Now, I do understand that the government is frustrated and may be attempting to try to stifle the opposition's ability to do their job. I think that that, to me, is the most alarming situation. As poll numbers drop, then are we going to go into Members' Services and try to make it harder for us to point out what's going on with the government?

The Chair: First of all, before we keep on this item, it was my hope – and I would like to see if we can still achieve that – that we might be able to finish this meeting today. Optimism. Actually, I was

hoping it would be by noon, but that seems to have faded. We do have a lunch here. I'll just do a quick check – I don't want to ever anticipate what this committee may or may not do – on how much time it might take. We could aim to be out of here by 12:15 or 12:30. If you think that's unrealistic, then we would break earlier, have lunch, and come back in. How about I suggest that we try to aim for that? If we have not finished by a quarter after 12, we will revisit the issue and have the lunch after we're finished. Is that agreeable?

Did I have someone else who wanted to speak?

Mr. Dang: Mr. Chair, I think that my interest in this exploratory line was to see if there was a way that all caucuses could be given the same benefit of operational spaces in Calgary and southern Alberta to try and make sure that everybody was able to have the same level of presence. I guess, if I may, I could read a potential motion that I have here.

The Chair: Certainly. Go ahead.

Mr. Dang: That might help alleviate some concerns from members. I would move that

the Legislative Assembly Office conduct a feasibility study that would investigate the costs associated with establishing a Calgary office that would be available to all caucuses.

The Chair: Do you have a hard copy?

Mr. Dang: I don't have a hard copy. I'm sorry. I can read it again, though.

The Chair: Could you read that back, Karen?

Mrs. Sawchuk: I will try, Mr. Chair.

The motion by Mr. Dang is that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services direct the Legislative Assembly Office to conduct a feasibility study to investigate the costs associated with a Calgary office that would be available to all caucuses.

The Chair: Mr. McIver.

Mr. Nixon: Could I get on the speakers list, please?

Mr. McIver: I'm taken aback just a little bit, Mr. Speaker. This is as crazy as I can imagine. The government has chosen to do their caucus business in a way that it can't be done at Government House, I suppose, which means that they've chosen to do political activities instead of government business there. Now, if they're doing government business, there's no reason they shouldn't be able to do it in the government McDougall Centre. If they're doing political business, they need to fund raise for that. This is clearly mixing the two.

It's a new, additional expenditure that would be completely out of step with the priorities of Albertans today, to provide office space where political parties can do political work. I can't imagine a less sensitive way of considering spending the taxpayers' money. If indeed the government caucus is doing government business, then they should feel free to do it in the government building. I can assure you that it's no secret that our caucus used to meet in McDougall to do our government business.

The Official Opposition has a place to do their official business. I'm sure that there are rules against running a campaign out of a taxpayer-paid building, and we'll make the assumption that they are following those rules. In the same way we'll make the assumption that the government is following those rules and not campaigning out of McDougall Centre. I'm assuming everybody is honourable here, Mr. Speaker.

11:50

Speaking to the motion, I see no reason why it could possibly be needed unless, of course, the facility would be used for political purposes, in which case all of us need to raise our own money and spend the money we raise through political fundraising to do political business. There, I've said enough. I think you know where I'm coming from, Mr. Speaker.

Studying a way to get around those principles that political business should be paid for by political fundraising and government business should be done in government buildings – I just don't see a reason. The only reason for this motion, in my opinion, is to blur those two very, very important principles, which should not be blurred.

The Chair: Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: Yeah. I've got to echo Mr. McIver's comments. It's shocking what we've heard in the last few minutes from government members. I mean, the only reason that government members would not be able to do their work within government facilities currently in our province – and there are a lot of them – is for partisan purposes. That's the only reason that they would not be allowed. To try to bring this forward and spin it to the people of Alberta that the governing party all of a sudden needs more facilities when within five minutes of the Legislature they've got four or five places they could use and they've got a perfectly good facility in McDougall in Calgary – the only reason would be that they're trying to attempt to get around something that's sacred: to not use taxpayer dollars for partisan purposes. This is why we have partisan offices. We have one in Calgary. That's where our partisan work takes place. I know that for the third party it would be similar. I'm shocked that this motion is coming forward. It makes absolutely no sense.

With that said, if we are going to proceed with this motion, I think we need to add to it the feasibility of using the government facilities that are currently across the province in order to allow all political parties to be able to do their job appropriately as well as the Legislative Assembly itself, which currently is used by the government caucus, you know, on the fifth floor before every question period. That's not available to opposition parties. So if we're going to do it, I think we should expand the feasibility study across the board.

Also, I think we should go ahead and pass the budget today because, obviously, everybody is going to have to continue to operate, and this is going to take a bit of time. I certainly don't think the NDP wants to see the LAO breaking leases in Calgary while we go through feasibility studies.

The Chair: Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I want to clarify a bit. It's an exploratory question, and there's no intent here to actually increase costs. We know that there's already \$90,000 that's available for office spaces in Calgary, and we know that \$90,000 for rent in Calgary would go a long way right now. We don't necessarily want to be increasing expenditures because we understand that this is a very sensitive fiscal climate right now in Alberta. We understand that these are times when we need to be controlling the spending of the LAO and the government, but we want to make sure that we have clarity and transparency on how these facilities are being used.

I think I want to reiterate once again that it's my understanding that the government members in the caucus do not have access in the same way to McDougall Centre that other members are suggesting

today. I am unable to go and book a meeting room in McDougall Centre. I am unable to go book a meeting room on the 10th floor here. Those have to be done by cabinet ministers, to my understanding, or members of Executive Council, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that the government is afforded all of these frivolous privileges that the opposition may be suggesting. I think it's very fair to say that all we want to do is have some exploration, see what's possible under the current funding that we already have on the table because I think that all caucuses could benefit from being able to do more work across the province.

The Chair: Just to clarify, the motion, as I understand it – we'll go back to it before we firmly call it – has no monetary impact at this point. So we're not changing the budget.

Mr. Orr, and then Member Cortes-Vargas.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wonder if someone from administration could actually confirm to us the way the rules are currently being enforced. Is it in fact being enforced that backbench government members are not allowed to use some of these facilities that we're talking about if they're doing government business and not caucus business? I'd like clarification from administration on how that's actually being administered.

Mr. Reynolds: Okay. Two things if I may, Mr. Speaker, as administration.

The Chair: Just before I give this to the Clerk, just to be clear, for Government House and McDougall Centre the LAO at its current status has no official responsibility.

Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Reynolds: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. That's what I was going to say. We don't control McDougall Centre. It's not an LAO property. It's not something we have any control over. That's entirely the government. Likewise with Government House: we have no control over that. Likewise with the 10th floor here: we have nothing to do with that. Those things are entirely up to the government. So I appreciate the question, but I can't answer because I don't know what Executive Council's policy is with respect to McDougall Centre.

One thing I did want to clarify, on another note, is that there was some discussion – and perhaps I misinterpreted it – about using the caucus office for party purposes. I must say, as members probably know, that we do not as the LAO approve expenses for party purposes. One of the principles that I would stress to you that I think is very important is that public dollars should not be used for party purposes, and that is something that I'm committed to strenuously enforcing. If someone has a problem with that, we can certainly have a discussion about it. The Official Opposition caucus office and any caucus expenditures are to walk the line between a caucus purpose and a party purpose because if it's serving a party purpose, it will not be funded by this office.

Thank you.

The Chair: Member Cortes-Vargas.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you. First of all, I would just like to start by reiterating exactly what you said, Mr. Clerk, and understanding that we absolutely operate under the caucus guidelines, and any mention of acting in the opposite is completely out of line. I mean, what we're talking about is a Calgary caucus member within their duties as a caucus member meeting with a stakeholder in Calgary and requesting space in McDougall, and it's not something that is available to them. In no way am I insinuating any fundraising.

Those kinds of claims are completely out of line, and I think the opposition is far reaching there.

We completely understand and respect the process in which the caucus guidelines are presented and want to operate within our duties as well. What we're talking about here is the funding processes for the different caucuses to enact their duties as members.

I just want to bring to the attention of all members that when you break down the funding to all the parties by caucus, by the number of members that they have, if I'm to just include backbencher MLAs and private members, 35 of them, \$76,000 is the amount allocated per member for caucus funding. Whereas if you keep going down, for the Wildrose it's \$128,000 per member; \$141,000 for the PCs; the Liberals get \$329,000 per member; \$329,000 for the Alberta Party as well. I think, with those numbers in mind, you have to look at how we are funding caucus members to enact their duties, and if those numbers are not clear to everyone else – those are inconsistent numbers.

What we're pointing out here is that in reviewing the caucus budgets, there is one item that stands out, one of the caucuses' line items that is not in every other one, but it talks to the specific cost of doing one action, which is the Calgary caucus office. What we're saying is that if you have it for one caucus, perhaps there would be a way to make sure that all parties have a caucus office space, operated by the LAO, to do their work as caucus members, not partisan work – those are just allegations that are completely unfounded – that we could accomplish that within that line item. It would be a way to address our capacity to work within the budget that we have. I think it is an important discussion to have.

12:00

Now, I hope that – the members opposite, you know, are going in the direction that we might be doing something out of line. I think that it's completely unfair, and I think that you can't just make those kinds of allegations without any sense of understanding. What we're telling you is that as a member of the NDP caucus I cannot go and get a meeting in McDougall Centre, which is what is being implied is available to the caucus members. So I'm just correcting that for the record. That is not possible. I'm only doing the work of stakeholder meetings or something within my job as a caucus member.

Mr. Nixon: So much and so little time, Mr. Speaker. First off, I think the Clerk may have misunderstood something that I was saying. I was referring to the difference between party office and caucus offices. I completely agree with him, so hopefully that clarifies that.

Let's be clear. We use, every caucus uses government buildings already to meet with stakeholders. What the hon. member is saying is obviously a position of the government of the day, which is disappointing considering that governments of the past did not do that to their backbenchers. However, I have met with stakeholders in the Federal building in my office, and that is the same thing as in the McDougall Centre. I am going to amend this motion in a moment, Mr. Speaker, to try to address some of that.

But let's be clear. What is being presented here by the government members is to remove money from opposition parties and give it to the governing party. That is limiting the resources that we have to hold the government to account. If the main purpose of this conversation is to try to make everything equal across the board, then we need to have that full conversation about the extraordinary privileges that the governing party has in comparison to the opposition parties, which is why originally the opposition was allowed to have an office within Calgary.

The idea that is being presented here, that the governing party does not have extraordinary, extra privileges over the opposition parties, is ludicrous, and there's not a person in Alberta who will buy that the government does not already have enough facilities to undertake their duties on behalf of Albertans. There's not an Albertan anywhere that will accept that. To me, it is absolutely appalling that we have a government who is, in the middle of the biggest intergenerational theft in the history of our province, now trying to stifle the ability of the opposition to do its job.

I would like to amend the motion to make clear that the use of McDougall Centre, the feasibility of that, will be included in this feasibility study.

The Chair: You're making an amendment. I must say that I would appreciate, Mr. Nixon – I think we should all avoid the use of words like “theft” in this kind of a discussion. I don't think it contributes to the quality of our debate. As I understand it . . .

Mr. Nixon: I understand that, Mr. Speaker, so I will withdraw the word “theft.” To be clear, this has to be explained to the people of Alberta. The argument that the NDP cannot do their job currently with the facilities they already have, when they are borrowing billions and billions against my children's and the rest of Alberta children's future, is ludicrous.

The Chair: My point is with respect to the use of the words that you're using, and I want to suggest that we all stay away from that. The amendment you are proposing to the motion is what?

Mr. Nixon: The use of McDougall Centre as part of the feasibility of being able to accomplish what the member is asking. If the idea is to make it so that all parties have access to the same space, I would like to see included in that process the feasibility of using McDougall Centre to be able to accomplish that, which would save taxpayers money and make it equal for all parties, including the government party, in Alberta. Actually, I'd like to even go further than that and ask for it for the buildings in Edmonton, but I don't know if that would fit with the original intent of this motion.

The Chair: So are we clear in terms of what the amendment is? We're going to have to go slow, verbatim. Does anybody . . .

Mr. Orr: We don't actually have a motion on the floor.

The Chair: We actually do have a motion on the floor, from Member Dang.

Mr. Orr: Did he make it as a motion or just as a discussion?

The Chair: He made it as a motion.

Mr. Orr: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: We have a motion on the floor by Member Dang. I'm hearing Member Nixon propose an amendment to the motion, but we're not certain about the . . .

Mrs. Sawchuk: Would you like me to read that into the record?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Nixon was suggesting that a sentence be added to the end of the motion by Mr. Dang, that the use of McDougall Centre be included as part of the study.

Mr. Reynolds: Maybe you could read out . . .

Mrs. Sawchuk: The entire motion?

Mr. Reynolds: Well, just where it would be . . .

Mr. Nixon: Yes, I think that would cover what I'm trying to say. Even further to that, though, I think that this body needs a report back on the legalities of the use of the spaces – I recognize they're not owned by the LAO, but they have bearing on this conversation . . .

Mr. McIver: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: . . . on what the legality is for Government House, the Federal building, the Legislature . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I know a point of order has been raised. I don't know that a point of order applies in this committee, but . . .

Mr. McIver: I believe that it does, Mr. Chair. I thank you for recognizing me on that. I called the point of order based on the fact that – and my apologies to my colleague from the Official Opposition – we've got an amendment before us regarding McDougall Centre. I think we heard quite clearly from the Clerk that the LAO has no authority over McDougall Centre. Consequently, I think the point of order does apply because we've got no authority over McDougall Centre. Again, to my colleague on the phone: my severe apologies. I just don't want to see us go any farther down this path than we already have.

Mr. Nixon: I get Mr. McIver's point. I mean, we shouldn't even be on this path, and I certainly agree with him. But I guess my argument back, Mr. Speaker, through you to Mr. McIver, would be that we just spent a significant portion of our day debating about facilities and people that work within facilities that we actually don't have control of, too, including the Federal building . . .

The Chair: Could we just . . .

Mr. Nixon: . . . through the Legislative Assembly.

The Chair: Mr. Nixon. Mr. Nixon. You have an amendment. To the point of order: I would seek counsel's advice, but I think the amendment is still in order. Would you agree?

Ms Dean: The amendment is. Perhaps the committee clerk could read the motion in its entirety with the amendment.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Moved by Mr. Dang – well, the motion would be that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services direct the Legislative Assembly Office to conduct a feasibility study to investigate the costs associated with a Calgary office that would be available to all caucuses and that the use of McDougall Centre be included as part of the study.

The Chair: The last sentence being the amended motion, correct? Mr. McIver, we're on the amendment to the motion.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. You know what? Again, with my apologies to my colleague on the phone, I'm not going to support any of this. If there was ever a pile of nonsense, the motion and the amendment, this is a pile of nonsense. We've got the government going to try to make the case that they don't get fair treatment and they want more. You know what? They're in control of a \$52 billion budget. I would say to the government that if they need more meeting space and it's on government business, they should maybe have a cup of tea with the Premier, who's in charge of McDougall Centre, and they should maybe have a cup of tea with some of the ministers in their caucus,

who are in charge of all government business. So if they have government business to do, perhaps they should contact the minister in charge of that particular piece of government business and book a room, as our government used to do and could still be done. To go down a road of spending more money because you can't have a cup of coffee or a tea with your Premier is ridiculous . . .

The Chair: Folks, I think – Mr. McIver, I think it's time that we move on.

Mr. McIver: . . . so I will not be supporting any of this nonsense, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: I heard you.

We have an amendment to the motion on the floor. Are there any other points that wish to be made on the amendment to the motion? Mr. Dang.

12:10

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think we do have to clarify. I don't believe that this is something that we can reasonably ask the LAO to do. I mean, obviously, McDougall Centre is not under the jurisdiction of the Legislative Assembly Office. Obviously, there's a separation between legislative business from the Legislative Assembly Office and government business from the Executive Council.

I think that there are very clear delineations between what we as private members do and what cabinet ministers do. I think that it's very obvious that we don't table government bills. We don't work on government bills, and I don't have a full bureaucracy behind me either. I think that those are some very obvious delineations, and I think that we should be very cognizant of that when we start throwing accusations around what certain offices may or may not be doing with their funding. I think that we have a very dedicated public service that monitors those expenses for us and ensures that those expenses are not used in an improper manner.

With respect, I would have to say that I would have to vote against this amendment. I don't think it's appropriate at this time.

The Chair: Any other comments on the amendment to the motion?

Seeing and hearing none, those in favour of the amendment to the motion, say aye. On the phones? All opposed to the amendment to motion, please say no. The amendment to the motion is defeated.

We are now at the original motion.

Mr. Nixon: Can I be on the list, please?

The Chair: You want to call the list?

Mr. Nixon: Yeah. On the main motion.

The Chair: On the main motion?

Mr. Nixon: Yeah. Which is what we're on now, are we not, Mr. Speaker?

The Chair: Right. Agreed.

Any more discussion? Mr. McIver, do you have another comment on the motion?

Mr. Nixon: I would like to be on the speakers list on the main motion.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to finish my thought. You may not want to hear it, but it's important. If the members of the government caucus want to meet in a room in a building controlled by the government and it is their contention that it is part of their

official job, then part of their official job falls under one minister or another, and all of it falls under the Premier. My suggestion is that at the next caucus meeting they actually talk to their Premier and talk to their ministers, remind them that they're on the same team, and maybe remind themselves that Albertans don't need to spend more for government offices or government business offices. That's why this motion is ridiculous, which is why I will not be supporting it.

What's really comical, I'm sorry to say, Mr. Speaker, is that you've got the government trying to get into the Official Opposition's office. It's pretty normal for the opposition parties to want to get into the government's office – we'll all try to do that in 2019 – but for the government in mid-term to try to crawl into the opposition office is unbelievably comical.

I won't be supporting this.

The Chair: Mr. Nixon, did you ask to speak to the motion?

Mr. Nixon: Yes, I did, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to Mr. McIver for his comments. I couldn't agree more. This is absolutely ridiculous, the idea that the government does not have enough space already to meet or do their job. You know, as I said earlier, I don't think there's an Albertan that will accept that.

I do have a question for Mr. Dang. Let's be clear. He is asking for us to lower the budget and the resources that are available to the Official Opposition and increase the amount that's available to the government. While I understand that they're not asking for an increase to the total that would be spent on this area, they are asking for a decrease in the resources of the Official Opposition by taking some of that money and adding it to the government's. Also, in addition to that, will the hon. members from the governing party that are here today commit to asking their caucus to stop using the 10th floor of the Federal building, Government House, to not have caucus meetings anymore at McDougall Centre? I doubt it, but I would like to hear from them on that because, I mean, fair is fair on that point.

Lastly, as Mr. McIver said, this issue that you guys are having of not being able to do your job I actually support, and I think you should bring it up with your Premier immediately. I certainly know that the people of Alberta that I talk to are not going to accept the argument from you that you need more space to do your job when you already have access to basically every government building in the province.

The Chair: Are there any other comments with respect to the original motion by Mr. Dang?

Mr. Dang, to close?

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my understanding that the inability to use McDougall Centre in the same way that perhaps other parties have used it in the past is coming from the civil servants and the public service. It's my understanding that we've been told pretty definitively that it's not available to be used in that manner. That's my understanding.

Mr. Chair, I do want to reply a bit, perhaps, to Mr. Nixon. I think that the intent of this motion isn't to claw back any sorts of funds from the Official Opposition. I think the intent of this motion is to get some exploratory, very preliminary information. On top of that, we see from that 2012 Members' Services Committee meeting that the expenses that are permitted under this line item are already explicitly for rent and operations of an office in Calgary. We see

that those funds, if they are being misused and not used in the manner for rent and operations . . .

Mr. Nixon: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Yes. Point of order, Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: As the Clerk and FMAS, who are in the room, have already made clear, that is what those expenses have to be used for, and the member implying that they're not is ridiculous. It just needs to stop. The fact is that he's then calling into question the credibility of not just the Official Opposition but of FMAS and the Clerk, which is just absolutely ridiculous.

The Chair: Mr. Nixon, I'm not sure that I heard a point of order there. It may be a difference of opinion but not necessarily a point of order.

Mr. Nixon: A difference of opinion, Mr. Speaker? With all due respect, the hon. member is implying that people may be using – for the opposition to do that, they'd have to be working with FMAS and the Clerk's office to hide where the money was going. The answer to his question has already been established, and I, for one, don't appreciate watching the hon. member accuse all those people of hiding something or doing something that is wrong.

The Chair: Mr. Dang, would you like to comment?

Mr. Nixon: It's Standing Order 23, making allegations.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, I would strongly suggest that this is a difference of opinion. I would never insinuate that the opposition was actually misusing the funds or anything of that sort, and I would happily withdraw that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dang: But I would also suggest that we did see earlier in this meeting on the record in *Alberta Hansard* that the LAO perhaps was not aware of the motion restricting the usage of those funds, and perhaps hon. members across the way were also not aware. I think that's something that we can see if we go back into the Blues later on today, that those were the words on the record. I think that if those funds are not being allocated in that way, they could and/or should be, Mr. Speaker, because that is a decision of this committee that was made years ago. When we look at this, we can say that all we're looking for is exploration, an idea to say: what is possible with these funds that are already only allocated for rent and operations? What is possible to give every single caucus more opportunity?

The Chair: Are there any other comments to the motion by Mr. Dang?

Mr. Nixon: Just one, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like clarification from Mr. Dang, to be clear for the record, that it is not his intention to reduce the Official Opposition's budget, because that's what I heard him say though his motion would imply differently.

The Chair: We can read the motion again. That's not my understanding, but please proceed to read it again.

Mr. Nixon: I would like his clarification, Mr. Speaker, if he could.

The Chair: Well, we'll just get the clerk to record the motion so that we all know what the motion is.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A motion by Mr. Dang that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services direct the Legislative Assembly Office to conduct a feasibility study to investigate the costs associated with a Calgary office that would be available to all caucuses.

The Chair: Did I understand, Mr. Nixon, that you were calling for a recorded vote? Was I correct?

12:20

Mr. Nixon: No, Mr. Speaker. Sorry if I gave you that impression.

Mr. McIver: I'd be happy to call for one.

Mr. Nixon: I was asking, through you to Mr. Dang, for clarification on his intention. He made a statement that it is not his intention to reduce the Official Opposition's budget on this matter, but at the same time he has made statements that we'd like to use part of the Official Opposition's budget to . . .

The Chair: Mr. Nixon, I was just trying to . . .

Mr. Nixon: I'm confused and would like some clarification for the record on his intention.

The Chair: Mr. Nixon, I was asking you simply – I misunderstood. I thought you said earlier that you wanted a recorded vote. I was wrong on that, but I am now hearing Mr. McIver requesting a recorded vote.

Mr. Nixon: Well, certainly, when we vote, I would want a recorded vote, but I didn't realize the question had been called.

The Chair: On the motion by Mr. Dang in a recorded vote, all those in favour?

Cortes-Vargas: Aye.

Dr. Turner: Aye.

Mrs. Schreiner: Aye.

Mr. Dang: Aye.

The Chair: Are there any members on the telephone in favour of the motion?

Ms Luff: Aye.

Mr. Piquette: Aye.

The Chair: All those opposed to the motion?

Mr. McIver: Opposed.

Mr. Orr: Opposed.

Mr. Taylor: Opposed.

The Chair: And on the telephones?

Mr. Nixon: Opposed.

The Chair: I'm advised that the motion is carried on a vote of 6 to 4.

We went past 12:15. I now suggest that we take a very quick lunch break and come back to finish the agenda. Is that agreeable to the committee? Dr. Turner.

Dr. Turner: Yeah. Could I suggest we just keep plowing through, please?

The Chair: I am agreed with that if anyone else is, but I seek the direction of the committee. On a break for five minutes being requested, is that agreeable? I seek the guidance of the committee. What's your wish? Okay. A 10-minute break if you can get a quick bite to eat. If not, we'll be back here in 10 minutes.

[The committee adjourned from 12:23 p.m. to 12:41 p.m.]

The Chair: Members on the telephone, are you with us? Contrary to what I said 10 minutes ago, I would like to suggest that we take one half hour for lunch and that we reconvene at 1:15.

Until 1:15 we stand recessed.

[The committee adjourned from 12:42 p.m. to 1:15 p.m.]

The Chair: Hon. members, if we could reconvene the meeting. I just want to confirm that the members who were in the meeting before are here. How about on the line? Are you all with us? If you could identify.

Mr. Nixon: Jason Nixon here, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Anyone else?

Okay. I think just to highlight, refresh my memory – it was an interesting discussion. The motion was passed concerning a feasibility study. As indicated at the outset and in correspondence provided to all members in the last week or so, we have some fairly tight timelines to submit the LAO budget to Finance and Treasury Board. We're probably a little delayed right now, so I would like to propose the following if we could get a consensus on that: that we review the balance of the budget sheets that we have here and see if we can complete the balance.

Right now, if my recollection is correct, we are at tabs 10 to 15, which are the caucus expenses. I think there was lots of discussion on that point, and the motion is on the table already. I'd like to suggest that we now move to tab 16, which is the planning and development initiatives, and 17, which is the electoral commission budget. If that's agreed, I would go to tab 16.

Mr. Clerk and Cheryl, if you could highlight any items with respect to those items.

Mr. Reynolds: Tab 16, planning and development initiatives, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Reynolds: Sure. I'll let Cheryl go ahead with that. I'd just like to say that part of the money that's in this area is for FMAS system enhancements as a result of the review so that we could look at putting some money into electronic processing or at least look at the automated options. Cheryl would be best placed to discuss the IT and broadcast operations component of the planning and development costs, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Cheryl.

Ms Scarlett: Thank you. As detailed in the overview for this tab, again, what is being requested is a zero increase in this area. The details are broken down in terms of (a), (b), and (c) relative to some continued major project initiatives that have been started and continuing along relative to major pieces of infrastructure and equipment in support of member and House activities and committee activities.

With the IT operations the details are there talking about some of what has been completed this year and with three major components proposed for this following year.

Continued build-out of some redundancy, meaning some backup of our IT infrastructure that supports all of us all throughout the province.

Hand in hand with a GOA initiative, we too need to get going on a voice over IP project. There is a transition planned for these buildings to start to move over to the voice over IP instead of the old telephone system that we're on. Because the GOA is going in that direction and we work so closely together in terms of those particular systems, we also need to look at working hand in hand.

Tied in with the broadcast initiatives that we've referenced earlier, there are some upgrades required to the Sliq system, which supports, stated simply, the *Hansard* system.

Continuing on along in terms of AV and broadcast operations, we are in the final couple of years of our build that we've referenced throughout the meeting here in terms of things that we're continuing to do to build out particularly the second floor and to also take and complete the transition of Chamber broadcast over into our precincts here. The initiatives will continue in terms of working on the Chamber TV control room, planning for that move over here, building out the master control which helps us in terms of moving towards that total autonomous in-house broadcast product and, as referenced and approved last year, in terms of our Chamber audio system, which is on its last legs. We've already started some work, and the majority of the work will be completed in this next fiscal year to upgrade that system, that is very old.

Item (c), then, the Clerk has referenced already, in terms of taking and making a commitment wherein we will as a team – FMAS, IT, and other players – be working in concert to look at technologies to see what we can take and build, acquire, change relative to systems that will address the information that was presented in the FMAS report.

The Chair: This is sort of the foundational beginning of some of the issues that MLAs have been asking for and needing. The earlier discussion we had about making us more nimble in the IT world: this room is just one example of that. Are there any questions on this matter?

Seeing and hearing none, I would move to the Electoral Boundaries Commission. This is a matter that we dealt with late last year. I believe that these numbers – is there a slight change? Essentially, these are the numbers that have been provided and approved earlier.

Mr. Reynolds: Well, Mr. Chair, the number for the supplementary supply estimate was \$1.45 million, I believe, and we didn't approve, obviously, the \$648,000 at that time. You're quite right that these were the estimates that came forward. These are the estimates that the commission is operating on right now and that Justice Bielby will be continuing with to shepherd the work of the commission. I don't know if there are any particular questions about this. All I can say is that this is what the Electoral Boundaries Commission is basing their work in the next fiscal year upon.

The Chair: As we all know, the commission operates at arm's length, independent of the LAO and the Speaker's office. The process is simply that the Speaker's office and the LAO facilitate the commencement and initiation, provide the necessary resources for them to function, but they operate independently. That's been approved in the past. Are there any questions with respect to that matter? Essentially the 2017-18 budget item is what would be approved. Any questions? On the telephone?

Seeing and hearing none, that completes the budget proposals consistent with the parameters that had been provided back in November. I would like to have a motion to approve the 2017-18 budget in the amount of \$68,657,384 as submitted.

1:25

Cortes-Vargas: I'd be happy to move that motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any discussion?

Hearing no more discussion, all in favour of the motion, please say aye. On the telephone line, all in favour, please say aye. Anyone opposed? On the telephone line, anyone opposed? Hearing none, I declare the motion approved and passed and the budget approved and passed.

Mr. Reynolds: If I might say, Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the vote of confidence in the work of the LAO. We look forward to continuing to serve you and moving ahead with this budget. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Now, I understand that we are to move to the next item on the agenda, which is the FMAS review, which is probably here primarily for information purposes. Just to give some background to this, this came out of the new Clerk's office and my office, a review of improvements to the FMAS system. We've completed the study with an independent adviser. That information was shared with all members of the Legislature. We've already started, as has been discussed several times, a number of improvements and organizational issues that will arise over the next period of time. I can tell you that it's probably one of the high priorities for us in the next year. I didn't anticipate that there would be very many questions on that, but if they're of a very generic nature, I'd be more than pleased to answer them.

Mr. Clerk, did you have . . .

Mr. Reynolds: Sorry. If I might, I'd just like to go over some of the recommendations and where we are. I think the Speaker alluded earlier to a memo, that you should've received electronically late last week, about obtaining your monthly financial reports electronically. Ringing any bells here?

An Hon. Member: Yes. We got it.

Mr. Reynolds: Yeah. Okay. That, if you'll notice, is recommendation 1 in part, so we're trying to accomplish that.

The motion that you just dealt with on the budget in terms of assessing how we can automate things or make electronic payments and processing more feasible is recommendation 2, in a sense. We're just looking at the means to do that and the hardware or software that it would take.

Recommendation 3, looking at Mr. Dang: the expenditure rules are items that the subcommittee may wish to consider as part of its review of the orders.

With respect to recommendation 4 it is something that we're actively looking at in terms of the training and communications with constituency office staff to make sure that there are good communications and that they are able to fulfill their jobs, et cetera.

Recommendation 5: we're looking at perhaps replacing the purchase orders system. I'd like to do some more work with the Auditor General, et cetera, to make sure that the adequate controls are in place.

Improving forms and processes is something that we're dealing with.

Leasing processes is something that we will be looking at, with an eye to seeing that something is in place, certainly, and to look at it before the next election because, realistically, the biggest stress for us with respect to leasing premises comes, as you may gather, right after an election, when all the leases can be terminated and new members have to become aware of how they can obtain new space. I know that a number of you, in fact, all but Mr. McIver, would have experienced that in terms of looking for space for the first time after the last election, so we're looking at methods to do that.

So in essence what we're looking at are some things for accomplishing in the short term, some things we hope to achieve in the medium term, and some things that will take just a little longer to implement.

I would also like to thank you very much for your participation in the work of this review. It's something that initiated shortly after I became Clerk, and I was pleased to initiate that along with the Speaker. We're always open to finding ways that we can improve to serve members better. We don't want to be too constrained by precedent even though we're in a job that relies heavily on precedent in some areas, but we're always open to new ideas. I'm never sure whether it's new wine and old bottles or old wine and new bottles, but that's what we're looking for, anyway.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: A lot of wine you've had over there.

Mr. Reynolds: Yes.

The Chair: Any questions or comments? Mr. Orr.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. I think you essentially just answered my questions. I mean, it seems like most of us agree that this is a good report, good recommendations, some great steps here which will help out. I was just wondering about, you know, how and when some of it will be implemented. I think you've answered most of that. I don't know if you want to add anything more, but it's certainly something we can maybe pick up in a year from now or six months or whatever and do a bit of a report on our progress. Yeah. Thanks for going there.

The Chair: Thank you.

From our friends in the cold south, any questions on the telephone? Comments?

Hearing none, are there any other items that you would like to bring forward today?

Seeing and hearing none, would a member like to move adjournment?

Mr. Orr: Always in favour of that motion. [interjections] Well, most of the time.

The Chair: All those in favour of the motion to adjourn, say aye. Opposed, say no. The motion is carried. The meeting stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 1:33 p.m.]

