



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Tuesday, August 6, 2019
11 a.m.

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Chair
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP), Deputy Chair
Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UCP), Acting Deputy Chair
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)*
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
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Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UCP)***
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (UCP)****
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* substitution for Heather Sweet

** substitution for Nicole Goehring

*** substitution for Richard Gotfried

**** substitution for Mike Ellis

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[Mr. Cooper in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning. I would like to call the meeting to order this morning.

I'd like to ask members and those joining the committee around the table to introduce yourselves for the record, and I'll call upon the members joining us via teleconference once everyone here at the table has introduced themselves.

I hope you're all having a great fall or whatever the weather we're having out there is, a beautiful summer. It's great to see all of you here.

If I might just start with Karen, and then we'll go around the table in that direction.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

Ms Goodridge: Laila Goodridge, MLA for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

Mr. Dach: Lorne Dach, MLA for Edmonton-McClung.

Ms Gray: Good morning. Christina Gray, MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

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

Mr. Deol: Good morning. Jasvir Deol, Edmonton-Meadows.

Ms Bell: Lianne Bell, chief of staff to the Speaker.

Mr. Long: Good morning. Martin Long, MLA, West Yellowhead.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Good morning. Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk, MLA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Link: Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms.

Mr. Joy: Darren Joy, senior financial officer.

Ms McHugh: Good morning. Ruth McHugh, executive director of corporate services.

Ms LeBlanc: Good morning. Stephanie LeBlanc, Senior Parliamentary Counsel.

Ms Dean: Good morning. Shannon Dean, Clerk of the Assembly.

The Chair: Excellent.

I am Nathan Cooper, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and, of course, the MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

On the phones?

Mr. Jones: Matt Jones, MLA, Calgary-South East.

Mr. Loewen: MLA Loewen, Central Peace-Notley.

The Chair: I believe that Mr. Williams had joined us. Perhaps he will be rejoining momentarily.

I would also wish to note for the record that the following substitutions have taken place: Mr. Dach for Ms Sweet, Ms Gray for Ms Goehring, Mr. Loewen for Mr. Ellis, Ms Goodridge will be acting as the deputy chair of the committee today, and Mr. Jones is substituting for Mr. Gotfried.

The meeting agenda and 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, and she will be happy to provide them for you.

Before we turn to the business at hand, a few operational items as a reminder to everyone. The microphone consoles are operated by *Hansard* staff. Please keep mobile devices on silent for the duration of our meeting. Audio and video recordings of the committee proceedings are streamed live on the Internet, broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV, and recorded by *Hansard*. Audio and video access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly website.

I would like to move to approval of the agenda. Are there any additions for today's meeting agenda? Seeing none, I'd like to ask that a member move the agenda as presented. Mr. Long. Any discussion about the agenda? All in favour of the agenda, please say aye. Any opposed to the agenda, please say no. Anyone on the phones in favour of approval of the agenda, please say aye. Any opposed? That motion is carried.

I'd like to move to agenda item 3, approval of the meeting minutes from June 18. Are there any amendments to or discussion on the minutes from our last committee meeting? Would a member like to move approval of the minutes from the meeting of June 18. Member Armstrong-Homeniuk. Thank you. Is there any further discussion? All those in favour of approval of the previous minutes, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones in favour of approval of the minutes, please say aye. Any opposed? That motion is carried.

Item 4 was a request dated July 24, 2019, from MLA Ellis, the deputy chair of the committee, to review members' pay. Members will have received a copy of Mr. Ellis's letter. Should you require an additional copy, the clerk would be happy to provide one for you. I just have a couple of comments before I turn the floor over to a member speaking on behalf of Mr. Ellis.

At our June 18 meeting the committee was made aware of various MSC orders addressing members' pay, specifically the relevant sections addressing the annual adjustment under the Executive Council salaries order and the members' allowances order and the members' committee allowances order. There is a provision in each of the orders for members' remuneration to be increased or decreased on April 1 of each year; however, based on a motion approved by the committee on February 9, 2016, this annual adjustment was frozen until two months after the first day of the 30th Legislative Assembly. At our June 18 meeting I provided members of the committee with this information and noted that the member remuneration at the current rates would be subject to an annual adjustment on April 1, 2020, if no other orders were made.

With that background, I believe MLA Goodridge has some comments to make, and once the presentation is completed, I'll be happy to open the floor to discussion that any other members may have. Please go ahead, Ms Goodridge.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to first move that

effective August 6, 2019, the members' allowances order be amended

- (a) by reducing the amounts set out in section 1(a), section 3(2) and section 4 by 5 per cent with any adjustments necessary to allow for equal monthly payments, and
- (b) by striking out section 4.1(2).

I have 20 copies of the motion.

The Chair: If you have further comments to make, feel free to make them as the motion is being passed out. If you don't, we'll

wait for the motion to be passed out and see if anyone else has any additional questions or comments for you.

For members that are on the phone joining us by teleconference, the clerk will update the internal committee website with the motions, and you're, of course, able to see the motion there. However, I believe that we're also going to be able to circulate the motion to you via e-mail in just a couple of minutes, once the electronic copy has been circulated to the clerk, and she will be happy to send that out in a few moments.

Ms Goodridge, do you have any additional comments that you'd like to make?

Ms Goodridge: No. Thank you.

The Chair: Members, are there questions with respect to the motion presented before the committee? Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to make it very clear. I think that this is cynical and hypocritical. I think it's something that when we see that the Premier, who is sitting on what is likely the largest gold-plated pension that Canada has ever seen when he was first elected in 1997, will amass up to potentially \$6.3 million in total MP pension payments by the age of 90. In just seven years he'll receive \$121,000 a year in pensions, and when he reaches 66 years old, he'll receive \$148,000 a year in pension payments. I think that when we see this attack, we think that it's very clear that this is actually just a shield and cover for public service attacks in the future: to attack public service pensions, to attack public-sector wages, and to roll back those wages, which we saw the Premier try to do with Bill 9 but that now the court has actually reached an injunction on.

I think it's very clear that the Conservatives and the Conservative caucus here are moving forward in a cynical nature to provide cover for themselves to go after our hard-working public service, and I think that's something that they should be ashamed about, Mr. Speaker. To be clear, the ND caucus will be supporting this as written. However, we do believe that suggesting to cut the pay of politicians a few hundred dollars a month to give them licence to screw over the working people of Alberta is, frankly, ridiculous.

Thank you.

11:10

The Chair: Point of order. Mr. Dang, I'm not convinced that "screwing over" is parliamentary language, and you can apologize and withdraw that.

Mr. Dang: Yeah. I will withdraw that.

The Chair: Are there any other questions? Mr. Dach, please.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have a couple of questions. Given the recent history with ministers of this government in their jobs failing miserably, in my view, I wonder if indeed it's an idea that this committee might consider if we feel it justified, them taking a 10 per cent pay cut. For example, the Finance minister refusing to do any part of his job while waiting for a blue-ribbon report that will justify him cutting workers' pay or refusing to deliver a budget in time for fall school semesters or refusing to consult with the public in advance of delivering a budget this fall or, for example, the Advanced Education minister refusing to deliver thousands of dollars in scholarship money before tuition payments are due, the Rutherford scholarship of \$2,500, not informing the public about technology upgrades that caused the scholarship issue. Ministers failing at their jobs maybe should be taking a 10 per cent pay cut: the Minister of Education refusing to

deliver a budget to the province's 61 school boards before fall classes or refusing to fund the classroom improvement fund, the school nutrition program.

The Chair: Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes.

The Chair: I would just perhaps interject. We are not discussing the Executive Council order at this point in time in the meeting. We're discussing the members' allowances order, which is a different portion of business. Perhaps you might like to save your comments for the appropriate time in the agenda.

Mr. Dach: I'd love to re-emphasize them at that time, sir.

The Chair: Are there any other questions, concerns, comments? The Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to reiterate our position. Earlier on this same issue, in 2015, former MLA Brian Mason – I would like to quote his position on the record. As a party we still see that this is very wrong. It is wrong for MLAs to vote on their own pay, and we strongly feel that this entire issue should be actually given to a third party. It is "to insulate MLAs and to insulate the government from the criticism that will certainly be made when they're asking public employees to take reductions in their wages." What I'm trying to say is that this move is basically to serve very narrow political interests of a government.

The Chair: That's all the comments that you have? Okay.

Ms Gray, would you like to make a comment?

Ms Gray: Oh, thank you, Mr. Cooper. Your Speaker senses are tingling once again. I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion, reducing some initial sections impacting MLA compensation by 5 per cent. My colleagues have raised a couple of very clear concerns, and I can say that a lot of my summer has been spent talking to our public-sector workers, who've been holding information pickets around the government's actions around Bill 9. What I've heard from these workers is strong anger and fear that this government not only does not respect the collective bargaining relationship, perhaps misunderstands the role in that collective bargaining relationship, and concern that there will be further attacks on public-sector worker compensation and that the platform commitment of the UCP government to reduce salaries for MLAs and for the Premier will be used as cover to justify forcing decreases on public-sector workers in the fall.

With comments that the Premier has made on Facebook Live about introducing future legislation and as we debate this 5 per cent adjustment, having heard very clearly the concerns from these workers and many others across Alberta, I'm wondering if I might be able to amend the motion. My amendment would be – and Parliamentary Counsel's assistance would be welcome – perhaps (c). We've got: Ms Goodridge has moved point (a), reducing by 5 per cent, point (b), "striking out section 1.1(2)." Point (c): that this committee recommend to the government of Alberta that these measures not be used as a rationale to justify cuts to public-sector worker compensation.

The Chair: I will confer with Parliamentary Counsel momentarily. My initial reaction is that it is likely going to be out of order as the committee scope wouldn't prevent it from passing a motion like that at some other time, but I don't believe that the committee scope with respect to the Members' Services guide or the guidelines would allow it to essentially write a motion into the orders. Now

that they've had a moment to confer, let me just double-check, but my sense is that that's out of order. I will report to you.

Parliamentary Counsel is of the same opinion, and I'm happy to have them speak to it. Why don't we do that as opposed to me providing your opinion for you? It seems reasonable that you might just inform the committee what your position is on changing the Members' Services orders with such a broad, basically open-ended motion.

Ms LeBlanc: Sure, Mr. Speaker. I think it would just make more sense to have it as a stand-alone motion, perhaps, instead of as an amendment to this motion.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I appreciate the guidance and will withdraw since it's out of order. I don't need to do that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any other discussion that you would like to have?

Seeing none, I will call the vote. All in favour of the motion as proposed by MLA Goodridge, please say aye. I'll take the phones in just a second. Any opposed? All in favour on the phone, please say aye. Any opposed?

That motion is carried and ordered.

Are there other points of discussion with respect to the letter that MLA Ellis drafted? I believe there were additional points in the letter with respect to Executive Council orders and Members' Services Committee orders. MLA Goodridge, please.

Ms Goodridge: Hi. I would like to move another motion, that effective August 6 the consolidated Members' Services Committee orders be amended as follows:

- A. the Executive Council salaries order is amended
 - (a) in section 1
 - (i) in clause (a) by striking out "\$79,560" and substituting "\$65,244,"
 - (ii) in clause (b) by striking out "\$63,648" and substituting "\$60,468," and
 - (iii) in clause (c) by striking out "\$28,644" and substituting "\$27,216"
 - and
 - (b) by striking out section 1.1(2).
- B. Schedule B to the consolidated Members' Services Committee orders is amended by striking out "Premier, 62.5% of indemnity allowance" and substituting "Premier, 53.95% of indemnity allowance."

11:20

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

For those of you on the phone we will also circulate an electronic copy momentarily, or perhaps you've already received it.

Are there other questions, comments that anyone would like to make with respect to the motion that's proposed by Ms Goodridge? Mr. Dang, with only parliamentary language, please.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is an important motion that, again, we will be supporting. But I think, to make it very clear, that with ministers taking an additional 5 per cent pay cut here, what we're seeing is that this is going to be an excuse again to try and do these cuts against the public service, a shield, a cover for the Premier to attack our workers, to attack Albertans, who spend every single day working for this province. I think this screen is something that they're going to try and use to justify things like Bill 9, which they didn't even want to debate in the Assembly. They only gave us very few hours of debate, and I think that's something that the government members should be very ashamed about.

In fact, I've been at these Bill 9 pickets, Mr. Speaker. I was in Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville just last week, and many of those members expressed dismay and displeasure that the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville did not attend. Indeed, they worried that these cuts would be used as an excuse and screen to allow the cuts to continue.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it's very clear that the minister and this government are trying to not do their jobs and withhold what their decisions need to be until after we see results from things like the blue-ribbon panel, in which case we believe they're going to go after our public service workers.

In that vein, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very interesting that we are reducing Executive Council salaries here, but we've seen certain ministers attempt to basically say: well, we can't do any of our duties until this panel reports; we can't do any of our duties; we can't invest in anything; we can't announce anything until this panel reports. My question for the government caucus, perhaps, would be: in that case, what are those ministers' jobs until the report is published? In fact, we may see that – my opinion is that they're not doing their jobs until that report is published. I'd seek the advice of Parliamentary Counsel, but I would move a motion that, in fact, the Minister of Finance's salary be set to zero until the results of the blue-ribbon panel are made public.

The Chair: I mean, to start, it would have to be an amendment to the motion. Is it possible to identify out members of Executive Council inside a motion with respect to the Members' Services guidelines? Like, let's be clear. We have a grasp of what is taking place at this committee. As you can tell, the consolidated Members' Services Committee orders are drafted in such a manner that it affects all members, all of Executive Council, the Premier, and office holders in a way that is consistent and regular. Utilizing the Members' Services Committee orders as a political tool: I would encourage you to do that in a manner that is going to have a positive impact on Members' Service Committee orders in the future as well. That's the reason that they're drafted like this. It's not to pick and choose individual members and highlight what they're doing or not doing.

Mr. Dang: Point of order.

The Chair: I'm not sure if you understand how this works. When the Speaker is speaking, I have that opportunity, and if you'd like to challenge that immediately following or have some discussion, that is also okay.

To utilize the Members' Services Committee orders in such a manner is not productive. I'm going to give you some indication as to whether or not it would be in order. It certainly will require a notice of the committee as no previous notice was given to Parliamentary Counsel. There would be some research that would be required to determine whether or not we could write one member of Executive Council into the orders, but I'm happy to hear your position.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Very clearly in the Executive Council services order under section 1(a) there is an exemption made for the President of the Executive Council. Very clearly the orders are created in a manner which allows for individual members of Executive Council to be identified under the Executive Council salaries order, and indeed there is a difference for members of Executive Council with portfolio and members without portfolio. We can see here that a particular portfolio has been sectioned out, and I believe that the President of Treasury Board and/or the Minister of Finance are portfolios that could be identified under section 1 of the Executive Council salaries order.

The Chair: Of course, there are individuals or other office holders who are written in or written out, predominately because it's the Premier. We can all agree that that individual has a unique role amongst members and amongst Executive Council as they were selected by Albertans to fulfill that role. The additional members of Executive Council are all treated the same with the exception of members with portfolio or otherwise, as you've noted.

I think the question that could be asked to Parliamentary Counsel would be: if the Minister of Finance and the President of Treasury Board had a title change, would, then, your amendment to the motion – would he then get paid? The challenge with the road that you're efforting to go down is that it can be tit-for-tat forever amongst these sorts of decisions. So the government – and I'm not saying that they would – could just as easily change the name of the Minister of Finance, and then all of a sudden your order is no longer good. It's the reason why our orders are written in that capacity in that way, so that this sort of thing doesn't happen.

Let me confirm with Parliamentary Counsel with respect to your ask as to whether or not the amendment would be in order, and then we can proceed, knowing that it would require a recess of this meeting to deliver upon the request, which is not moving in a positive direction for the committee.

The short answer to your question is: no, a motion of that nature would not be out of order. That was a difficult way to say that your motion would be in order.

I would like to strongly urge members of the opposition, in this case, to work with Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting so that this could have been addressed. As you will know, Parliamentary Counsel has a solicitor-client relationship directly with the opposition just like they have a solicitor-client relationship with the government. Interestingly enough, they also have a solicitor-client relationship with the Speaker, so the Speaker is unaware of any motions that may be moved at a Members' Services Committee meeting unless a member of the committee would choose to communicate that to the Speaker. That's a long way of saying that your motion would have been kept confidential no matter what way you cut it. So that would have been very advantageous.

11:30

We certainly have the ability to be creative. It will require a recess of the committee for them to draft the amendment that you likely should have shared with them prior. I have no ability to prevent you from doing that, so I'll turn it to you, and you can govern yourself accordingly.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just point out that for members of the opposition, as you have pointed out, the motions that are presented at these committees are confidential, and as such the opposition had no opportunity to know the wording of these motions or perhaps what they may entail. As such, we didn't want to presume any motions that may have needed to be written at that point, and we didn't have that opportunity. I would say that it certainly seems as though – if the government is trying to be cynical and attack our public service workers, if they're trying to be hypocritical and attack our public-sector workers with this smokescreen, it's something that we definitely do need to hold them to account for.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, at this point, as I don't want to delay this meeting substantially, I would withdraw this motion, but in that case could I do a different one that perhaps would have slightly more amenable wording for Parliamentary Counsel, I hope?

The Chair: You can try.

Mr. Dang: Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, I would then amend for a subamendment that would cause the Executive Council salaries order for all Executive Council salaries to be set to zero until August 15, 2019, which is the date that the blue-ribbon panel report is determined to be released.

The Chair: While I appreciate your efforts and will allow Parliamentary Counsel to have a discussion, we are at August 6. I hope that you would have considered some of my suggestions about what the intention of the Members' Services Committee orders are. They are to set out broad strokes around the management of ourselves and our organization and how MLA administration is taking place. I hesitate to entertain such a motion. However, I am not sure that there is anything we can do about it, so we may just hear it. We'll ask Stephanie here momentarily for the position. My sense is also that this would be an additional motion as opposed to now an amendment to this particular motion that would prevent that from happening between now and the 15th. But let's check in with Stephanie and see what her position would be.

Ms LeBlanc: Mr. Dang, just to clarify. In essence, would the dollar figures after "and substituting" in each of those clauses be replaced with zero? Is that your intention?

Mr. Dang: Yes, until August 15.

Ms LeBlanc: I suppose you could have a subamendment that replaces those figures and then potentially add in a part (c) dealing with the committee either revisiting that at that time or having those figures be replaced with the new numbers on August 15.

Mr. Dang: The latter would be perfectly acceptable for me.

Ms LeBlanc: Okay.

The Chair: The committee will take a five-minute recess while we prepare your amendment.

[The committee adjourned from 11:34 a.m. to 11:49 a.m.]

The Chair: The committee will reconvene.

Member Dang, if you'd like to read the motion into the record. We will proceed from there.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that

1. In part A in clause (a)
 - (a) in subclause (i) by striking out "\$65,244" and substituting "\$0," in subclause (ii) by striking out "\$60,468" and substituting "\$0," and in subclause (iii) by striking out "\$27,216" and substituting "\$0."
2. In part B by striking out "53.95 %" and substituting "0%."
3. By adding the following after part B:
 - C. Effective August 15, 2019,
 1. the amounts listed in section (1) of the Executive Council salaries order will be replaced with the following:
 - (a) \$65,244 a year, in the case of the President of the Executive Council;
 - (b) \$60,468 a year, in the case of a Member designated otherwise than as a Minister without Portfolio; and
 - (c) \$27,216 a year, in the case of a Member designated as a Minister without Portfolio.
 - and
 2. In schedule B "0%" will be replaced with "53.95%."

The Chair: Are there any questions or comments that members would like to make with respect to Member Dang's amendment? Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll speak really briefly to this. I think I covered a bit of this before the break. Certainly, I think that as we move forward, we understand that members of Executive Council have very important duties to do. We understand that members of Executive Council have many important obligations to do. However, as we've seen throughout the last session and as we continue to see, ministers are refusing to answer questions from the public. Ministers are refusing to answer questions from MLAs. They're refusing to answer questions from the media. Really, it feels as though the ministers are refusing to do their jobs, using the excuse of this blue-ribbon panel, which they're going to use to then attack our public-sector workers.

We know that the blue-ribbon panel is due to report on August 15. We know that at that point the ministers must resume their duties and actually go out and govern this great province, Mr. Speaker, so I think that to be fair to Albertans, if these ministers will not fulfill their obligations and instead are waiting for this cover for them to attack our public-sector workers, we should ensure that they get a good value, and until their job is being done, after this panel has reported, they shouldn't receive this additional remuneration.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in this meeting I heard your desire to see that this committee not be used for political purposes, and I further heard you say that all committee members "have a grasp of what is taking place [in] this committee." I agree with that. I believe it's very clear to all members in this committee and all those watching at home and the media as well that this whole purpose of this meeting on the part of the government was to provide a package of political cover to ensure that they could point to their reduction of MLA pay and compensation and say, "Look, we cut our pay, too," when they go ahead and take a whole big schwack of cuts at the public service.

Now, our public service is hard working and dedicated, and that's not what I can say about the ministers, who have been failing at their jobs and just waiting for this blue-ribbon panel to make a report. I think if there's any admonishment, Mr. Speaker, to be justified in taking advantage of this committee to use it for political purposes, it belongs to the government because the government members are those who are using this committee to take an opportunity to cover themselves politically for their drastic cuts that are coming to the public service that they've been telegraphing for weeks and weeks and months now.

We'll see it soon, but until the blue-ribbon panel reports, ministers are basically stalling in their jobs, saying, "We'll not do anything; we'll not make any decisions," whether it's Advanced Education, where the Rutherford scholarship is being stalled; whether it's the Minister of Finance, where he's justifying cuts taking worker pay and waiting for the blue-ribbon panel; whether it's the Minister of Education refusing to deliver a budget to the province's 61 school boards, refusing to fund the classroom improvement fund, the school nutrition program; whether it's the Minister of Community and Social Services refusing to see through the phases of the PDD review, refusing to involve the expert panel tasked with leading the PDD, refusing to provide clarity on delays to applications for PDD and FSCD. All of these ministers are – and I could go on with a list of perhaps the whole cabinet – waiting for

the review of this blue-ribbon panel, putting the work of the government on hold. Ministers are failing to do their jobs and are now using this meeting as political cover to point backwards when they come and attack the public service with drastic cuts to say: look, we cut our pay, too.

11:55

I think it's more than cynical. It's déjà vu. We've seen it in 2012. Mr. Mason, at the time an MLA for the NDP, suggested at the same time that it was cynical cover, political cover for the government of the day, and we're seeing another Tory government, another Conservative government do the same thing, basically provide political cover for themselves in advance of taking drastic action to cut the remuneration of the public service. I think, sir, that the government members and the government should take your advice and be admonished for using this committee for political purposes and providing it as a platform to host a package of political cover for their upcoming cuts to the public service.

The Chair: Ms Goodridge.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like the record to state that I'm extremely proud of the work that our ministers and our Premier have been doing over the last four months. I believe that they have been doing fantastic work on behalf of every Albertan in getting out, reaching all four corners of the province, and carrying on their commitments. I don't believe that that's something that we are discussing right now.

This is a platform commitment that we made in advance of the election about cutting the Premier's pay by 10 per cent and cutting MLAs' pay by 5 per cent. This is something that we were very clear about prior to the election being called, something that we campaigned upon, and I think it's something that when I go home to my riding of Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche and I run into people at the coffee shop or the grocery store, they tell me that they're proud of the work that our government is doing. They're proud to see that we're leading by example and taking these pay cuts. While perhaps this isn't something that all members hear in their grocery store, I know in talking to many of my colleagues within the United Conservative caucus that we hear this day in, day out.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have to point out that I think that some of this fantastic work such as not having the application process for scholarships working – that's going to cause some students not to be able to enrol in their postsecondary institutions before the fall – is the driving force behind us wanting to make sure that these ministers are actually doing their jobs. We can see very clearly that the funding is not going out to students and that they're not doing what Albertans elected them to do, which is to provide responsible governance. Very clearly, until they are able to do that job – and perhaps the blue-ribbon panel will give them the cover they need to attack our postsecondary institutes as well as other public services – they shouldn't be getting paid. Until we know what they're going to be doing and how hard they're going to be cutting and how deep, I think it's very important that Albertans get a good value for their money, and we know that these Conservative ministers are not giving it.

The Chair: Are there others? Mr. Deol.

Mr. Williams: Yes. Daniel Williams, if I may.

The Chair: You'll be next on the list.

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, once again, it's not about the pay cut. It's not about the move. It's more about the motives behind this move. The government is trying to justify, by moving this forward, the attack on the public sector. We have seen the systemic things happening under this government before. We have seen students waiting for the scholarship funding. We have seen the schools going into the fall, not even a month ahead, still waiting for the funding announcements. Communities are still waiting for the answers on their grant applications. The cancelling of the PDD review recently. On the contrary, in this fall session the government has given a \$4.5 billion tax break to the superrich corporations.

Mr. Speaker, I will say that this is totally cynical. It is a political gambit to serve their narrow political interest. The PC government in 2012 had tried to do the same thing, and Alberta did not approve of it. They rejected it. It's not the MLA pay cut, but it is about what we want to achieve. Going forward, the government will probably move towards introducing PST or something. Once again, I'm trying to say that what we are worried about here is: what is the motive behind these moves? That's what I want to say.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Williams, on the phone, please.

Mr. Williams: I'd like to open by way of apologizing for my cutting out, back and forth. That's life in northern rural Alberta.

Speaking to this point with Mr. Dang's amendment, I'm very disappointed in the way that the opposition has approached this. The importance of government being paid for the work that it's doing should be there independent of whatever party is in power. We did not see any of these motions, similar to these motions, in the past. It is a principle of parliamentary democracy that the government be compensated for its work no matter who's in power. As many of the members opposite know, these ministers work tirelessly. To try and take a stab at cutting their pay exclusively because they don't have policies that the opposition likes, I'd suggest the only way that you can reduce a minister's pay like this would be to get unelected from government, which is what we saw previously in the last election. So I'd suggest they campaign hard if they want this to happen for the next election.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? Ms Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. To echo some of the comments that I've heard from my colleagues and to respond directly to Mr. Williams' suggestion that this is coming because there are policies that we do not like, I would just like to remind the members that there are families across this province who are unable to apply at this point for scholarship money that students have already earned, that they've worked hard to have access to; that there are families that are waiting for decisions from the Minister of Community and Social Services to see if their family members can get the supports that they need; that there are schools that are not hiring teachers because their school boards are not able to know what their budgets look like.

These are concerns we've heard from Albertans. These are concerns that we've heard from teachers, we've heard from nurses, we've heard from hospital support services staff and social workers because these are things that impact families. This government continuing to deny Albertans the certainty that they need for supports that they need: these are not optional supports for members of the PDD community, for supports that our students need. Because not having access to Rutherford scholarship money, I will remind all members of this committee, will impact most drastically lower

income students who are more vulnerable, who perhaps will see this – I'm not sure if the minister is calling it a delay or what language he's trying to hide behind, but that this tech upgrade is going to potentially prevent students from enrolling in education is a huge failure. We need to be very clear on what we're talking about and that this is coming from Albertans.

I will be supporting Member Dang's amendment to this motion because I think it really draws attention to Executive Council deferring important work, that they should be doing now, to the blue-ribbon panel release on August 15. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms Goodridge, please.

Ms Goodridge: I just want to clarify. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Rutherford scholarship has not been cancelled. I would appreciate if members from the NDP caucus stop fearmongering on this issue. It's my understanding that it's an upgrade to the website to allow for online applications and that this is part of the process that's in place and that more information will be communicated at a later date. But I don't think that telling students that their scholarships are all of a sudden cancelled is going to help students get into university. It's worth noting that these scholarships – I myself received a Rutherford scholarship 15-plus years ago; I guess it wasn't that long ago but a long time ago – and when I received my scholarship, it wasn't paid out until, I believe, late October and then again in April. So it's not that – at least for myself and for most of the students that I knew when I was going to university, the Rutherford scholarship wasn't your ability to pay for that semester's tuition. It typically arrived well after the tuition deadline was in place. I just want to clarify that.

Minister Nicolaides has been clear that this scholarship has not been cancelled. Thank you.

12:05

The Chair: Member Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be clear, I don't think we've said that. We've said that this minister is unable to do his job, which does seem to in fact be the case, and students not knowing whether they will receive that scholarship will in fact be affected.

However, Mr. Speaker, looking at the Executive Council salaries orders that we're trying to subamend the amendment here for, I think, very clearly, when we're looking at the type of change you're trying to talk about in this amendment, reducing these substantial additional salaries we're talking about, for example, in the Premier's case, who is going to receive an additional \$65,000, a man who has been a career politician, elected since 1997, and who's serving in cabinet for nearly a decade, and he's in line again to receive potentially \$6.3 million in MP pensions up to the age of 90, and again in just a few years if he's still Premier at that time, he'll also be receiving over \$121,000 at age 55 in MP pensions on the taxpayers' dime, and when he hits 66 he'll be receiving almost \$148,000 in pension payments on the taxpayers' dime, I think that's hypocritical. I think it's cynical that he's trying to use these pay cuts as cover for him to attack our public service, when he's also going to be receiving these substantial public-sector pensions that he's trying to take away from our hardest working Albertans, the people who work to keep this province running and safe.

Mr. Speaker, I would strongly encourage every member of this committee to vote in favour of this amendment. I think it's something that we need to look at and realize, that these ministers are refusing to do their jobs, are refusing to provide the services that Albertans deserve, whether that's PDD decisions, whether that's in postsecondary grant funding, whether that's in municipal services, whatever it is. This committee needs to send a message to the

government that they have an obligation to Albertans. They need to provide those services.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others?

Mr. Williams: Again, I'd just like to comment on my disappointment in the opposition. The salary the Premier gets is for the office of the Premier just as a salary for your office as an elected official, for your district, your constituency, is for your office. Just because Member Dang is doing a good job or not doing a good job does not merit a raise or a lowering or by any one individual's opinion a raise or lowering. It is the institution of the Premier's office that deserves that salary, and because the opposition does not like a policy going forward by this government is no reason that anyone should be lowering any salaries. It is beyond inappropriate and thoroughly disappointing to see the lack of respect for the institution and the attempt to try and turn this institution and this Members' Services Committee into some sort of political ping-pong.

The Chair: Are there others?

Seeing none, all those in favour of Member Dang's amendment as presented, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone. Perfect. That motion is defeated.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, can we get a recorded vote?

The Chair: On division, all those in favour. Ms Goodridge are you in favour or opposed?

Ms Goodridge: Opposed.

Mr. Dach: Dach is in favour.

Ms Gray: In favour.

Mr. Dang: In favour.

Mr. Deol: In favour.

Mr. Long: Opposed.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Opposed.

Mr. Williams: Opposed.

Mr. Loewen: Opposed.

Mr. Jones: Opposed.

The Chair: Okay.

The amendment is defeated.

We are back on the main motion as proposed by MLA Goodridge. Are there any other questions or comments?

Seeing none, all those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed in the room, please say no. On the phones any in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried.

We are back on the main agenda. I believe that Mr. Ellis' letter indicated three items of business in his initial letter and then one item of business in the letter dated August 1. I turn to Ms Goodridge. Do you have additional questions, comments, or would you like to propose any other motions?

Ms Goodridge: I would like to put forward another motion. I would move that

effective August 6, 2019, the members' committee allowances order be amended by striking out section 2(2).

It's worth noting that this is a housekeeping amendment to clean up our members' services.

The Chair: I'll just wait for the motion to be distributed and then I'll call for questions or comments. We'll also send the motion electronically as soon as the committee clerk has it available and is able to do so. Questions or comments with respect to the motion as proposed?

Seeing none, all those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed to the motion, please say no. On the phones in favour, please say aye. Opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried and so ordered.

We are at item five, the request from MLA Ellis, letter dated August 1, 2019. Members have been provided with a copy of that letter from Mr. Ellis requesting that the discussion of fuel cards and mileage be added to today's agenda. Ms Goodridge.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that effective September 1, 2019, the transportation order be amended as follows:

- A. Section 3 is amended
 - (a) by renumbering section 3 as section 3(1),
 - (b) in subsection (1) by striking out "this section" and substituting "this Order," and
 - (c) by adding the following after subsection (1):
 - (2) A Member who is a member of the Executive Council and provided with the use of an automobile pursuant to a directive of the Treasury Board may be provided with fuel for the operation of that automobile, if related to and reasonably necessary for the performance of the Member's duties as a Member of the Legislative Assembly.
- B. Section 5(1) is amended
 - (a) by striking out clause (a),
 - (b) in clause (b)
 - (i) by striking out "less 7 cents per kilometre," and
 - (ii) by striking out subclause (i), and
 - (c) in clause (c) by striking out "less 7 cents per kilometre."
- C. Section 6 is amended
 - (a) in clause (a) by striking out all the words that follow "up to 35,000 kilometres per year," and
 - (b) in clause (b) by striking out all the words that follow "up to 80,000 kilometres per year."
- D. Section 6.1 is amended by striking out "the reimbursable value of up to a total of 10% of the kilometres" and substituting "any amount of the kilometres."

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Goodridge. The motion has been circulated here in the room and is now available on the screen on the committee website. I believe it has also been sent electronically to members on the phone. Are there questions or comments with respect to the motion as proposed by MLA Goodridge? Ms Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you. I was just wondering if Ms Goodridge could give us a plain language summary of what this motion is doing.

Ms Goodridge: Absolutely. Thank you for the question. In section A(b) it's simply housekeeping: it should have said "Order" all along, not "section." And (c), it's allowing that if a minister is using their fleet vehicle as part of their MLA duties, they can still claim the fuel purchase on that only when it's related to their MLA duties. It just helps simplify the fact that we're removing the ability for fuel claims in other portions.

Then B, it's removing the ability in A to claim for fuel, maintenance, car washes, those kinds of things as part of the members' services allowance, and it's also bringing us up to the public service kilometre rate for mileage in general.

The last part in section D is giving MLAs more freedom and flexibility to allow their staff to conduct kilometres at your discretion as to however many you would so choose instead of having it as a 10 per cent max cap. Does that explain it?

Ms Gray: I think so.

12:15

The Chair: Are there other questions or comments with respect to the motion as proposed?

Seeing none, I'm willing to call the question. All those in favour of the motion as proposed by MLA Goodridge, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phone, those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried and so ordered.

Ms Goodridge: Mr. Speaker, I have one last motion for the committee today. I move that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services direct LAO administration to discontinue the fuel credit card Element program for members, effective September 1, 2019.

This is allowing for the administration to provide a little bit of time to switch over programs and make sure that all the administrative work is able to be completed and giving members time to transition as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Goodridge.

I just have one quick question of Mr. Joy with respect to timing. Is September 1 a reasonable time for you to make any necessary adjustments that are required?

Mr. Joy: I believe so, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Are there other questions or comments with respect to the motion as proposed by MLA Goodridge, that is both available on the committee website as well as has been circulated here in room and, I believe, transmitted electronically to those you on the phone?

Seeing none, all those in favour of the motion as proposed by MLA Goodridge, please say aye. Any opposed to the motion, please say no. On the phone, all those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried and so ordered.

Ms Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would like to move a motion that I referenced earlier, and it's more appropriate as a stand-alone motion. I have hard copies that can be distributed to all. As those go out, I'll simply read this motion and then speak to it. I move that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services recommend to the Alberta government that reductions to MLA and minister remuneration passed at the August 6, 2019, meeting of the committee not be used as rationale to justify any measures to roll back compensation of Alberta's public-sector workers.

The Chair: Just as a way of housekeeping, we are on other business under item 6 of the meeting agenda.

Are there questions, comments with respect to the motion as proposed by Ms Gray? Oh, sorry. We're just getting the wording on to the committee website as well as circulating it to members on the phone here momentarily. Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I alluded to earlier in my comments, when I enunciated some of your concerns that this committee not be used for political purposes and that all committee members "have a grasp of what is taking place at this committee,"

I would like to say that I think it's incumbent upon us as committee members to respect those concerns and ensure that the government is fully aware that these measures that are being moved and passed today are not to be used as a means of political cover to justify public service cutbacks, which we anticipate are coming because of the telegraphing of those measures by members of the government over the last number of weeks and months. I think that, sir, the best thing to do is to ensure that if this is indeed the will of the committee as expressed, which we've done so, that it is a stand-alone measure and independent of any political cover that the government wishes to use these measures for.

So we will be very, very vigilant in watching what the government's use of these measures that we're passing today is, but I think this motion really emphasizes the need not to politicize the work of the Members' Service Committee and, in particular, not to give the government political cover for actions they plan to take against public service compensation for those hard-working public servants in our province.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just in support of this motion I wanted to remind the committee that our party, the NDP, has long-standing opposition to Conservative governments cutting their own pay as a smokescreen or to try to seize moral high ground before cutting the wages of our public-sector workers, so this motion simply seeks to make sure that the government is not using this as a tool to hurt workers. I think it's really important that this government respects the public-sector workers who work for us, respects the collective bargaining process.

Already today in this committee meeting we've heard language from Ms Goodridge that includes the words "leading by example," which raises concerns for me that remuneration changes passed at today's meeting are being done simply for political and opportunistic motives, looking forward to the blue-ribbon panel, and these concerns have been expressed to me by many, many Albertans as I've been talking to workers throughout the summer at various festivals, at different events across this great province.

So I hope that all members of the committee will support what I think is a very reasonable motion put forward, and I would echo, as other committee members have already said, that some of the language around this is cynical and make the final comment that I believe ministers and MLAs on the government side have already suggested that there's no connection between their negotiations with workers and the moves today, so that should make this motion an easy one to support.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are there other questions or comments? Mr. — oh, sorry. Seeing another member at the table, I'll come back to you.

Ms Goodridge.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to point out — I'm curious as to whether they're only wanting to have the reductions for the MLAs and ministers and not Executive Council in general.

The Chair: Ms Gray, should you choose.

Ms Gray: In my motion I'm trying to discuss all of the remuneration changes passed at today's committee meeting, and I would accept a friendly amendment from Ms Goodridge to make that more clear.

The Chair: What are you hoping to accomplish?

Ms Goodridge: I just don't think it's – in the language in the standing orders it states MLAs and Executive Council.

The Chair: So you'd like "reductions to MLA and Executive Council" instead of "and minister"?

Ms Goodridge: Yeah.

The Chair: Sure.

Are there other questions or comments? Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important that we pass this motion here today because we've heard members on the Conservative side talk about things like, as my colleague here already stated, leading by example or language like that. I think it's important that we look at this. We can see that the Premier is trying to use this as cover for his attack on public service workers. I think that we have to understand that there has to be respect for the collective bargaining agreements, there has to be respect for that process, and there has to be respect for workers. If the government so chooses to use this as their smokescreen, if the government so chooses to use this as their sleight of hand, as it were, that would be an attack on all workers in this province. It would be an attack on the ability of this government to negotiate in good faith with workers. I think that that's something we need to be very concerned about.

Certainly, I'll be supporting this amendment, and I hope all members will be as well.

The Chair: Any others? Dan Williams, go ahead.

12:25

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it seems to me like the opposition members misunderstand exactly what's going on in this committee and attempting to politicize it. These standing orders are a technical document of Members' Services Committee orders that are full of formulas, individual salary remunerations, talking about all sorts of technical details. If the opposition wishes to put a motion like this forward and a motion other than a government motion in the House, of course, that's the place for matters of debate and politics. To have this in with consolidated Members' Services Committee orders is strange and out of place and smacks again of brinkmanship and political gamesmanship. I think the opposition knows exactly what's going on. It's untoward, what they're doing, and they should be a little disappointed in themselves for trying to do it.

The Chair: Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a shame that Mr. Williams doesn't understand how important it is that the messages we send to Albertans no matter where we are in this Assembly, whether that's in a committee of the Assembly or in the House of the Assembly, are important. These are things that utilize taxpayer monies. It's something that we actually saw Mr. Kenney, the Premier, use during the election as a smokescreen back then. So if anybody is politicizing this, it is the Premier and his government politicizing this, effectively, as a tool for them to smokescreen their way around pay cuts: attacks on public service workers, attacks on collective bargaining, attacks on the people that keep this province running. That's something that we're trying to insulate against. We're trying to ensure that this committee cannot be used for those types of political purposes, and if the Conservative members don't want to vote for that, then we can see very clearly and Albertans will see very clearly that these members aren't in it for their best

interests but instead are making these changes in a cynical, hypocritical way when they're going to be seeing their own leader collect millions of dollars in public service pensions while still going after our public service workers.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour of the motion as proposed by Ms Gray, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones, in favour, please say aye. Opposed, please say no. That motion is defeated.

Mr. Dang: Recorded vote, Mr. Speaker?

The Chair: On division, let's do it the same way that we did it last time. I'll state your name; you state whether or not you are in favour or opposed to the motion. Ms Goodridge.

Ms Goodridge: No.

The Chair: Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Yes.

The Chair: Ms Gray.

Ms Gray: In favour.

The Chair: Mr. Dang.

Mr. Dang: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Deol.

Mr. Deol: In favour.

The Chair: Mr. Long.

Mr. Long: Opposed.

The Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Opposed.

The Chair: Mr. Williams.

Mr. Williams: Opposed.

The Chair: Mr. Loewen.

Mr. Loewen: Opposed.

The Chair: Mr. Jones.

Mr. Jones: Opposed.

The Chair: Okay.

That motion is defeated.

We are on other business. The Clerk did have some comments to make; however, given the time, I am more than certain that we can do this at a subsequent meeting and that nothing significant will come as a result of that.

With that said, the next meeting will be at the call of the chair.

I'd entertain a motion for adjournment. Ms Goodridge. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12:29 p.m.]

