



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Monday, December 19, 2022
9 a.m.

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Fourth Session**

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Chair
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC), Deputy Chair

Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Fir, Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Pon, Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)

Also in Attendance

Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)

Support Staff

Shannon Dean, KC	Clerk
Helen Cheng	Executive Assistant to the Clerk
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Lianne Bell	Chief of Staff to the Speaker
Terry Langley	Sergeant-at-Arms
Dave Ludwick	Executive Director of Corporate Services
Darren Joy	Senior Financial Officer
Janet Schwegel	Director of Parliamentary Programs
Amanda LeBlanc	Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

9 a.m.

Monday, December 19, 2022

[Mr. Cooper in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, members. I'd like to call this meeting to order.

My name is Nathan Cooper. I'm the MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. I will now ask members joining the committee meeting at the table to introduce themselves for the record, and then I will call on members joining the meeting remotely to introduce yourselves, beginning with Mr. Williams.

Mr. Williams: Dan Williams. I am the member of the Legislature for Peace River.

Mr. Rowswell: Garth Rowswell, MLA for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

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

Mr. Langley: Terry Langley, Sergeant-at-Arms.

Ms Goehring: Good morning. Nicole Goehring, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Gray: Good morning. I'm Christina Gray. I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Koenig: Good morning. I'm Trafton Koenig with the Parliamentary Counsel office.

Ms Cherkewich: Good morning. Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk.

Ms Dean: Good morning. Shannon Dean, Clerk.

The Chair: Member Pon.

Ms Pon: Good morning. Josephine Pon from Calgary-Beddington.

Mr. Deol: Good morning, everyone. Jasvir Deol, MLA for Edmonton-Meadows.

The Chair: Member Fir.

Ms Fir: Good morning. Tanya Fir, MLA for Calgary-Peigan.

The Chair: Member Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Good morning. Richard Gotfried, MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek and a guest of the committee today.

The Chair: And a very special welcome to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. As I understand it, it is a very auspicious day for you today. From my family to yours: a very happy birthday, and welcome this morning.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Irfan Sabir, MLA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

The Chair: Also joining us this morning we have Darren Joy, finance, and Dave Ludwick from finance, I believe. Are there any other staff joining us online this morning? Excellent.

Before we turn to the business at hand, a few operational items. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are streamed live on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and visual streams and transcripts of the meeting can be accessed via the Legislative

Assembly website. Those participating by remote videoconferencing are encouraged to please turn off your camera until you are speaking and mute your microphone when you are not speaking. Members participating virtually who wish to be placed on the speakers list are asked to e-mail or send a message in the group chat to the committee clerk, and members in the room, please signal the chair if you would like to be on the speaking list. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

With that, we'll move to item 2, the approval of the agenda. Are there any proposed additions, revisions for today's meeting agenda? If not, would a member please move the adoption of the agenda? Garth, thank you. Is there any discussion on the agenda?

Seeing none, all in favour of the motion moved by Member Rowswell, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones, in favour? Opposed? Carried.

This brings us to item 3, the approval of the meeting minutes. Are there any amendments to the meeting minutes from our last committee meeting, January 26, 2022? If not, would someone be willing to move that motion? Member Goehring. Thank you, Nicole. Are there any other questions, comments, concerns, debate?

Seeing and hearing none, on the motion as proposed by Member Goehring, all those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones in favour, please say aye. Opposed? Carried. Thank you very much, members.

This brings us to item 4, the primary purpose of our meeting this morning. I would like to open with some opening comments with respect to the budget parameters document that was circulated, and then we can proceed with some discussions should there be some. The budget parameters for the Legislative Assembly have been provided to the committee by providing the committee with an overview of the Legislative Assembly fiscal year 2023-24 budget. After my remarks I'm happy to open the floor for discussion.

By way of background the Legislative Assembly's current fiscal year budget is approximately \$72 million, consisting of three main components: the Legislative Assembly Office branch budget of \$29 million, MLA administration of \$34 million, and the caucus budgets of approximately \$8.6 million. I've had preliminary discussions with Legislative Assembly administration to plan for a number of increases based upon Alberta's public service salary adjustments, inflation, and operational requirements. These items were summarized in the budget parameters document that was provided to you in advance of the meeting.

In our discussion today we will see three main cost drivers influencing our proposed budget changes. As we all know, Alberta is experiencing high inflation. Inflation is affecting our operational costs and will be reflected in our budget. We've also seen the thawing of compensation freezes in the public service of Alberta, and we will review how this change impacts our caucus, constituency, and branch staff costs. Last, we have a number of proposed items that need to be addressed or improvements within our organization's operations.

I'd like to start with an estimate of the number of hours that the House is expected to sit during the fiscal year. It is assumed that the House will sit 75 sessional days with an average of 30 hours per week, a total of 20 weeks, and 82 committee meetings averaging three hours per meeting for a total of 246 hours in total.

I'd like to provide a brief overview of the changes outlined in more detail in the budget parameters document. As I mentioned, Alberta is experiencing significant cost inflation, and the Legislative Assembly is no exception. The Conference Board of Canada forecasts an annualized inflation of 3.2 per cent for Alberta over the calendar year 2023; thus, we propose to apply an inflationary factor to the operational costs of the Legislative Assembly's budget.

That is for constituency office funding, MLA administration, and the Legislative Assembly Office branch budgets.

Members, you may be aware that the Alberta public service has recently lifted the salary freeze and realigned salary grids for opted-out and excluded employees. As a reminder, staff compensation consists of salaries as well as the benefits component. The Legislative Assembly will make these changes to lay in lockstep with the Alberta public service compensation adjustments by modifying both management and nonmanagement salaries and benefits, with benefit adjustments made based on known actual premiums or anticipated change to premiums. These adjustments would be applied across the Legislative Assembly budget for eligible staff, including constituency office staffing, caucus staffing, and branch staffing. With specific request to how these affect MSA and caucus budgets, factors will be applied to the labour component of these budgets. The MSA staffing component indicated in Constituency Services Order RMSC 1992, c. C-1, 1(3)(a)(ii) and approximately 70 per cent of caucus budgets for staffing reflect in the pay grid realignment, cost-of-living, and merit adjustments for those eligible.

Lastly, I'd like to brief the committee on a number of proposals that address improvements to the Legislative Assembly operating environment. As members know, a bill was presented in the fall sitting which would provide our security staff to have peace officer status. The costs related to this change total \$475,000, consisting of \$165,000 for a record management system that integrates peace officers and EPS to track incidents or clients, \$110,000 for equipment and training and facility costs, as well as \$200,000 a year for wages for part-time LASS staff training.

9:10

We expect an increase related to health spending accounts by \$200,000. Traditionally the billing for health spending accounts through the government of Alberta has been once per year in April for the then count of MLAs and employees. The government of Alberta has indicated that these accounts have been underfunded and will be changing to a monthly billing cycle. We estimate that this will result in a cost increase due to the large number of new staff the Legislative Assembly hires in an election year.

The human resource services branch requires an additional two full-time employees to support strategic and operational needs for talent management, workforce planning, as well as solutions for adopting our enterprise resource planning, or EPR, solutions.

The Legislative Assembly has taken a number of steps to protect our information and technology assets, including various technical protections and cybersecurity awareness training. The Legislative Assembly proposed to acquire cybersecurity insurance to complement the third-party insurance coverage already provided to the Legislative Assembly under the government of Alberta's risk management insurance fund. The Legislative Assembly is just to the point of acquiring a quote for such insurance, but it has budgeted \$150,000 per year for this coverage.

Another component of our future information technology strategy consists of our ERP project. Our current ERP system was installed in 1996. Although the project to replace the current system started this time last year, the Legislative Assembly has had to take some project changes. Our plan is still to deliver a mobile portal to support expense submissions, payroll-related activities for members and staff by May 2023, with the full back office ERP system installed by December 2024. The increase of \$400,000 will bring the fiscal year 2023-24 project to \$1.5 million, with the need to assess future costs for maintenance, licensing, and support for 2024-25.

The last few components in the budget parameters document changes reflect an increase of \$50,000 to support additional events

on the Legislature Grounds and \$100,000 for American sign language interpretive services for committees.

In summary, two-thirds of the proposed budget increase is driven by the Alberta public service compensation changes and a 3.2 per cent increase to operational costs due to inflation. The remaining one-third of the increase relates to the Legislative Assembly Office's proposals on recommended operational improvements. This will amount to less than 3 per cent increase to the overall Assembly budget.

With that, I will be happy to open the table for discussion.

During my remarks I see that the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock has joined us. Glenn, can you just introduce yourself for the record.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. Good morning. Glenn van Dijken, MLA for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

The Chair: Questions, comments, or discussion on the budget parameters document?

Seeing none, I am willing to entertain the proposed motion. Ms Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that we go to an in camera discussion for reasons of wanting to discuss something that involves private and personal information.

The Chair: I am comfortable with such a motion. The hon. Official Opposition House Leader has moved that the standing committee on members' services and all officials from the Legislative Assembly Office move in camera. This is a debatable motion. Does anyone have any questions, comments, concerns, or would like to raise any issues at this time?

If not, I am prepared to call the question. On the motion as proposed by Ms Gray, all those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones in favour, please say aye. Opposed? Carried.

[The committee met in camera from 9:15 a.m. to 9:48 a.m.]

The Chair: Thank you very much, committee members. The committee returned to the public record at 9:48.

We are currently discussing item 4, the budget parameters document. Are there questions with respect to other items on the budget parameters document? Member Williams, are you willing to move the draft motion?

Mr. Williams: Yes. I'm not sure if it's up on the screen. I'd like to move the motion as proposed in the presubmitted motions.

The Chair: Member Williams moves that

- (a) the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the 2023-2024 budget parameters for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta presented to the committee December 19, 2022, as distributed and (b) direct the Legislative Assembly Office to prepare the 2023-2024 budget estimates in accordance with the approved budget parameters.

Is there any other discussion, questions, comments, concerns?

Seeing none, on the motion as proposed by the hon. Member Williams, in favour, please say aye. Opposed, please say no. On the phones, please say aye. Opposed, please say no.

Carried.

Member McIver, could you just introduce yourself for the record, please?

Mr. McIver: Ric McIver here, sir. I apologize. I was double-booked. There was a presentation I was required to make in another

meeting. I apologize for my lateness. If I have to cut out, it'll be because I've got to go back to that other meeting. My apologies, Chair.

The Chair: No apologies needed. Good to have you here for the time that we do.

This takes us to item 5, proposed amendments to orders. There are three potential changes to orders. These changes are largely cosmetic or to reflect the will of the decision the committee made a number of years ago that was missed in the orders.

You are aware that the members' group life insurance orders and the members' group plan orders outline the insurance and benefits coverage provided to members pursuant to section 39 of the Legislative Assembly Act. Members receive coverage that is similar to the plan for management, opted-out and excluded employees of the public service of Alberta. Any changes to that plan are considered to have been orders with respect to members. Recently there was an issue identified that requires an update to the orders proposed to incorporate a previous decision of the committee in relation to the cost-sharing benefit premiums until the age of 75 of former members. These amendments will also ensure that the language of the orders reflect the current coverage being provided to members and former members and will also ensure that the coverage mirrors any changes of benefits provided to management, opted-out and excluded employees of the public service.

Committee members have received a copy of the proposed amending orders, that has been circulated previously. Are there any questions or concerns related to the documents circulated?

If not, I am prepared – we do need to pass three motions. They have been circulated. The first motion will be coming up on the screen momentarily. It will say the following, that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed amendments to the members' group life insurance as distributed.

Is there a member willing to make that motion? Member Rowswell.

Are there any questions, concerns, comments, or debate with respect to the proposed motion?

Seeing none, on the motion as proposed by the hon. Member Rowswell, all those in favour, please say aye. Opposed, please say no. On the phones, please say aye. Excellent. Opposed, please say no.

The motion is carried.

The second motion, that will be presented momentarily, is that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed amendments to the members' group plans orders as distributed.

Is there a member willing to make that motion? Oh, Mr. Williams. Sorry.

Any other questions, concerns, comments, debate?

Seeing none, on the motion as proposed by Member Williams, all those in favour, please say aye. Opposed, please say no. On the phones, in favour? Opposed, please say no.

The motion is carried and so ordered.

The last order change is with respect to during the Second Session of the 30th Legislature the Assembly passed Bill 87, Electoral Divisions (Calgary-Bhullar-McCall) Amendment Act,

2021. As members will recall, the bill renamed the electoral division from Calgary-McCall to Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. As a result of this amendment to the act, the members' services orders need to be updated to reflect that change. Members received a copy of the proposed amending order.

Are there any questions, concerns, comments?

If not, would Member Sabir be open to moving such a motion?

Mr. Sabir: So moved.

The Chair: The motion is that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the proposed miscellaneous (schedules) amendment order, 2022, as distributed that reflects the name change of the electoral division of Calgary-McCall, which was changed to Calgary-Bhullar-McCall in recent amendments to the Electoral Divisions Act.

Any other discussion?

On the motion as proposed by Member Sabir, all those in favour, please say aye. Opposed, please say no. On the phones, please say aye. Opposed, please say no.

The motion is carried.

9:55

Hon. members, item 6, the dissolution guidelines. This is for your information, and as we would like these guidelines as part of the public record, the dissolution guidelines have been provided to the committee for your awareness and for reference. These guidelines are what will be in place during the forthcoming election period next spring. These were recently circulated to all members and staff and are now posted on the Assembly website. The Legislative Assembly Office has also conducted training for constituency office staff and will be reaching out in January to caucuses to offer similar information sessions. Should you or your staff have any questions, there is a list of Legislative Assembly Office contacts at the end of the guidelines. Please do not hesitate to reach out for any assistance.

Are there any other questions, comments, concerns with respect to the dissolution guidelines? Hopefully, this is close to the third time that you have received these. Say it once; say it again; say it a third time.

Other business. Is there any other business?

Item 8. The date of the next meeting will be at the call of the chair. I can give some general timelines for that meeting. I anticipate it to be in the last week of January, likely the 31st, but I will circulate to confirm that in the first couple of days of January, likely.

With all that said, thank you all very much for your participation in the meeting today. I hope that you have a happy holidays if you are celebrating the holiday season, a very, very Merry Christmas, and please stay safe out there during these frigid temperatures.

Have a Merry Christmas, and with that I'll entertain a motion to adjourn. Member Rowswell. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones, please say aye. Opposed, please say no. The motion is carried and so ordered.

[The committee adjourned at 9:57 a.m.]

