



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Thursday, November 9, 2023
9 a.m.

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Chair
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC), Deputy Chair

Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)

Support Staff

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Helen Cheng	Executive Assistant to the Clerk
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Lianne Bell	Chief of Staff to the Speaker
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
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Lyndsay Tischer	Director of Human Resources
Janet Schwegel	Director of Parliamentary Programs
Amanda LeBlanc	Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

9 a.m.

Thursday, November 9, 2023

[Mr. Cooper in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, members. It being 9 a.m., I'd like to call the meeting to order.

I'd like to ask those of us joining here in the committee room to introduce yourselves. Welcome to the first meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. I'll begin here on my right. We'll go all the way around the table. If you would introduce yourself for the record. After we deal with the remote participation motion, we will introduce Member Singh.

Mr. Roth.

Mr. Roth: Good morning. Aaron Roth, committee clerk.

Mr. Getson: Good morning. Shane Getson, MLA, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

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

Mr. Yao: Tany Yao, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

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

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

Mr. Sabir: Irfan Sabir, MLA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Eggen: Good morning. My name is Dave Eggen. I'm the MLA for Edmonton-North West.

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

Ms Phillips: Good morning. Shannon Phillips, MLA for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Tischer: Good morning. Lyndsay Tischer, director of human resources, Legislative Assembly Office.

Ms Cherkewich: Good morning. Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk, office of Parliamentary Counsel.

Dr. Ludwick: Good morning, all. Dave Ludwick, executive director of corporate services.

Ms Dean: Good morning. Shannon Dean, Clerk.

The Chair: I'm Nathan Cooper, the MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and the chair of Members' Services.

Our first item of business will be the consideration of a motion to permit remote participation during committee meetings. A motion to approve remote participation does not prevent the committee from determining that personal attendance at a specific meeting is required. In those cases a motion would be moved at the end of a meeting requesting the personal attendance of all members at a subsequent meeting. I have a suggested motion for the committee. If the committee clerk could read that potential motion into the record and see if a member might be willing to move that.

Mr. Roth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services consent for the purpose of section 6 of the Legislative Assembly Act to

remote participation by any member in the committee's meetings held at the designated committee rooms in the Queen Elizabeth II Building during the 31st Legislature unless the committee carries a motion in advance of the meeting that remote participation of members is not permitted at that meeting.

The Chair: I see Member Yao has indicated he'd be willing to move that motion. Happy to have discussion about that. I will consider that motion moved on behalf of Member Yao. I'm happy to have some discussion if there is any. One clarifying comment I would like to make is that because it's for the 31st Legislature, it will cover all meetings, and this will be the only time that the motion needs to be passed.

Any other questions, comments, or concerns?

Happy to call the question. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it.

At this time I'd like to invite members participating remotely to introduce themselves for the record. Mr. Singh.

Mr. Singh: Good morning, everyone. Peter Singh, MLA, Calgary-East.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Peter, and welcome.

I'd like to move now to item 2, approval of the agenda. Are there any additions or revisions for today's meeting?

Seeing none, I'd like to propose that a member move the approval of the agenda.

Ms Phillips: Moved.

The Chair: Ms Phillips. It's like an auction mart in here; anything above your waist is a bid. Excellent. Ms Phillips moves that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services adopt the proposed agenda. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Item 3 is an orientation for committee members. This being the first meeting of Members' Services, I've asked the Clerk, Shannon Dean, to provide a very brief orientation, primarily for the record. Given that all members on the committee are returning members and have a good sense, I understand the briefing to be quite brief, but I'll turn it over to the Clerk.

Ms Dean: Good morning, members, and thank you, Speaker Cooper. My original goal in preparing these remarks was to provide a fairly comprehensive overview, but given the abundance of experience at the table here I don't think that's necessary, so I will be very brief.

As noted in your orientation materials, the Members' Services Committee is appointed at the commencement of each Legislature, with the Speaker serving as chair. The committee's mandate is largely set out in the Legislative Assembly Act, with the key functions being the approval of the annual estimates of the Assembly as well as setting members' compensation, benefits, constituency office budgets, and the rules governing disbursement of those funds. These rules are set out in the Members' Services Committee orders. Some additional areas that are regulated through the orders include members' transportation allowances, travel, and records management.

I'd also like to touch upon the system of financial accountability with the Legislative Assembly Office, or the LAO. The LAO is considered to be a department under the Financial Administration Act. Accordingly, expenditure of funds appropriated by the Assembly is governed by that act, notably part 4, which deals with disbursement of public money. There are also regulations and

directives under the Financial Administration Act that apply to our financial policies and procedures as well as the orders and guidelines approved by this committee.

In my role as deputy head I appoint the senior financial officer, Mr. Darren Joy, who does not appear to be here today. We also have accounting officers appointed, and we designate certain individuals as expenditure officers for various elements in the Assembly budget. Each member, as you know, is an expenditure officer with respect to the member's constituency office budget. For caucus funds the expenditure officers typically come from the caucus leadership such as the whip as well as senior staff designated by the whip.

The financial management branch at the LAO is responsible for the receipt and disbursement of public money, maintaining accounting records and systems, producing financial statements for the Assembly, and co-ordinating the LAO's financial policies and procedures with the overall, government-wide policies in the financial management area. The accounting officers are responsible for reviewing and approving disbursements to ensure that the expenditure of public funds is compliant with the relevant authorities.

Now, the Members' Services Committee has approved certain orders and guidelines that have been developed to govern expenditures. In particular, I would draw your attention to the constituency services order, guidelines for members' expenditures, and caucus expenditure guidelines. These rules and guidelines are revised from time to time on the instruction of the committee. Sometimes issues are identified by the Auditor General which the committee may wish to consider. As you know, the Auditor General conducts an annual audit of the LAO. Finally, it's important to note that any administrative decisions regarding compliance are subject to appeal to the Speaker in the first instance, and then there's a further appeal to the committee.

The final area I want to touch upon is the Assembly budget. We are just beginning this process for the forthcoming fiscal year. In the coming weeks we anticipate a meeting of this committee to be called for you to review and provide feedback on a budget parameters document that will guide the preparation of the budget for the forthcoming fiscal year.

In closing, I just want to make you aware about the Assembly budget. The current year's budget is \$76.7 million. There are four key components. First, LAO branch budgets: they amount to 38 per cent. MLA administration is the largest component, at 47 per cent, and that includes members' pay and benefits, operational expenses that are centrally budgeted as well as constituency allowance budgets. Caucus budgets account for 12 per cent of the LAO budget. And, finally, there's a small portion, 3 per cent, dedicated to special funding requirements. That includes planning and development initiatives as well as our ERP system, that is currently in progress.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much, Shannon.

Does anyone have any questions or comments for the Clerk?

I have a couple of other just very brief comments that I'd like to make sure are on the record. Quorum of the committee is one-third, or four regular members of the committee or official substitutes. Members who are not committee members or official substitutes may attend committee meetings and participate in the discussion but may not move a motion or amendment or vote on motions before the committee. Discussion, of course, flows through the chair, and I along with the committee clerk will track members who indicate that they would like to speak or participate.

The committee is supported in its work by the Legislative Assembly Office, the Clerk, Parliamentary Counsel, House services, corporate services, communications, our committee clerk, and other branches of the LAO that we may call on from time to time, depending on the matter under consideration. The committee typically meets three to four times a year to consider various matters within its mandate.

Temporary substitutions. Standing Order 56(2.1) to (2.4) provides an opportunity for committee members to name a temporary substitute for part or the entirety of a committee meeting or for several meetings.

9:10

I will refer the committee members to the orientation memo that was distributed to all committee members prior to the meeting and also to paragraph 3.9.3 of the practical guide to committees and the detailed description of the temporary substitution process. In brief, a temporary substitution in the membership of a standing . . . committee may be made upon written notification signed by the original Member and filed with the [committee clerk] or through an e-mail communication sent directly from the original Member to the Clerk and Committee Chair . . . substitution is given on a business day, not less than 24 hours prior to the meeting for the substitution of the Chair or Deputy Chair, and . . . any other Member, prior to the scheduled start of the meeting for which the substitution is in effect

pursuant to Standing Order 56(2.1).

Last but not least, hon. members, Standing Order 52.041 provides for the chair of the standing committee to implement a deadline for certain motions and amendments to motions that members wish the committee to consider. Members will have received the memorandum on November 2, 2023, regarding deadlines for nominations and amendments for this meeting. Additional information regarding Standing Order 52.041 can be found in the orientation memo and also paragraph 3.6.14 in the practical guide on committees. Does anyone have any questions, comments, concerns with respect to the information you've just received?

If not, I'd like to move to new business. I understand there has been some discussion about the potential motions circulated to the committee. With that, Mr. Getson.

Mr. Getson: I appreciate it, Mr. Speaker – Mr. Chair, I guess, in this format. We did submit a motion on that, and if I could read that into the record here. So I'd move that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services undertake a review of the compensation, benefits, and allowances paid to the Members of the Legislative Assembly under the authority of the Legislative Assembly Act. Such review is also including recommendations on the process for future review and adjustments for members' compensation, benefits, and allowances. Be it further resolved that the committee direct the Legislative Assembly Office administration, the LAO, to undertake a crossjurisdictional survey of Canadian federal, provincial, and territorial parliaments in connection with the above-noted areas, submitted to the committee on or before December 11, 2023. Be it further resolved that the LAO administration be authorized to hire an independent consultant to prepare a report with advice and recommendations in the areas for consideration by the committee such that the report be provided on or before January 15, '24.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Getson.

Is there anyone wishing to comment on the motion?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question. All those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it.

My apologies. Hon. Member Singh, would you like to vote in favour or opposed to the motion?

Mr. Singh: I support the motion. Thank you.

The Chair:

The ayes have it.

There was a second motion that was circulated to the committee with respect to a subcommittee that may undertake some discussions with respect to the motion just moved by Mr. Getson, I understand. Ms Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes. In reaction to the original motion, understanding the practice of this committee to use subcommittees for business, I move that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services establish a subcommittee to be referred to as the members' compensation, benefits, and allowances review subcommittee, to which the following applies: (a) the subcommittee is comprised of the hon. Nathan Cooper, Speaker and chair of the committee, as the chair of the subcommittee, two members of the committee nominated by the government caucus, and two members of the committee nominated by the Official Opposition; (b) the subcommittee's mandate is to identify specific areas of focus to the independent consultant for consideration in the consultant's report and, upon completion of the independent consultant's report, to review that report on members' compensation, benefits, and allowances and provide advice and recommendations for consideration by the committee no later than January 31, 2024; (c) the quorum for a meeting of the subcommittee is three members, with a minimum of one member from each caucus; and (d) a member of the committee may substitute for a subcommittee meeting at a meeting provided that notice of the substitution is provided to the committee clerk before the meeting commences.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Ms Gray.

Are there any questions, comments, concerns, or discussion with respect to the motion by Ms Gray?

Mr. Getson: Just one on item (d) if I may.

The Chair: Please.

Mr. Getson: Member Gray, when we're talking about the substitutions, just probably for clerical purposes, is it substitutions from this standing committee now, or is it open to other members as well if there was a substitution required for the subcommittee? Maybe it's a point to the clerk.

Ms Gray: My preference would be a member of the committee, just because of the background knowledge needed.

Mr. Getson: Okay. Perfect. I would support that, too. I appreciate that.

The Chair: Excellent. Are there any other questions, comments, concerns?

I'm prepared to call the question. All those in favour in the room, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Participating remotely, in favour?

Mr. Singh: I support it. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The ayes have it.

That motion is carried and so ordered.

Hon. members, as the committee has established a members' compensation, benefit, and allowance review subcommittee, I'd like to advise the committee that the first meeting of the subcommittee is likely to take place the week of November 20. I will circulate the best possible time. My guess is the morning of the 21st, but I'll take that up with the members of that subcommittee.

With respect to who those members may be, I have a self-imposed deadline of the 14th of November for each caucus to appoint their members. Perhaps they may be suited to do that now. If they are, you can let me know.

Mr. Getson: Sorry. Now I'm in the habit of touching the darn button here.

Yeah. So from our side it would be MLA Rowswell and myself.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

I don't know if the members of the ND caucus are prepared to . . .

Ms Gray: We'll get back to you.

The Chair: Okay. Yeah. That's fine. Actually, you can just get back to the clerk by the 14th, which is Tuesday of next week. I would greatly appreciate that so that we can expediate that and then anticipate a meeting the following week.

Item 5. Unless there are other new business items, item 5, the date of the next meeting. Hon. members, as we are approaching the period where the committee will need to consider budget parameters for the LAO for the upcoming '24-25 fiscal year, I'm currently looking at trying to conduct a meeting the week of December 11, with a strong consideration for Wednesday, the 13th, but I will circulate some dates to committee members for consideration and feedback for that next meeting. But if we can put it in sort of our framework for that week, I would appreciate that. Any questions, comments, concerns with respect to the date of the next meeting?

Excellent. Would a member please move to adjourn as that is the completion of our meeting? Member Getson. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. The ayes have it. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:18 a.m.]

