



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Monday, February 5, 2024
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)
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)*
Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP)**
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)***
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)****
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)

* substitution for Irfan Sabir
** substitution for Shannon Phillips
*** substitution for Martin Long
**** substitution for Garth Rowswell

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Shannon Dean, KC	Clerk
Helen Cheng	Executive Assistant to the Clerk
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Lianne Bell	Chief of Staff to the Speaker
Trafton Koenig	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
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>

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[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. I'd like to open this meeting by asking members and those joining us at the committee table to introduce themselves for the record. I will then call upon members joining us remotely to introduce themselves.

I would also note that Mr. van Dijken is an official substitute for Mr. Rowswell; Mr. Kayande for Member Phillips; Mr. Haji for Member Sabir; Ms Lovely for Mr. Long.

Beginning with the committee clerk, please introduce yourselves. We'll go around the table.

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

Mr. Getson: Shane Getson, MLA, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, God's country, and deputy chair.

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

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

Mr. Eggen: Good morning. David Eggen, Edmonton-North West.

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

Mr. Joy: Darren Joy, senior financial officer for the Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. Koenig: Good morning. Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel office.

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

Ms Dean: Good morning. Shannon Dean, Clerk.

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

Member Kayande: Good morning. Samir Kayande, the excellent constituency of Calgary-Elbow.

The Chair: Mr. Haji. Sorry; we missed you there.

Mr. Haji: Morning. Sharif Haji, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have heard from Ms Lovely; she's currently joining us remotely but will be joining us here in person in just moments, so we'll allow her to introduce herself for the record. Oh, there she is.

Ms Lovely: Thank you. I'm here. You know, the elevator is out of commission so I'm just going up the stairs, and I'll be there momentarily. Good morning, everyone.

The Chair: Excellent.

And Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. Glenn van Dijken, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

The Chair: 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 videostream and transcript of the meeting can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Those participating via videoconference are encouraged to please turn on your camera while speaking and mute your microphone while 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. Members in the room can indicate to the chair your desire to be on the speaking list. Please set your cellphones and other electronic devices to silent during the meeting.

This brings us to item 2, the approval of the agenda. Are there any proposed revisions, additions, or changes to the agenda?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to take a motion to approve that. Mr. Getson. Are there any questions, comments, concerns, discussion with respect to the agenda?

Seeing and hearing none, all those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Remotely, please say aye. Remotely, please say no. Motion is carried.

Item 3, the approval of the meeting minutes. Are there any amendments to the minutes of our last committee meeting?

The motion that one of you may want to propose is that the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the minutes as distributed for its meeting held January 29. Are there any other questions, comments, concerns with respect to additions or changes? If not, would someone move that motion? Mr. Eggen. Any other questions?

Hearing and seeing none, all those in favour of the approval of the minutes, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Remotely, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Motion is carried.

Hon. members, that brings us to the substantive portion of our meeting, which is item 4, the 2024-2025 Legislative Assembly budget estimates. Before I begin, I would like to thank the legislative staff, members of our finance team, committee clerks, and others who have spent a great deal of time in the preparation of the estimates. I'd also like to thank all members of the committee, who have worked very collaboratively over the past number of months to ensure that we can get here, to today. I would like to thank you for your co-operation and hope that will extend through to today's meeting.

The budget estimates for the Legislative Assembly Office. Let me start by providing an overview to the committee of the Legislative Assembly fiscal year 2024-2025 budget. After this, I'll turn it over to the Clerk for more detailed discussion on the budget.

On December 13, 2023, the committee met and approved the budget parameters document to provide direction to the Legislative Assembly Office for the preparation of the 2024-2025 budget. In addition, there is an addendum to these parameters that was discussed at our meeting on January 29 which provided further direction to LAO administration to include in the budget a contingency for decisions pending from the committee pertaining to the review of compensation, benefits, and allowances.

The budget parameters approved on December 13 outlined a proposed budget increase of 6.5 per cent to facilitate the required changes that were discussed and approved by the committee. We now expect that budget increase to be approximately \$8.1 million. The \$8.1 million increase is comprised of the following: \$1.4 million, or 3.9 per cent, increase in MLA administration; \$1.1 million, or 3.7 per cent, increase to the LAO branches; \$334,000, or 3.6 per cent, increase to caucus funding; special funding requirements of \$200,000 for one-time funding for the enterprise resource planning project; \$1.5 million for the boundary commission; a \$1.9 million contingency for employee market adjustments; and in addition, in accordance with the amendment to the budget parameters document, a \$1.9 million contingency for

decisions that are pending regarding the committee review of member compensation, benefits, and allowances.

In summary, setting aside the provision for the Electoral Boundaries Commission and the member compensation, benefit, allowance contingency, the proposed increase to the LAO budget is \$4.7 million. With these changes, the total voted expenditures for the LAO would increase to \$84,854,000. The key components of this total are the following: approximately 46 per cent, or \$39.4 million, is allocated to MLA administration; 36 per cent, or \$30.2 million, is allocated to the LAO branches; and \$11 million, or 9.5 per cent, is allocated to caucuses. The remaining 7 per cent are special funding requirements; namely, \$5.8 million allocated to the Electoral Boundaries Commission, enterprise resource system one-time cost, IT planning and development as well as the employee market adjustment contingency.

With that said, I'll now turn it over to Shannon, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and she will provide some additional remarks.

Ms Dean: Thank you, Speaker, and good morning, committee members. The budget you have before you is presented in accordance with parameters that were previously approved by this committee. As the Speaker noted, the overall increase to the LAO budget being proposed is \$8.1 million, bringing the budget to approximately \$84.8 million.

Just to focus in on a few of the comments that the Speaker mentioned with respect to the \$8.1 million adjustment, it's comprised of the following: 3.9 per cent increase in MLA admin; 3.7 increase to LAO branches; 3.6 per cent increase in caucus funding. Then there are some special funding requirements, notably \$1.5 million for the Electoral Boundaries Commission, as the Speaker mentioned, and we have a contingency of \$1.9 million for pending decisions, pending this committee's review of member compensation, benefits, and allowances. There is also an employee market adjustment contingency to accommodate any future general market adjustment to the management and opted-out, excluded nonmanagement employees of the Legislative Assembly. These would parallel any adjustments made for the Alberta public service. This adjustment includes LAO branches, caucus, and constituency staff. I would also note that in accordance with the budget parameters an adjustment to operational expenses has been included for increases in the CPI reflecting current inflation rates.

9:10

Now, as you may know, staff compensation comprises a significant component of the budget. To briefly summarize, focusing first on branch staff, there will be a merit adjustment of 3 per cent for an estimated 60 per cent of managers who are eligible and 4 per cent for those 60 per cent of employees who are eligible. These adjustments impact staff benefits, resulting in increased employer contributions to the health benefit and pension plans as well as premiums for CPP, EI, and WCB. These adjustments will also be applied to eligible caucus and constituency office staff. Again, these adjustments impact employer contributions to benefits and statutory contributions. As I mentioned earlier, we've built in contingency funds to plan for any market adjustments to parallel those made for the Alberta public service, and those decisions are still pending.

With respect to LAO branch operations there are several operational improvements that we are working on and increases to branch budgets to reflect that: notably, an increase in security staff, approximately three FTEs or so; enhancement to security screening equipment; as well as an increase to visitor services staffing, about two FTE equivalents. Some of the event costs are also increasing. We are aiming and striving to bring our programming back to prepandemic levels. I'd also draw to your attention that we're continuing to enhance the democracy exhibit

on the main floor of this building. In summary, the overall adjustment to LAO branch operations of \$1.6 million amounts to about one-fifth of the overall budget increase previously mentioned.

With that, Speaker, I'll take any questions that members may have.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much, Ms Dean.

Are there any questions for Shannon or myself with respect to the budget before you? I know that we've had a lot of good conversations in the lead-up to this as well. If there are any, though, now would be the time for them.

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to ask a member of the committee or suggest – perhaps Aaron would put the draft motion there – that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the 2024-2025 Legislative Assembly budget estimates in the amount of \$84,854,000, as submitted.

Mr. Getson. Are there any other questions, comments, discussion with respect to the motion as proposed by Member Getson?

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

Motion is carried and so ordered.

Thank you very much, everyone. I do appreciate that.

Having approved the 2024-2025 legislative budget, an updated constituency order is required so that the budget adjustments to the 2024-2025 fiscal year are properly reflected in the staffing and operating elements of the member's services allowance. The draft order has been circulated to all committee members, and I'd now like to open the floor for discussions, comments with respect to the subject.

If not, I'm sure that Aaron can throw up the proposed draft motion that had been previously circulated. Is there anyone willing to move that motion?

Mr. Getson: Sure. I'll move.

The Chair: Mr. Getson. Are there any other additional questions, comments, concerns with respect to the motion?

Sorry; Shane, can you read it into the record for me as I didn't read this one in for us.

Mr. Getson: Sure. Moved by the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, known as God's country, that

the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the Constituency Services Amendment Order, 2024, as distributed and as amended.

The Chair: Not as amended, just as distributed.

Mr. Getson: Oh, sorry. Just as distributed. I apologize.

The Chair: It's okay.

Any other questions, comments, concerns with respect to the motion as proposed by Member Getson?

All those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Remotely, please say aye. Opposed, please say no.

The motion is carried and so ordered.

This moves us to agenda item 5, other items of business. I don't believe there are any, but if anyone has any.

Excellent. The next meeting will be at the call of the chair.

Prior to concluding the meeting, again, I'd like to reiterate my great deal of debt of gratitude to all those who put in the extra hours and time and diligence in getting us to today. The LAO will conclude all of the

documentation that is required and get our estimates over to Treasury Board and Finance just as quickly as possible.

With that, I'll entertain a motion to adjourn. Ms Lovely. 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, and the meeting stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:16 a.m.]

