



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Special Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Wednesday, December 13, 2023
9:30 a.m.

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First Session**

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)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)*
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)

* substitution for Martin Long

Also in Attendance

Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (Ind)

Support Staff

Shannon Dean, KC	Clerk
Helen Cheng	Executive Assistant to the Clerk
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Lianne Bell	Chief of Staff to the Speaker
Andrew Koning	Parliamentary and Engagement Co-ordinator to the Speaker
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Terry Langley	Sergeant-at-Arms
Dave Ludwick	Executive Director of Corporate Services
Darren Joy	Senior Financial Officer
Lyndsay Tischer	Director of Human Resources
Janet Schwegel	Director of Parliamentary Programs
Amanda LeBlanc	Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

9:30 a.m.**Wednesday, December 13, 2023**

[Mr. Cooper in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call this 10 o'clock start time to order. I believed I was coming 30 minutes early, and I am perfectly on time.

Good morning and welcome. I'm Nathan Cooper, the MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and the chair of this committee. I'd like to begin by asking members who are joining the committee at the table to introduce themselves for the record. I will then call members who have joined us virtually to introduce themselves, and if you're at the table with us today, whether you're a member of the committee or joining us because you are staff, I'd like if you could also introduce yourself, beginning with the clerk on my right.

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

Mr. Getson: Good morning. Shane Getson, deputy chair, MLA for God's country or known here in these parts as Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

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

Mrs. Johnson: MLA Jennifer Johnson, Lacombe-Ponoka.

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

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

Mr. Koning: Andrew Koning, parliamentary and engagement coordinator for the Speaker.

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

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

Mr. Eggen: Good morning. I'm Dave Eggen, MLA for Edmonton-North West.

Ms Tischer: Good morning. I'm Lyndsay Tischer. I'm the director of human resource services for the Legislative Assembly Office.

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

Dr. Ludwick: Good morning, all. Dave Ludwick, executive director of corporate services here at the LAO.

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

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

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

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

The Chair: Good morning. Thank you, all.

I'd also like to note for the record the following substitutions, that Member van Dijken is an official substitute for Member Long.

Before we turn to the business at hand, a few operational items. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. The committee proceedings are streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Assembly TV. The audio-, videostream and transcripts can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Those participating remotely are encouraged to please turn on your

cameras while speaking and mute your microphone when you're 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 are asked to please signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones or other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

That brings us to the approval of the agenda. Are there any proposed additions or revisions to today's meeting?

Seeing none, I wondered if Mr. Getson might be willing to move the agenda.

Mr. Getson: Mr. Speaker, you read my mind. I would be more than happy to move the agenda.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion with respect to the agenda?

Seeing none. All those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. On the phones or virtually, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. That motion is carried.

Number 3, the approval of the meeting minutes. Are there any amendments to the minutes from our last meeting, the meeting dated November 9, 2023?

Is there anyone wishing to move the motion for approval of the minutes? Perhaps Mr. Eggen.

Mr. Eggen: I do so move, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Is there any further discussion or comments with respect to the motion as proposed by Member Eggen?

Seeing and hearing none, all those in favour of approval of the minutes, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Virtually, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Motion is carried and so ordered.

This brings us to the substantive portion of our meeting today, item 4, the 2024-2025 Legislative Assembly budget parameters. I'd like to introduce our next item, the budget parameters for the Legislative Assembly, by providing the committee with an overview of the Legislative Assembly fiscal year 2024-25 budget. I will be inviting the Clerk, Shannon Dean, to make further comments regarding specific elements of the budget parameters, after which I'm happy to open the floor to any questions or discussions that you may have.

By way of background, the Legislative Assembly current fiscal year budget is approximately \$76.7 million, consisting of three main components: the Legislative Assembly Office branches budget of \$31.6 million, MLA administration of \$36 million, and the caucus budgets of approximately \$9.2 million. I have had preliminary discussions with the Legislative Assembly Office administration to plan for a number of increases based on 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 and posted on the committee website.

In our discussion today we will see three main cost drivers influencing the proposed budget changes. As we all know, Alberta has experienced a level of inflation that is impacting our operational costs, which will be reflected in our budget. Alberta public service cost-of-living adjustments will impact our caucus, constituency, and branch staffing budgets, and last, we have a number of proposals to address special funding requirements and improvements in our organization's operations.

I would like to start with an estimate of the number of hours the House is expected to sit during the fiscal year. It is assumed that the House will sit for 78 sessional days with an average of 30 hours per week, a total of 20 weeks, and 102 committee meetings averaging three hours per meeting, or 306 total hours.

As I mentioned, Alberta has experienced a certain level of inflation, and the Legislative Assembly Office is no exception. Thus, we propose to apply an inflationary factor to our operational costs across the Legislative Assembly budget. That is for constituency office funding, MLA administration, and the Legislative Assembly Office branch budgets.

Members, you may be aware that the LAO parallels and is consistent with the Alberta public service compensation plans for opted-out and excluded nonmanagement and management employees, including cost-of-living adjustments. As a reminder, staff compensation consists of salaries as well as benefit components, and the Clerk will walk us through how the LAO plans to carve out budget to make sure that these changes stay in lockstep with the Alberta public service compensation adjustments.

With respect to MSA and caucus budgets factors will be applied to the labour component of these budgets such as the MSA staffing component indicated in the constituency service orders RMSC 1992, c. C-1 1(3)(a)(ii), and approximately 70 per cent of caucus budgets for staffing will be updated to reflect pay and merit adjustments for those eligible.

Before asking Shannon to provide more detail, I will briefly list a number of proposals that address operational improvements and special funding requirements. Let me start with the work being done to examine member compensation benefits and allowances. Last month the committee struck a Members' Services Compensation Benefits and Allowance Review Subcommittee, which has now retained an independent consultant to report on specific areas of focus. Upon receiving the report, the subcommittee will provide advice and recommendations to this committee. Since the subcommittee has been asked to make recommendations no later than January 31, a meeting of this committee will be called in February to consider the budget impacts of those recommendations.

9:40

With respect to the members' services allowances a 5 per cent inflation factor has been applied to operational portions of the MLA administration expenses. A \$144,000 adjustment has been made to reflect these increases in electors as well as a \$12,000 adjustment made to reflect an increase in the provincial population. Caucus budgets will be adjusted to reflect a 5 per cent inflation factor and a 3 per cent merit increase for eligible managers and 4 per cent for eligible staff.

Next, a contingency of 5 per cent has been included to accommodate any future general market adjustments to the compensation budget for adjustments to management and opted-out, excluded nonmanagement employees of the Legislative Assembly. I'll ask Shannon to review the contingency in further detail shortly.

Members will also be aware that there is a legal requirement for the Electoral Divisions Act that an Electoral Boundaries Commission be established in the forthcoming fiscal year to make proposals to the Legislative Assembly as to the area, boundaries, names of the electoral divisions in Alberta. An amount of \$1.5 million is included in this budget to address cost pressures driven by public meetings, advertising, travel, and information technology requirements.

As outlined in last year's approval budget parameters, the LAO identified a need to update the HRS, payroll, financial, and accounting systems to a more contemporary integrated ERP system. Shannon will report on the number of project milestones that have been achieved in this year. She will present the fiscal year 2024-25 budget impacts to the projects, and she will speak to future operational budget impacts driven from annual maintenance, licensing, and support costs for the ERP.

As members know, a bill was presented last year that will provide for our security staff to have peace officer status. This branch will

require an additional \$393,000 in new funding for costs related to staff, screening equipment, and constituency office security visits.

There are a number of other adjustments that are included in the budget parameters document that you were provided. The budget requests for corporate services, interparliamentary relations, Parliamentary Counsel, visitor services are all listed in the document. Interparliamentary relations will require an additional \$40,000 in one-time funding as Alberta will be hosting the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association regional seminar in 2024.

In summary, not including the amount for the Electoral Boundaries Commission, this year's overall budget requests are approximately \$5 million. Three-quarters of the amount are pertaining to staffing costs to parallel the Alberta public service opted-out and excluded nonmanagement and management employees, and the remaining 25 per cent of the increase is to the Legislative Assembly Office proposals on the recommendation of operational improvements. Overall, the budget requests amount to approximately a 6.5 per cent increase to the Legislative Assembly Office budget.

Before we open the table for discussion, I'd like to call upon Shannon Dean, Clerk of the Assembly, to provide further information on compensation-related factors in consideration for this budget and an update with respect to the ERP. Shannon.

Ms Dean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Members, I want to speak to you briefly about two items: first, the employee market adjustment contingency; and secondly, where we're at with respect to the ERP project.

First, the fiscal year 2024-25 budget parameters include a 5 per cent contingency to accommodate cost-of-living adjustments to the management and opted-out, excluded nonmanagement employees of the Legislative Assembly that will parallel whatever is decided with respect to the Alberta public service. While we expect this contingency to be applied to the budgeted amount for staffing costs, we carved it out as a special funding requirement to avoid unnecessarily increasing the various budgets. We will come back to you in the new year with the dollar amount of this contingency reflected in the budget for your consideration.

In terms of where we are with the enterprise resource planning project, as the Speaker outlined, we've been working on this project for a little over a year and a half to update our HRS, payroll, financial, and accounting systems to a contemporary ERP system. Since this committee last met, two significant milestones have been achieved. This past May we launched a mobile self-serve portal, and I'm sure you've all had some exposure to it. It facilitates members' expense submission and provides all users with access to pay, benefit, vacation, and attendance information. In October the LAO completed a search to select a new human capital management and payroll system. This service offers talent acquisition capability, compensation, payroll, performance management, time and attendance, workforce management analytics, employee training as well as other human capital management tools.

We still have some work to do with respect to the ERP, but we are still sticking with our December 2024 completion date. We will implement the new human capital management system with our new accounting solution and all of the other modules and tools needed to complete the comprehensive ERP system. What we are asking for is an additional \$200,000 for the fiscal year 2024-25. That will bring the total ERP budget to \$1.7 million. We will keep all members apprised as to our progress with respect to the various milestones on this project.

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

If I can take this opportunity to thank members of the LAO for their work on the ERP project – it continues to deliver results that I

believe are making things better for members, in particular our ability to file claims and communicate, all through our mobile device. I know I have personally appreciated those abilities, and I have heard the same feedback from other members and also to thank the Legislative Assembly Office staff for your work in the preparation of the parameters document. I look forward to your ongoing commitment to our organization with respect to the production of budget documents as we move through.

I'm happy to open the floor for any questions. I believe the presentation was quite thorough, but if there are any questions, I'm happy to take those from members now. Mr. Getson.

Mr. Getson: Just one item here on the security. Given the current events taking place recently with Saskatchewan, et cetera, I'm not sure where we landed at, Chair, on either tasers or sidearms or increasing some of the training. Is that part of it for our staff? Again, if we are considering that, I'm strongly supportive of making sure that our members have the tools and the services and the training they need to make sure that not only we as legislators are safe but the general public going forward.

The Chair: Yes. What I would say is that part of the request of the \$393,000 for security services includes additional resources and tools for our staff to have at their disposal. With respect to the legislation that passed the Assembly approximately a year ago, the regulatory work that is required for them to become peace officers, all of the agreements and MOUs that need to be signed between the Speaker's office, the Minister of Justice, the sheriffs, EPU, and other law enforcement bodies are, I would say, in the final stages of being concluded, which is why the additional request has come forward for these resources now so that we can deliver that in the upcoming fiscal year.

I might also say – and I have said it on the record both here and in the public space – that the Sergeant-at-Arms is continuing to go through a significant security review in light of events that we've seen in other jurisdictions, in particular in Saskatchewan. Over the short term I believe that we will see some changes with respect to access to the building, but I am hesitant to describe our security position at this point in time. Members will receive an update on that in the early part of the new year. Then we also will be undertaking other projects to look at, on a much larger scale, our security position and considering relocating entrances and access and egress to the building, et cetera. Some of those things are longer term, and some of them are short term. We will deliver on a number of security-related issues in the early part of the new year.

Are there other questions? David.

9:50

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thanks. I was just curious about the special funding requirement part of this budget for the Electoral Boundaries Commission, \$1.5 million. I just can't remember: is that the regular way in which we fund the Electoral Boundaries Commission, through the LAO? I'm just curious what the money is going to be used for. It's quite a lot, right? It's, like, 20 per cent of this whole budget ask.

The Chair: Thank you. Yes, it is the usual way, just in the same way that elections are funded through the Legislative Assembly Office and not the GOA, to keep the appropriate separation between those organizations. So, yes, it is the usual way. I can't speak to or I can't remember the previous amount, if it also was \$1.5 million or if there was an increase, and it is spread over the two years. It is the same as it has been done in the past, and the Chief Electoral Officer actually co-ordinates the expenditure of those resources.

Largely, it will depend on how many public meetings they elect to have once the commission has been appointed, and of course the opposition and the government have their respective appointees. The

chair is prescribed in legislation as to who that person can be. Once all of those things take place, which can't actually happen until next year – but, obviously, we need to be planning for it for now.

Mr. Eggen: Right. Okay.

I think that answers my other question, which is: who actually administers the money? It's the Chief Electoral Officer. Is that what you said?

Ms Dean: If I can clarify, we support a lot of the functions of the commission. For example, I believe Aaron served as an assistant with the last commission, and our committee staff, our communications staff also help support the work of the commission.

The Chair: The mapping, IT, all of that and the work of the commission are delivered by the Chief Electoral Officer, though.

Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Yes. Thank you, Chair. Throughout the document there's reference to inflationary factors, CPI of 5 per cent. I guess the Clerk has identified that as a contingency rate that will be adjusted based on government determinations reflective in their departments. My question is: wherever we see that 5 per cent rate in this document, are we expecting that that will be solidified at a later date throughout? Like, under LAO branch budgets it looks like a general inflationary factor of 5 per cent will be applied, and then further down we see where it's identified that a CPI factor of 5 per cent will be applied to MLA administration operations, and under caucus budgets a 5 per cent CPI assumption. I guess I just need clarity that, once that figure is solidified, that gets reflected in all the references within this budget document.

Ms Dean: If I may, Mr. van Dijken, just clarify that there's an inflationary factor that's applied to the operational elements of the LAO budget. That's different than the cost-of-living adjustment, that we are estimating at 5 per cent with respect to the opted-out and excluded management employee group. The inflationary factor: we're estimating at 5 per cent, and that's applied to the operational components of the various budgets.

Mr. van Dijken: If I may, Chair.

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mr. van Dijken: Then, if it's being actually applied, I'm a little bit curious as to that 5 per cent figure, how that has been determined to be applied in this budget.

Dr. Ludwick: Mr. van Dijken, it's Dave Ludwick at the Legislative Assembly Office. The figures that we selected for the 5 per cent are based on what we saw for Alberta inflation over the last 12 to 18 months or so. Alberta and the rest of Canada, as you probably have read, have seen significant inflation in the last 12 to 18 months, so based on that, we made an estimate as to what we think should be applied for operational costs. That's the figure that we have arrived at.

The Chair: Are there other questions?

Mr. Rowswell: The MSA, with the increase in electors, is \$144,000 divvied amongst all the constituencies, I guess. And then the \$12,000 is due to increase in population. What's the difference there, and how is that determined?

Mr. Joy: The electors are those who can actually vote, right? And population is just the increase in population. It would include everybody that resides in Alberta.

Mr. Rowswell: So that's just divvied up based on specific constituencies.

Mr. Joy: Correct.

Mr. Rowswell: That is how it would be determined.

Mr. Joy: We have numbers for changes within each riding for electors and population.

Dr. Ludwick: And, Mr. Rowswell, just so you know, in the MSA calculation both those factors are in the math. There's a need for an updated number for electors as well as an updated number for the population. There are two different numbers there.

Mr. Rowswell: Thanks.

Mr. Getson: Just two quick items here. The \$10,000 in funding for LAO branch-wide employee recognition and cultural commitment initiatives: could you speak a little bit on what the cultural initiative commitments are?

Then the second part is on the financial branch requesting the accounting officer position. Is that a new position in its entirety, or is it an additional accounting officer?

Ms Dean: It's an additional FTE.

In terms of the culture commitments I'll ask Dave to supplement, but we're just looking at some initiatives to enhance employee recognition, and Dave is leading that committee.

Dr. Ludwick: Mr. Getson, you might be familiar with – last year the organization participated in the Great Place To Work survey in order to understand where we were in terms of a great place to work. This past year we also, for the second time, conducted that same survey, and we were able to achieve the milestone of being certified as a great place to work. In the process of reviewing our staff feedback, we added two additional culture commitments to the two that were there in the prior year. So the \$10,000 here, that we're bringing forward, is to help support some of the staff recognition, appreciation, and recognition, diversity, inclusion, and so forth, activities relating to supporting that work.

Mr. Getson: With the additional items, what are they? Like, you've had two. What are the two additional items? What are you trying to target here?

Ms Dean: It's cross-branch collaboration.

Dr. Ludwick: So the two that were there before are diversity, inclusion; and appreciation and recognition. The third one was cross-branch recognition. Forgive me; I don't have the fourth one off the top of my head.

The Chair: I might just take a very brief moment to thank for the good work that the LAO has done with respect to becoming a great place to work. That recognition puts us in a very esteemed category across the country in recognizing a good employer and a good place to work.

One of the things that came out of that was the working group of employees on employee recognition. We do a couple of things throughout the year to recognize employees. One, we have a spring appreciation barbecue, where we get a couple of food trucks and play some yard games over a lunch hour. The resources are largely applied to activities like that.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. And it's not a large sum of value. It just jumps off the page of: okay; well, what are you doing? I appreciate the

explanation. It's not going to be, you know, a lengthy thing like a congressional probing or anything – don't think of it that way – but it's just literally kind of wondering what the initiatives were. What do we get for recognition?

The Chair: They're largely . . .

Mr. Getson: We're looking at cultural things, and cultural things jump off the page.

The Chair: Yeah. They're largely around group activities. Like, this past week we had a small reception on the main floor of the QE II Building, and we provided eggnog and coffee for our teams. We encouraged each department to decorate Christmas trees down on the main level of the QE II, and the Speaker had the opportunity of judging them. I would encourage you to check the creativity out, but it provided the ability for us to recognize those who participated in that.

10:00

Are there other questions?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call for a motion. Is someone willing to move the suggested motion that

(a) the Standing Committee on Members' Services approve the 2024-2025 budget parameters document for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta presented to the committee on December 13, 2023, as distributed and (b) direct the Legislative Assembly Office to prepare 2024-25 budget estimates in accordance with the budget parameters document.

Mr. Rowswell. Thank you.

Are there any further questions, comments, discussion, or concern?

Seeing and hearing none, all in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. Joining us virtually, in favour, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried and so ordered.

That brings us to item 5, members' compensation, benefits, and allowance crossjurisdictional review research. At our November 9 meeting the committee directed the Legislative Assembly Office to prepare a crossjurisdictional review of compensation, benefits, and allowance for federal, provincial, territory elected officials by December 11. The subcommittee received the information on December 5. The information is being reviewed by the subcommittee and Ms Cheryl Scarlett, the independent consultant hired by the Legislative Assembly Office to assist in the committee's review. Are there any further questions or comments with respect to this matter? It is for information purposes; there is no motion required.

Seeing or hearing none, the next meeting will be at the call of the chair, but you can anticipate that the subcommittee, for the benefit of the members, will meet in early January prior to receiving the final report, and I would anticipate that we will have a meeting towards the end of January to receive that information from the subcommittee.

That brings us to adjournment. Is someone willing to move to adjourn?

Mr. Sabir: So moved.

The Chair: It's good of you to get on the scorecard, Member Sabir.

All those in favour of adjournment, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no. That motion is carried and so ordered.

I wish all of you safe, happy holidays, and a Merry Christmas to each and every one of you. Have a wonderful day. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:03 a.m.]

