



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Legislative Offices

Thursday, September 24, 2015
9:04 a.m.

Transcript No. 29-1-1

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The 29th Legislature
First Session**

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND), Chair
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND), Deputy Chair

Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)
Kleinsteuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)

Legislative Officers

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Jill Clayton | Information and Privacy Commissioner |
| Del Graff | Child and Youth Advocate |
| Peter Hourihan | Ombudsman, Public Interest Commissioner |
| Glen Resler | Chief Electoral Officer |
| Merwan Saher | Auditor General |
| Marguerite Trussler, QC | Ethics Commissioner |

Office of the Chief Electoral Officer Participant

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| Drew Westwater | Deputy Chief Electoral Officer |
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Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Participant

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| Terri Davies | Director, Investigations and Legal Representation |
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Office of the Ethics Commissioner Participants

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| Lana Robins | Lobbyist Registrar and General Counsel |
| Kent Ziegler | Chief Administrative Officer |

Support Staff

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| Tracey Sales | Communications Consultant |
| Cheryl Scarlett | Director of Human Resources, Information Technology, and Broadcast Services |
| Janet Schwegel | Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i> |

9:04 a.m. Thursday, September 24, 2015

[Ms Woollard in the chair]

The Chair: Welcome to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. I'm Denise Woollard, MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek and chair of this committee.

I'd ask that members and those joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record, so we'll go around.

Mr. Dach: My name is Lorne Dach, MLA, Edmonton-McClung, deputy chair of the committee.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: My name is Jamie Kleinsteuber, MLA, Calgary-Northern Hills.

Ms Sweet: Heather Sweet, MLA for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. van Dijken: Glenn van Dijken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mrs. Scarlett: Cheryl Scarlett, director of human resources, information technology, and broadcast services with the Leg. Assembly.

Mr. Connolly: Michael Connolly, MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Cortes-Vargas: Estefania Cortes-Vargas, MLA for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Reynolds: Rob Reynolds, Law Clerk and director of interparliamentary relations at the Legislative Assembly.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: I would call on the members joining the meeting via teleconferencing to introduce themselves now, please.

Mr. Bhullar: Manmeet Bhullar, MLA for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Nixon: Jason Nixon, MLA for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Cooper: Nathan Cooper, Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, everyone.

Meeting materials were posted to the committee's internal website, but if anyone requires copies of these documents, please let our committee clerk know.

Before we turn to the business at hand, a few operational items. The microphone consoles are operated by the *Hansard* staff, and we're asked to keep all cellphones and BlackBerrys on silent and off the table as these can interfere with the audiofeed. The audio of committee proceedings is streamed live on the Internet and recorded by *Alberta Hansard*. Audio access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly website.

We're on to the next section, meeting participation via teleconferencing. Section 6 of the Legislative Assembly Act permits participation in a committee "by means of telephone or other communication facilities that permit all Members participating in the meeting to hear each other if all the members of the committee consent." For members' information the committee rooms are equipped to facilitate meeting participation via teleconferencing. The three members participating today via teleconference may not move a motion nor vote on any motion put forward in this respect until a motion is passed to agree to participation via teleconference.

So for the members to participate at this meeting, the committee must pass a motion unanimously to allow for teleconferencing today, or members may instead pass a motion to approve meeting attendance by telephone for the duration of a Legislature. I wondered about this, but this does not preclude the committee from determining that members' attendance in person at specific meetings is required.

Mr. Reynolds, is there anything you wish to add at this point?

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. No, I was just wondering if the committee members have any questions. Perhaps I could jump in there.

The Chair: It's all straightforward? Okay.

If a member would like to move that

for the duration of the 29th Legislature the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices permit committee members to participate in meetings via teleconference, now is the time. Anybody? All right. Glenn.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. I'd make that motion.

The Chair: Good. Just for a point of interest, seconders are not required for motions in committee. All in favour of that motion by a show of hands? Any opposed? No? Okay. Unanimous. Thank you.

All right. We're on to the agenda. Would a member move a motion . . .

Mr. Reynolds: Sorry, Madam Chair. I was just going to say that now the people on the telephone can participate fully.

The Chair: Yes. Okay. So that message is heard – I'm still not used to this – and they know that they can make motions and vote on motions.

Mr. Dach: A question if I may?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Dach: The motion that was moved and agreed upon was simply to allow members to participate by teleconference today only?

The Chair: No. For the duration.

Mr. Dach: For the duration. All right. I wanted to confirm it. Thank you.

The Chair: Good. Okay.

We're on to item 2 on the agenda, approval of the agenda. Would a member move a motion to approve today's meeting agenda, please?

Mr. Connolly: I'll move the motion.

The Chair: Now, do I call him Michael or Mr. Connolly?

Mrs. Sawchuk: Mr. Connolly.

The Chair: Okay. I need to keep this straight. Thank you.

Moved by Mr. Connolly that the September 24, 2015, meeting agenda of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices be adopted as circulated.

Mr. van Dijken: A question?

The Chair: Yes.

9:10

Mr. van Dijken: Just a question with regard to the peer review of the Auditor General: are we going to be covering that in this meeting also today?

Mrs. Sawchuk: Madam Chair, if I may.

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Sawchuk: The document that Mr. van Dijken is referring to is one that was posted on the internal committee website for members' information. I believe that the Auditor General would be addressing that document when he's next before the committee, probably during budget estimates, annual reports, that type of thing.

Mr. van Dijken: Fair enough.

The Chair: All right. I call the question on the motion to approve today's meeting agenda. All in favour? Thank you. All right. The motion is carried.

Okay. We're on to item 3, committee orientation. The mandate and committee support are the first part. The Legislative Offices Committee's mandate relates to the six officers of the Legislature, responsible for seven offices. We have the Auditor General, the Chief Electoral Officer, the Child and Youth Advocate, the Ethics Commissioner, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and the Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner.

The committee's mandate includes the review of business plans and reports of the officers of the Legislature as well as the review and decision on the officers' operating budgets. The committee annually reviews officers' compensation and considers their terms of office and requests for reappointment. The committee is also responsible for contracting with an independent auditor to complete an annual audit of the operations of the office of the Auditor General. Reports of the officers, including annual reports and special reports, stand referred to the Legislative Offices Committee, Standing Order 55.01, and the committee may meet to review reports or to consider other matters such as proposed statute amendments or delegations of authority brought forward by the officers.

The committee is supported in its work as required by Mr. Rob Reynolds, Law Clerk and director of interparliamentary relations; Mrs. Cheryl Scarlett, director of human resources, information technology, and broadcast services; and our committee clerk, Mrs. Karen Sawchuk.

Mr. Reynolds, do you want to add anything at this point?

Mr. Reynolds: Once again, it may be easier just to respond to any questions that people might have about the mandate of the committee. I think you've covered everything in broad strokes. It's a bit like: you have to get involved in it before you perhaps see the outlines of the jurisdiction.

As the chair said, a function of this committee is to review and ultimately approve budgets for the officers of the Legislature. Those budgets, once passed – we call them estimates – are provided to the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Finance for inclusion in the estimates. They aren't amended after they leave this committee. The Legislature has delegated the authority over setting the estimates for the officers to this committee.

That occupies a fair amount of time along with, you know, the comings and goings of officers, as it were, because their terms of office are staggered. I mean, obviously, they don't all end at one time, so there's always that to consider. But when there is a vacancy for an officer and there is a competition, that's usually operated, if you will, by a special committee that we refer to as a search

committee, on which some of you may or may not sit. I just wanted to tell you that. If you think, "Gee, what happens if we're looking for an officer? Who does that?" usually there's a special committee.

Anyway, I'll stop there unless there are any questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. Good.

Mr. van Dijken: One question.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. van Dijken: Just a question with regard to documentation of these meetings: where can we go to find minutes of previous meetings or documentation of previous meetings? That would be helpful for me.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Actually, Madam Chair, the minutes are not on the website, but we can provide you with copies of those.

Mr. Reynolds: Yes. But the transcripts are.

Mrs. Sawchuk: There are the transcripts as well, the meeting transcripts. So via the Assembly website there's the committees' link, and you can get transcripts of every meeting going back.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. Fair enough.

Mrs. Sawchuk: But the minutes are a very shortened version of what occurred.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you.

The Chair: You know, I wasn't sure how much time it took between the meeting and its being available online, but I know I got transcripts from all the meetings last year.

Mrs. Sawchuk: It's within a few business days or a week.

The Chair: Okay. Good.

The next item has to do with general meeting schedules, talking of meetings. Everybody should have been able to get a copy of that. That's just an overview of the issues that are dealt with by the committee and a general meeting schedule, which is proposed for information purposes. It's got the late summer, early fall, late fall, winter, as required, and there's a lot of "as required." So, everybody, have a look at those.

Mrs. Sawchuk: It's just for information.

The Chair: Yeah, for information. I mean, it's one of those things that I think – we'll get to everything through the year; we just have to figure out when we're going to get everything covered.

Any questions about the general meeting schedule? We'll be talking about the next meeting of the committee before we leave today.

Okay. The third part of the orientation is temporary substitutions. That's under Standing Order 56(2.1), and that outlines the process for substitution of committee members, just if anybody wasn't sure of that.

A temporary substitution in the membership of a standing or special committee may be made upon written notification signed by the original Member and filed with the Clerk and Committee Chair, provided such notice is given not less than 24 hours prior to the meeting.

Once you know it, it's straightforward. I think that maybe a few people weren't sure of that standing order.

When substitutions occur, it is the responsibility of the original committee member to ensure that the substitute has been provided

with all the necessary meeting materials. Members of the Legislative Assembly who are not committee members or official substitutes may attend and participate in the meetings, but they may not vote or move motions.

Again, Mr. Reynolds, anything I missed there? Anybody have any questions on that?

Cortes-Vargas: I'm just curious: are there any restrictions on the temporary substitutions?

Mr. Reynolds: Sorry?

Cortes-Vargas: Any restrictions on the temporary substitutions?

Mr. Reynolds: I know you must have a scenario in mind, but I'd say, generally speaking, no. Usually you don't substitute in cabinet ministers; it would be another member.

Cortes-Vargas: I think their availability would probably be limited, too.

Mr. Reynolds: Yeah. I mean, generally speaking, it's just that we need notice. The member who's not going to be there and is going to substitute someone has to sign something, has to provide notice so that we know that they agree to it. Hopefully, the person they're substituting in knows and agrees, too. That's about it, really.

Cortes-Vargas: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Oh, yes. A question on the phone line.

Mr. Bhullar: My question is: Rob, is there something that actually states in legislation that substitute members cannot move motions or vote?

9:20

Mr. Reynolds: No, no. I'm sorry. Substitute members can certainly move motions and vote. I think that perhaps what the chair was referring to was members who aren't part of the committee. Members who just come and attend the meetings without belonging to the committee cannot move motions or vote, which makes sense when you think about it because if you vote, then what would be the point of membership on the committee? But, certainly, temporary substitutes have all the, as it were, rights and powers of the member for whom they're substituting.

Mr. Bhullar: Yeah. Okay. That's good. That was my understanding, so I was a bit confused when that was said.

Mr. Reynolds: Sorry. I was just going to say that Standing Order 56...

Mr. Bhullar: That allows for that?

Mr. Reynolds: Yes. For those following at home, it's suborders (2.1), (2.2), (2.3), (2.4), also interesting, and (2.5).

Mr. Bhullar: Perfect. Thank you.

Mr. Reynolds: Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Are there any more questions about that? I'm sorry if that wasn't clear. I'm still getting up to speed on that. But I see that if somebody came in late and didn't get their forms filled out on time, then they wouldn't be able to vote or move motions. They could sit in as a substitute but not an official substitute; that's my understanding now.

Mr. Reynolds: Well, they could attend the meeting. Any member can attend any meeting. It's just that if you're a substitute, you have to provide 24 hours' notice, and we would ask – just another note. But let's say that the meeting is on Monday. If you could get that in on Friday, that would be appreciated because people may not be checking their e-mails on Sunday.

Thank you.

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Okay. We are moving right along. We're on to item 4 on our agenda. That is the 2015-2016 approved budget estimates for the officers of the Legislature, and the first item is the office of the Ethics Commissioner's revised 2015-2016 funding request. I'd like to welcome Ms Robins and Mr. Ziegler from the office of the Ethics Commissioner, who will be presenting the funding request on behalf of that office.

We'll do a quick round of introductions before we start, and then they can begin, okay? I'm Denise Woollard, MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek and chair of this committee.

Mr. Dach: Lorne Dach, deputy chair of the committee, MLA for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Jamie Kleinsteuber, MLA, Calgary-Northern Hills.

Ms Sweet: Heather Sweet, MLA for Edmonton-Manning.

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

Mr. Connolly: Michael Connolly, MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Cortes-Vargas: Estefania Cortes-Vargas, MLA for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: I'm very sorry. Could the people at the end of the table state their names for the record, please?

Ms Robins: Lana Robins.

Mr. Ziegler: Kent Ziegler.

Mrs. Scarlett: Cheryl Scarlett, Leg. Assembly human resources, IT, broadcast services.

The Chair: Okay. Our people on the phone: please, could you introduce yourselves?

Mr. Cooper: Nathan Cooper, MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Nixon: Jason Nixon, MLA for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Bhullar: Manmeet Bhullar, Calgary-Greenway.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

All right. I'm going to turn it over to you.

Office of the Ethics Commissioner

Mr. Ziegler: Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee. As we introduced ourselves, I am the chief administrative officer for the Ethics Commissioner of Alberta, and Ms Robins is our Alberta lobbyist registrar and general counsel as well. Before we begin, on behalf of Commissioner Trussler please

accept her sincere regrets for not being here personally. She had a previous commitment that she could not get out of.

We'd like to start by expressing our appreciation for being granted this opportunity to come and explain our request for additional funding to you today. We do recognize that this request is coming at a very unfortunate time given our fiscal environment and the challenges facing the Alberta economy in the year ahead.

As you've read in our request, we are seeking approval for some additional funding to rebuild our lobbyist registry and database. The current system is based on Lotus Notes technology, which is both outdated and inefficient. In January of this year our former lobbyist registrar moved on to new challenges, so among my other duties I took over the day-to-day functions of being the lobbyist registrar and began working intimately with the system. Then in April we were able to recruit Lana, and she took over the reins as the new lobbyist registrar. In that time, while the commissioner and I knew that the system had its shortcomings, we had no idea how bad it was.

Over these last nine months both Lana and I have worked hard to try to fix the system, and we continue to spend hours working out little bugs and quirks in the system with our IT provider. It seems that we fix one issue, and that causes something else in the coding to break, or some new glitch pops up. It's an endless cycle of problems. We had hoped that we could fix the system sufficiently to carry us for a couple more years, but the more we dig into the system issues, the more we realize that the problems cannot be fixed and that our actions are only stopgap solutions.

These technical issues also impact lobbyists. They are simply trying to obey the law and complete their registrations, but they run into problems with the system, and that frustrates them as well, as they can't update their registrations easily or in a timely fashion. This makes the system less reliable and useful to the general public as well.

Our current system is limping along, and we are doing and will do our best to make do with what we have. However, our maintenance costs are starting to escalate more and more as we try to maintain and fix this old technological engine. As a small office the amount of time spent working through technical issues that shouldn't exist in the first place does have an impact on our workload. It takes valuable time away from other activities which we should be spending more time on such as enforcement and monitoring lobbyist activities.

As we mentioned in our request, we had flagged the need for a new system at last year's Leg. Offices Committee as we knew the system was nearing end of life. We had planned to put out an RFP over the summer and see what came back in terms of cost and then incorporate that into our '16-17 budget request, that we will be making soon. At the time we estimated \$200,000 for a system rebuild; however, as I will explain shortly, that is clearly an underestimate.

Recently Saskatchewan passed a new Lobbyists Act, and over the summer they've been feverishly working on assessing their system requirements and have put out a public request for proposals to build a new system. They have done all the legwork in going to a public RFP and have since offered us an opportunity to partner with them on their venture. Partnering with them would allow us to cut down costs for both of us as we can share certain core set-up, infrastructure, development, and maintenance costs if we use the same system and provider. In total, we see an opportunity to save up to \$150,000.

We have also done a high-level review of other lobbyist systems with our counterparts across the country to see what they use, whether they are happy or not with their system, and whether we could possibly use their systems to save some money. Our research led us to conclude that their systems are either, one, not working

well, and they are planning to build new as well but not for some time; two, they have recently built a good new system, but there is no opportunity to cost share after the fact; three, they have a good system, but licensing or development costs are just simply too expensive or prohibitive for us to consider; or four, their system is not compatible with our legislation and our needs here in Alberta.

So Saskatchewan's offer seems the most worthy of pursuing, and we have explored that option. They are currently in the midst of reviewing proposals provided to them as part of their RFP. They have even offered us the opportunity to come and sit in on vendor demonstrations next week, which we have accepted. There is also a possibility that another provincial government may partner with Saskatchewan and us as well, which would also help to drive down some of the shared costs. What we are ultimately hoping for is that we can partner with Saskatchewan and we can agree with them on a system that suits both of our needs and possibly a third party's.

We anticipate that initial costs, from our perspective, will be in the \$275,000 to \$300,000 range. I believe that we have – but I could be wrong – the smallest operating budget in government. That said, we feel that we might be able to squeeze \$75,000 to \$100,000 or so out of our current budget by really watching our pennies carefully to cover some of these costs, but we will still need the additional \$200,000 to cover what we hope will be the high end of remaining costs. However, IT projects such as this are always difficult to forecast.

As Saskatchewan's needs will be somewhat different than ours, there will be modification costs to whatever system we choose, and those are very difficult to forecast at this early stage as well as we haven't even seen the vendors' demonstrations yet. Regardless, we will ensure that if we do go with Saskatchewan, the chosen system will have the capability to be revised down the road if there are changes to the Lobbyists Act. The bottom line is that the system needs to be replaced; not if but when. If we move now, we can take advantage of the Saskatchewan offer and save perhaps \$150,000 off the total bill. If you do see fit to grant our request and if we do pursue the Saskatchewan system, you can also be assured that Commissioner Trussler, Lana, and I all intend to bargain hard with the chosen vendor to get the best price possible. We both know, we all know many vendors artificially inflate proposal pricing simply because it is a government agency asking and they assume we don't watch our pennies, but we do, as evidenced by our coming in under budget last year by about \$85,000.

9:30

We do appreciate the fiscal challenges Alberta faces, and we'll continue to do our best with whatever system and resources we have. We just wanted to present this request as we saw a chance to save some money in the long run. We appreciate you allowing this time to give this background information.

Lana will now share a few thoughts of her own, and then we can take any questions you may have.

Ms Robins: Well, thank you for inviting us to be here today. It's definitely a pleasure for us to meet you in person. As you know, we're a very small office. There's the commissioner; Kent, our chief administrative officer; we have one executive assistant; and then myself as the lobbyist registrar and general counsel. As the lobbyist registrar part of my duties include reviewing and approving new lobbyist registrations and dealing with all inquiries from the public, including users who are experiencing technical difficulties with the system. I've become quite intimate with the lobbyist registry system since I started in April.

We have a searchable database, so the public can go onto our system and then do searches to review registrations. Our system is

also completely online, so there is no cost for lobbyists to do a registration. Because our system is completely online and we do have very limited office resources, we are completely dependent upon having a well-functioning IT system to ensure a well-functioning registry. Also, we're finding we don't have the resources to constantly deal with the technical issues that come up very often, and to properly conduct our mandate under the Lobbyists Act, we feel that having the system is very imperative.

I started in April, and I can say that since that time, in the last six months, approximately 30 to 40 per cent of my time has been spent dealing with technical issues, and that is a significant amount of time in terms of an online system. This includes answering calls and e-mails from users regarding technical difficulties they're encountering and ongoing communications almost daily with our IT person. It's a significant amount of time, which, with a better registry system in place, could be much better spent from an enforcement perspective and dealing with a lot of the other inquiries that come in.

As Kent has mentioned, we understand that these are indeed tough fiscal times. We know that budget funds are likely scarce, but we also do feel that Saskatchewan, which has newly implemented its lobbyist legislation, has presented us with a very real cost-savings opportunity, and we felt this was a significant enough opportunity to warrant us making a request for the Alberta government to allocate some funds towards us collaborating with them to also develop a new system for Alberta.

As Kent mentioned, Saskatchewan is well into their RFP process, and they have done much of the legwork already in having a consultant provide them with the report and proceeding with the RFP process. They've invited us to look at what they're doing, with a view to sharing the costs of developing a registry system model that would work well for both provinces. We understand that another smaller province may be interested, so there may be further opportunity to, again, share costs. We believe there will be a substantial savings in doing a cost-savings approach. In that Saskatchewan's legislation mirrors ours, we think that makes a lot of sense fiscally if each government could have a brand new registry for only a portion of the cost it would be if we were to go out on our own and pay for a brand new one to be developed from scratch.

You may be wondering what exactly is wrong with our current system. I've sort of alluded to the time that we are spending on dealing with the IT problems, and I thought it would be helpful if I discussed a few examples to give you a sense of the issues that we are dealing with on a day-to-day basis.

The system is based on technology called Lotus Notes, which is a very outdated programming system. We understand it's no longer even available in the marketplace. It often randomly glitches, continually creating errors not previously encountered, so it certainly keeps us on our toes with the sorts of errors that keep coming up that are new for us. They have to be dealt with one at a time manually and often involve contacting, e-mailing, phoning our IT person, and then he has to go in and manually amend or remove registrations from systems. It's a very time-consuming process in terms of dealing with the Lotus Notes system.

In terms of our technical support we have one IT person, who is out of the province, and this does create its own set of challenges. Because he is on his own, sometimes we get a quick response and other times we are having to wait for two or three days. Recently I was not able to access the network for a few days because we had a network access issue. Our IT person was away for a couple of days, so that created an issue for us. Because Lotus Notes is such a specific technical area, we do need his expertise to deal with these issues.

The public registry on its own is not very functional for searching purposes. If you go on to search, for example, recent registrations, it's only if you are showing subject matters. This is another one of the glitches that we have followed up on with our IT person. That would require change to coding, and it's not an easy change to make.

We're finding that there are comments coming from users that the website is not really all that searchable. It's clunky and outdated. The website itself is in need of updating, but with Lotus Notes, again, updating the website is no easy task. We do have to get our IT person involved to do that. So it's not easy for us to just go in and make changes. It's a very cumbersome process to do this.

One of the things that we're also doing is trying to revise the forms. Most of the forms in there are the initial forms that were started in 2009. They're in need of a lot of updating, but it's not easy for us to go in and make those changes. With Lotus Notes, again, we have to go in and get coding changes to make even simple registration forms, and if we do make changes to one section of the form, what we're finding is that it has a domino effect. We're finding a few days later or even a few weeks later we're getting many calls from users who are now encountering new errors not previously encountered because we made changes to the coding.

I hope I'm giving a sense, sort of a sample of some of the technical issues that we're dealing with and how cumbersome the system is and how difficult it is for us to deal with from an IT perspective.

We are proud of our legislation. We are one of the jurisdictions who has put it in, and we think that in order to support our legislation properly, we need to have a well-functioning IT system.

I do have quite a lengthy laundry list of other technical glitches that I could get into with further detail if you would like me to. I'm not sure about the committee's time. I would be happy to . . .

The Chair: I think that that's really good. I don't mean to cut you off, but I think you've given us a pretty good overview of what challenges you're up against. So thank you, Mr. Ziegler and Ms Robins.

Just before I thank you and send you off, does everybody have a copy – I forgot to ask you – of the September 11 letter from the Ethics Commissioner's office? It was posted on the internal committee website.

Are there any questions for Mr. Ziegler and Ms Robins?

Mr. van Dijken: Just one question. With the new system we see that we'd save time for Lana on all her IT issues, but would we also be able to drive down some of the IT service provider costs? You know, purchasing a new product, would those IT service provider costs possibly be reduced in a new system also?

Mr. Ziegler: I think that's what we're really kind of hoping for by partnering with another jurisdiction. They're going to customize a piece of software, and when there's a glitch, it will affect both systems equally. Both of us will share the cost of figuring out the solution, but then to implement and fix it should be cheap because we'll save half of that because we're not going on our own. I think we'll see some savings there. I think that's part of what we're hoping to see with sharing a system. They've got an IT problem, and they can fix it for two clients at the same time, so we expect that that should bring down the cost for fixing whatever issues they have or for whatever support that they give us as well.

The Chair: Any other questions?

Mr. Bhullar: I've got a question.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you. Thank you very much, by the way, for your presentation. It was very informative and factual and brief, which is helpful. You have said that there's currently no registration fee for lobbyists, so my question would be: if we were to make such an upgrade for the convenience that lobbyists enjoy, if the committee were to decide to move forward with this, is there some sort of a surcharge or a registration fee that could be established to help pay for the upgrade in exchange for the convenience that lobbyists now get to enjoy?

Mr. Ziegler: Thank you for your question. I'm not entirely sure whether we have the authority under our legislation to charge service fees for that, but if Mr. Reynolds would know . . .

Mr. Reynolds: Sure. Thank you. I just pulled it out. That doesn't mean I know it intimately, but you know, it's a good start having the act. I'm sure Ms Robins probably has a very good idea of what's in the act.

9:40

Ms Robins: Well, there is a \$150 registration fee if they file it manually, and the goal for that is that we do encourage them to go to online registration. We do not want to receive manual registrations. But I just returned from the lobbyists conference, and I can tell you that of the jurisdictions there, there is only one that is currently charging a fee to register, and they are looking at getting away from that with the goal to increase registrations and definitely encourage people to register.

The Chair: That answers the question well?

Mr. Bhullar: Madam Chair, can I ask a follow-up?

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Bhullar: What are the sheer numbers of registrations that you find that we have? How many, on average, new registrations do you get a month? That's number one. Number two, once somebody is registered, are they then required to file annual registrations or annual updates or anything? I guess I'm asking if there's a continued workflow with somebody after they've registered once. And number three, what proportion of registrations today come from a manual sort, and which proportion comes from online registrations?

Ms Robins: Okay. Currently we have several hundred active registrations. I can't be exactly specific as to the number. One of the downfalls of our current IT system is that we have no way of pulling statistical reports, so we literally have to go in and do manual counts, and the number is constantly fluctuating. We get new registrations.

Mr. Ziegler: I think at last count we had just under 300 consultant lobbyists and just under 300 org. lobbyists registered, but again that's flexing.

Ms Robins: Yeah. Then in terms of online versus manual we get zero manual. It is all online, I'm happy to report. In terms of the process it depends on what type of lobbyist they are. Consultant lobbyists have to file a registration within 10 days of entering into an undertaking. We have many consultant lobbyists with many registrations in the system because basically for every client they have to register within 10 days of entering into the undertaking. Organization lobbyists, once they register, have to file a semi-annual renewal every six months from that date, and then if there are any changes that occur in the interim periods, they have 30 days to go in and update that through a notice of change.

Mr. Ziegler: Does that address all your questions, Member Bhullar?

Mr. Bhullar: It does, yes. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Sweet: Thank you so much for your presentation. I just have a question around the collaboration between provinces. Looking at the integrity of the information that we will be registering on the system and then, of course, the background work that'll be done around keeping statistics and things like that, how are you maintaining that integrity when the system is built to ensure that the Alberta provincial information is secured within the Alberta province, that the two provinces don't somehow accidentally overlap and there are confidentiality issues?

Mr. Ziegler: I suspect what we would do is to have two servers or partition one server to have both server sites replicate to a different hard drive, basically. We'll have our own space on a shared server, or we'd get our own server to store the data. The other nice thing about our registry is that all the information in the registry is public information. It's really just a matter of people going in and they fill in the form. So the privacy issues aren't as big of an issue as one might expect because we don't have anything that's not public.

Ms Sweet: Okay. Then from the maintenance perspective, will it be a shared maintenance? You're speaking to the fact that we might be able to maintain costs by having that shared maintenance. Then how would that model look, I guess, in the question of people having access, then, to the system?

Mr. Ziegler: In terms of maintenance I'm not sure we're there yet, and that's kind of why we're interested to see the vendor presentations, just to see what they're offering and how they propose to kind of handle that and then see if there are any issues. I think that's something that we're still looking at, and if it doesn't look like it would work for us – that's one of the things that we're saying. If the system doesn't look good, we're not going ahead with whatever Saskatchewan chooses if we don't think it will serve our needs.

Ms Sweet: Thank you.

The Chair: Good. If that's all . . .

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Another question?

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Just a bit of a comment, and then – well, I guess more of a comment. If folks in the room could do us on the phone a favour just by identifying who is speaking, that would be super lovely. I would really appreciate that.

A further comment to the commissioner's office. I just appreciate the work that you've done on this project. I particularly appreciate your fiscal responsibility when it comes to the budget last year and the things that you've done to tighten the belt. Moving forward, if we could find ways to collaborate to be responsive to the fiscal realities that we all face, you know, I certainly am supportive of those types of collaborations so that we can make sure that we're getting the best value possible. The restraint that you've shown in the past gives me a lot of confidence that you will continue to show that restraint in the future. I appreciate that. I appreciate your presentation this morning.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Bhullar: Madam Chairman, I'm sorry; one more question if that's okay.

The Chair: Okay. One more. Then I think, Mr. van Dijken, that you've got a final question, do you?

Yes. Go ahead, Mr. Bhullar.

Mr. Bhullar: Okay. Thank you. My question is: by moving to a new system, will we be terminating our existing contract with our existing service provider early? If so, will that cause us any contractual financial obligations that we must pay out?

Mr. Ziegler: Thank you for your question. The last time I reviewed our contract – it's been some time. With our service provider we do go month to month, but we do also sign an annual agreement with him. I'm not sure, but I believe that the last time we signed with him, we did leave a clause in there that we could terminate with 30 days' notice. So it would not be extensive.

The Chair: Thank you. Good.

Mr. Bhullar: That's good to hear.
Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken, I think you've got a last question.

Mr. van Dijken: That was part of my question, but also my question is with regard to the time frame of implementation. Sometimes these things are staged over a couple of years or so. Do we have any idea how that'll all fall, or we don't know that until the product is introduced?

Mr. Ziegler: I think that what we're looking at at this point is that if we were to go ahead and partner with Saskatchewan, we would be, actually, probably cautiously optimistically hoping for a new system by spring, not something that would take years to do, maybe spring or early summer. Saskatchewan needs to get theirs up and running legislatively. I know they're anxious to move forward quickly, and if we're going with them, we would follow suit. I would say spring or early summer.

Mr. van Dijken: Good.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Thank you so much for your presentation and for answering the committee's questions. You'll be informed of the committee's decision in writing within the next few days.

Mr. Ziegler: Thank you.

Ms Robins: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll have just a short break while our next guest is set up.

Just for the committee's information, we'll discuss the various requests here later in the meeting, okay? Good.

[The committee adjourned from 9:49 a.m. to 9:50 a.m.]

The Chair: Are we ready? I'd like to welcome Mr. Graff, Child and Youth Advocate, and Ms Davies, the director of investigations for that office, to the meeting.

We'll do a quick round of introductions before we start. I'm Denise Woollard, MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek, chair of this committee.

Mr. Dach: Lorne Dach, deputy chair, Edmonton-McClung.

Ms Sweet: Heather Sweet, MLA for Edmonton-Manning.

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

Ms Davies: Good morning. I'm Terri Davies. I'm the director of investigations at the office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

Mr. Graff: Good morning. I'm Del Graff, the Child and Youth Advocate for the province.

Mr. Connolly: I'm Michael Connolly, MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Cortes-Vargas: I'm Estefania Cortes-Vargas, MLA for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Reynolds: I'm Rob Reynolds, Law Clerk and director of interparliamentary relations.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Jamie Kleinsteuber, MLA for Calgary-Northern Hills.

The Chair: And our people on the telephone, would you introduce yourselves, please?

Mr. Cooper: Nathan Cooper, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Nixon: Jason Nixon, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Bhullar: Manmeet Bhullar, Calgary-Greenway.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, members should have a copy of the September 21 letter from Mr. Graff, which was posted to the internal committee website.

Mr. Graff, if you would like to go ahead with your presentation, people can get information as we go.

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate

Mr. Graff: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning and thank you for providing me with the opportunity to talk with you. I'm joined by Terri Davies, who has some information from our investigations division that she can provide if some clarification is needed. The purpose for my attending your meeting this morning is to discuss the office of the Child and Youth Advocate's 2015-16 budget. In particular, I'd like to discuss our need for \$275,000 to provide funding for a full year to support five additional full-time equivalent positions that were approved in July of 2014. In addition to discussing our 2015-16 budget, I would like to talk with you about the work of our office both in terms of the services that we provide and the expansion of our responsibilities since we became an independent office of the Legislature. Before doing this, however, I'd like to quickly provide you with a summary of the discussions to date regarding our 2015-16 budget request.

Our 2014 revised budget was made up of the original 2014-15 budget of \$12,502,000 plus a supplementary estimate of \$730,000, and that totals \$13,232,000. The supplementary estimate of \$730,000 was requested and approved to address the amendment to the Child and Youth Advocate Act giving our office the authority to investigate deaths related to children and youth that had previous involvement with the child intervention system. At that time we told the committee that we required additional resources to fully support this work in 2015. On December 5, 2014, we presented our 2015-16 budget of \$14,502,000 to the committee for consideration.

Subsequently, on December 16 the committee approved our 2015-16 budget in the amount of \$12,967,360. The 2015-16 budget that was approved by the committee represented a 2 per cent reduction from our 2014-15 revised budget. It did not address the full funding for the five positions that were approved in July of 2014.

On February 10, 2015, I appeared again before the standing committee requesting that they reconsider their decision. My request was to provide only the \$275,000 needed to support for five more months the five additional full-time equivalent positions that were approved in July 2014, which would make those positions fully funded. The approved 2015-16 budget reflected only seven months of the salaries, benefits, and related costs for the five new positions that were approved in July 2014. The committee at that time did not approve my request.

I want to talk briefly about the work of our office and the changes to our responsibilities since the proclamation of the Child and Youth Advocate Act in April of 2012. I want to emphasize to you that our office provides direct services to vulnerable young people throughout this province. Individual advocacy services serve approximately 2,500 young people every year. Legal representation for children and youth provides about 1,100 legal appointments annually, which directly serve about 1,600 children each year. Adding to that is our engagement and education group, who provides approximately 200 presentations annually, the majority of which are provided directly to young people or to the workers who serve them directly. I want to be clear with this committee that we are a direct-service provider and that we advocate for some of the most vulnerable children and youth in the care of this province.

I now want to turn your attention to the expansion of responsibilities of our office for investigative reviews since the Child and Youth Advocate Act was proclaimed. The Child and Youth Advocate Act has had two amendments since it was proclaimed in April of 2012. Both of those amendments were related to investigative reviews. The first amendment, in November of 2013, allowed our office to investigate the serious injury or death of young people aged 18 to 22. This was an amendment that we requested and received support for from this committee. We did not seek additional funds for this change as we believed we could absorb the additional workload, and we did.

The second amendment, which came into effect in May of 2014, allows us to investigate deaths of young people who received child intervention services within a two-year period preceding their death. This amendment was recommended by the implementation oversight committee to the Minister of Human Services and to the government of Alberta. The second amendment was what led us to request support for additional funding in July of 2014.

To give you a sense of how our investigative review work has grown, I'll tell you about the change in the number of reports that we've received. In 2012-13 we received three reports of serious injury and 17 reports of child death, a total of 20 reports. In 2013-14, after the first amendment that was made to our legislation, we received 10 reports of serious injury and 25 reports of child death for a total of 35 reports. In 2014-2015, after the second amendment, we received eight reports of serious injury and 63 reports of child death for a total of 71 reports. In 2015-16 so far, to the end of August, we've received one report of serious injury and 24 reports of child death, a total of 25 reports just so far this year. Of the reports that we received last year and so far this year, 46 reports have come from the office of the Chief Medical Examiner and relate to young people who had previous involvement with the child intervention system within the past two years.

I trust that there's recognition of the work pressure that accompanies the repeated expansion of our mandate regarding child serious injury and death reviews. To go from 20 reports of child

serious injury and death in 2012-13 to 71 reports in 2014-15 is substantial. When you consider that our budget is comprised of 63 per cent manpower and related costs, 26 per cent for legal representation to children and youth services and related costs, and 11 per cent related to contracted services for investigations, special reports, file reviews, et cetera, we have limited capacity to absorb further manpower costs.

We've had to make some difficult decisions to address the 2 per cent reduction of \$265,000 and find the resources to continue to fund the shortfall of \$275,000 for salaries and the related costs for new staff positions. These two cost pressures alone add up to \$540,000 and represent almost 4.2 per cent of our budget, and that's before we address any other cost pressures in our budget.

Madam Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about this important matter. I hope I have conveyed the importance of the direct services provided by committed professionals in our office to many, many vulnerable young people in Alberta every day. I hope I've provided some additional clarity to this committee about the expansion of our mandate and additional work from the amendments to the Child and Youth Advocate Act in the past three years.

I am asking this committee to review its previous decision and approve our February 2015 request of \$275,000, to bring our 2015-16 budget to \$13,242,360. This funding will support our increased mandate by annualizing the salaries and related costs for the five new positions that had been approved in July 2014.

Thank you once again, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to meet with you today, and I'll be happy to respond to any of the questions from the committee.

10:00

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Graff.

Ms Davies, did you have anything to add? Okay.

Any questions?

Ms Sweet: Thank you for the presentation and for the work that the advocate does. I worked for children's services prior to being elected, so I worked quite closely with you on many files that I was a part of.

I guess I'm just wanting to get some clarity around the mandate of the Child and Youth Advocate in regard to some of the recommendations and reports that come out from your reviews that you're completing, looking at how the Child and Youth Advocate looks at those reports, fitting within the mandate of not just children's services or Human Services but all ministries. Maybe you can just clarify with the committee that the mandate isn't just specific to Human Services but is actually an expansion to other ministries as well.

Mr. Graff: Yes. Thank you for the question. Certainly, with respect to our investigative reviews our responsibility is to identify systemic issues that arise from those tragic circumstances regarding children and to make recommendations that will in fact improve the systems that serve children. Those recommendations aren't confined to the Ministry of Human Services. In fact, we've just released a report where we've made two recommendations to Alberta Health Services. We've made recommendations to other bodies as well. So we're not confined to the Ministry of Human Services at all. Our purpose is, in fact, to improve the services that vulnerable children receive in this province.

Ms Sweet: Further to that question, the reports that we have been seeing or that I've read have been in response to an issue, so it's been due to an investigation of some kind. I'm wondering if the Child and Youth Advocate will be looking at doing more of a

proactive response instead of a reactive response, so looking at: what are the themes that are consistently coming through some of these issues that are being presented, and how do we create proactive strategies to maybe prevent children coming into care or being exposed to some of these services? Is that something that your organization has looked at before, or is that in the mandate as well?

Mr. Graff: Yes, it certainly is in our mandate. We have a requirement to provide advice to government on any matters that affect children. A good example of that is that we did a special report on youth leaving government care, and one of the issues that came forward in that report was the need for mental health services as they transition into adulthood, that if they received them when they were younger, transitioning into adulthood with those supports.

In a proactive way we developed a report and had a symposium where we brought young people, decision-makers, and community agencies together to talk about: how can this take place, and how can we address this issue collectively? Out of that, there has been some action that was proactive in terms of anticipating a need and addressing it. So that's an example of how we do that.

There are a number of ways that we do that. Our public education and engagement folks do that on a daily basis. You could just relate it to the notion that when we educate young people that they have rights and that they're able to exercise those rights, there is an empowerment that comes with that that is a proactive and preventative activity.

Ms Sweet: Just one last question, and then I'm done. In regard to the role of the advocate being a legislative officer and not within a ministry, my understanding is that the advocate actually sits on the quality assurance committee, which reports directly to the minister. I'm just wondering how that relationship works while creating the autonomy of the advocate.

Mr. Graff: Yes. It's a question that has come up before, and it really relates to my role on the council for quality assurance, which is an internal committee of the Ministry of Human Services. It's intended to provide guidance to the ministry on improving the quality of child intervention services.

The requirement for my participation was part of the legislation that came forward with the proclamation of the Child and Youth Advocate Act, and our initial discussions were related to: how does that take place? How does an independent officer of the Legislature sit on a committee that reports to a minister?

One of the things that I was very clear about from the outset is that I'm the Child and Youth Advocate wherever I am, so if I participate on this committee, I participate as an independent Child and Youth Advocate. I'm not appointed by the minister. My presence isn't demanded by the minister; it's demanded by my legislation.

We have worked out the mechanics around: how do we deal with decision-making, for example, regarding child death reviews and some of those areas where responsibilities are mutual? We've set a course with the council for that to take place, so it has in fact not been a problem. We also had identified that if there is the potential for conflict of interest between my role and the council's, other council members, we would articulate what that looks like and, in fact, address it directly.

We have a Provincial Court judge on the council. We have other people who have the potential to be in a conflict of interest as well. It is something that for the council members we've worked out over I think about a three-year period, and it seems to work well.

The other thing I could say about the council for quality assurance is that when we do child death reviews, we develop terms

of reference that kind of guide our investigative review work. Prior to our developing an investigative plan, where we're, you know, developing terms of reference, we go to that committee to ask them if they have any input, any areas that we've missed, anything that we need to be aware of as we go forward. They've been very helpful because they're a diverse group of people with considerable expertise. They've been very helpful in that regard.

The Chair: Good.

Michael, and then if anyone else has a last question or two, we should move along.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair, if you can just put me on the speakers list.

The Chair: Yes, I will.

Mr. Connolly: Just a quick question. I don't know if this might be speculation, but what has been the short-term result of this committee's previous decision to deny the Child and Youth Advocate proper funding?

Mr. Graff: We've had to make some adjustments to our allocations. One of the things that I told this committee – and the question had come up: if the funding isn't approved, what will you do? What I've said is that we will continue to meet our mandate. We would have to make some adjustments to our allocations, and we've done that. We've moved resources away from some of those things like training and professional development and quality assurance and moved them more towards those areas of requirement in terms of investigations.

That being said, I think it would be fair to say that our time frames for when we expect to be completing our tasks have slowed down.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cooper, go ahead.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Chair. I have a couple of quick questions here as well as a comment. You know, we're talking about a bunch of numbers that certainly should have been passed through the Assembly a significant time ago. Whether it was previous administrations or the current administration delaying the budget till after the federal election, this is a reminder that as legislators we need to be about the business of the province and doing it as quickly and as intentionally as possible.

I am certain that all officers of the Legislature would have liked to see some certainty when it comes to their funding, particularly given that the last provincial budget was passed, I believe, from memory, in April 2014. It certainly doesn't help our officers when we go through long periods of time with no certainty about their budgets. You know, I encourage the government of the day to do everything that they can to get back into the House and move on with the business of the province.

Having said that . . .

The Chair: Do you have a question, Mr. Cooper? Sorry to interrupt you.

10:10

Mr. Cooper: I certainly do.

Having said that, I have a question. I'll preface my question by stating that I am in full support of and that the Wildrose caucus has been a strong advocate of the work that the Child and Youth Advocate does, and it has in the past voted for the \$275,000 that we

speaking of today. In stating that I am in favour of ensuring that those five additional staff people can provide such important service to the province and to youth in the province, the question I have is: on page 8 of your submission, Mr. Graff, with respect to the increases in salaries in the personnel budget of \$328,000 as well as a cost-of-living adjustment of 2.25 per cent, which essentially works out to be a 5.25 per cent increase, in my estimation, at a time of fiscal restraint across the province and significant layoffs, was there any discussion to put a wage freeze on existing employees so that there would be some room in the budget to increase the total number of staff, or is that a decision that wasn't considered?

Mr. Graff: The decision with respect to the – I'm trying to think of the term that is applied when people are not at the top of their range.

An Hon. Member: In-range.

Mr. Graff: In-range salary increases. Those kinds of decisions and the decisions with respect to, you know, the overall 2 and a half per cent are decisions that are made for the entirety of the public service, and we follow suit with those decisions. One of the things that we struggle with is that sometimes those decisions have been made, but the funding to support them has not materialized. So while we had made the request that the funding be there as part of that \$14.5 million submission, in fact our resources got reduced by the 2 per cent from the previous budget. Those resources weren't there, but the obligations were still there, so that becomes a cost pressure for us. When I was talking earlier about the \$540,000, that only addresses part of the cost pressure. What you're referring to, Mr. Cooper, refers to some of the other cost pressures that we face.

Mr. Cooper: Can you clarify for me? This \$328,000 in in-salary increases, or the 3 per cent: when was that initial request made?

Mr. Graff: It would have been made with our submission on December 5, so our original submission for the 2015-16 budget.

Mr. Cooper: December 5, 2014?

Mr. Graff: That's right, and that would have been for our 2015-16 budget. We came to this committee at that point in time to get approval for our budget going forward.

Mr. Cooper: Understood.

The Chair: Okay. Does that answer your question?

Mr. Cooper: That'll be fine for now.

The Chair: Thank you.

Does anyone else have a question? No? Okay.

Thank you very much, Mr. Graff. We really appreciated hearing from you and having Ms Davies here, too. You'll be informed of the committee's decision in writing within the next few days. Thank you for answering all the questions as well.

Mr. Graff: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay. We'll have a short break, and then we'll have our next guest in.

[The committee adjourned from 10:14 a.m. to 10:18 a.m.]

The Chair: Okay. I'd like to welcome Mr. Resler – I hope I've got that right – Chief Electoral Officer, and Mr. Westwater, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, to the meeting.

We'll go around the table for a quick round of introductions. I'm Denise Woollard, MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek, chair of this committee.

Mr. Dach: Lorne Dach, MLA, Edmonton-McClung, deputy chair.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Jamie Kleinsteuber, MLA, Calgary-Northern Hills.

Ms Sweet: Heather Sweet, MLA for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. van Dijken: Glenn van Dijken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. Westwater: Drew Westwater, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer.

Mr. Resler: Glen Resler, Chief Electoral Officer.

Mr. Connolly: Michael Connolly, MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Cortes-Vargas: Estefania Cortes-Vargas, MLA for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Reynolds: Rob Reynolds, Law Clerk and director of interparliamentary relations.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: We have members on the phone. If you'd introduce yourselves, please.

Mr. Cooper: Nathan Cooper, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Jason Nixon, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

The Chair: That's it. Okay. Thank you very much.

Before we get started, I'd like to reiterate that the officers may bring forward proposed statute amendments for the committee's consideration. However, the committee does not have the mandate to approve amendments but may forward its recommendations to, in this case, the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Bhullar, if you would like to introduce yourself.

Mr. Bhullar: Yes. I'm here. Sorry. I got bumped out.

The Chair: Thank you. We'll take that as an introduction.

Okay. We have Mr. Resler here, the Chief Electoral Officer. Members should have a copy of Mr. Resler's letter of June 19 and the chair's response.

I'll now turn it over to Mr. Resler to explain the proposed amendments to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. The floor is yours.

Office of the Chief Electoral Officer

Mr. Resler: Good morning. It's a pleasure to be here this morning. Thank you for meeting with us to discuss the proposed amendments to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. Madam Chair, as referenced in your letter to me in July of this year, I am aware that the committee does not have specific authority with respect to the act, but I do appreciate this committee's agreement to discuss this matter.

I'm here today to discuss three items: first, to request your support of our amendment to move the boundaries commission's timeline ahead one year, which will allow our office the time required to implement new electoral boundaries prior to the 2019 provincial general election; second, to inform you of the impact on

our office if the current provisions of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act are followed; and finally, to advise you that I am consulting with Alberta Justice and Solicitor General to amend the legislation.

As you may be aware, the boundaries commission is appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council to address voter population shifts by redrawing the electoral division boundaries. The role of Elections Alberta is to provide advice, information, and assistance to the commission, and once the new boundaries are passed by the Legislature, we'll have a significant workload to implement these new boundaries.

Section 5 of the act states that a commission is to be appointed following every second general election to review the electoral boundaries. The 2015 provincial general election was the second election since the last commission. The act further states that we must wait at least eight years since the appointment of the last commission and no more than 10 years before appointing a new one. Because the 2015 general election was held one year earlier than scheduled, there is a direct impact on the timelines established for the boundaries commission.

If members wish to refer to the handout that was circulated, column 1 of the table lists the general activities of the commission and its reporting. Column 2 details the timelines for the 2009-2010 commission. If we look at the third column, titled Projection Based on Current Legislation, I provided information as far as projected timelines for the next commission using the current legislation and based on the commission timelines previously.

The earliest a commission can be established is in July 2017 because we have to wait the minimum of eight years. The committee would issue an interim and final report to the Legislature, and the new boundaries would be or may be approved by December 2018. This would provide our office with less than one month to implement the new boundaries prior to a spring 2019 provincial general election. Within that time frame we wouldn't be able to implement any changes. This means we wouldn't be able to provide political parties or candidates the required maps or updated lists of electors, nor would we be able to provide the poll books and have them prepared for election officials to conduct the vote. The condensed time frame would also impact the time available for candidate nominations to be held under the new boundaries.

Until the boundaries are approved by the Legislature, we're unable to hire returning officers as they're required to reside in their electoral division. So until we have boundaries, we're unable to hire the returning officers. Once hired, the returning officers will need to review and potentially redraw over 6,000 polling subdivision boundaries within those new electoral division boundaries, which are then drawn by our GIS mapping staff. We'd have to move approximately 2 and a half million electors into the correct boundaries and then also prepare the list of electors and maps for distribution, as I stated before, to the candidates and parties, generate the poll books, and do other general election preparations. We need at a minimum eight months to perform those duties.

10:25

If you look at the final column of the table, the proposed timelines, what we are proposing differs slightly from our original correspondence, that was sent to the committee in June. We are proposing that the commission be appointed by September 2016, which would result in a final report and approval by the fall of 2017. This will provide us the ability to hire returning officers in a timely manner, to perform a map and list review in spring 2018, to perform an enumeration in the fall of 2018, and to prepare for the spring 2019 provincial general election.

That ends my presentation. We'd be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any questions for Mr. Resler or Mr. Westwater?

Mr. Reynolds: I just want to point out to the committee – I realize that this will be discussed and voted on later – that while Mr. Resler and Mr. Westwater are here, it is unusual for the committee to consider a proposed amendment to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. I don't recall there ever being a similar request.

But, if I may, I think that the Chief Electoral Officer's office was wondering, if you will, how they could make their request, as it were, public in the sense of getting the approval of, you know, the Assembly's delegate, this committee, as it does with its own amendments to its parent statutes, the Election Act and Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. Really, I think he's trying, if I may, to respect the process that exists for other amendments even though there isn't a precedent with respect to this particular act. I mean, the alternative – once again I hope I'm not being too presumptuous – would have been just to go to the Minister of Justice and not to this committee. Am I stating your . . .

Mr. Resler: That's correct.

The Chair: Thank you. That provides more information. That's good.

Anyone with any questions?

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair, I would like to be on the speakers list.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. Mr. Resler, I appreciate your proactive presentation here this morning. Also, I appreciate your effort to respect the independence of your office by working through the committee. Thank you so much for that. A quick question for you: can you remind me again – and I know that I read it somewhere here in your report – when the last redesignation report was completed?

Mr. Resler: The last report was completed – it was approved by the Legislature in December 2010. The commission's original appointment was on July 31, 2009.

Mr. Reynolds: Sorry. It reported on July 24, 2010, I think.

Mr. Resler: Yeah. I think the final report to the Legislature was in June 2010.

Mr. Reynolds: Right.

Mr. Cooper: So the 10-year legislation requirement is based around the initiation of the commission or the presentation of the report?

Mr. Resler: The appointment, so from eight to 10 years following the . . .

Mr. Cooper: Okay. Given that the two elections were so close together and given that we're in significant economic turmoil, what is your opinion on actually delaying the commission until after the next provincial election, so early 2020 or late 2019, with the potential of actually pushing the commission back instead of pushing it up?

Mr. Resler: The main factor that influences that is the growth of the population in Alberta. One of the reasons for redistribution is,

you know, effective representation and balancing the equality of the voting power. We've had tremendous growth in Alberta. The population back in 2009 was about 3.6 million people, and we're probably at about 4.2 million now. That growth in the urban areas – I don't have population numbers. Let's say elector numbers. We go by electors. We've had, I think, in Calgary-South East growth of over 60 per cent. Edmonton-South West, Airdrie: there's some significant growth in some of these areas. That's a factor that you have to look at.

Mr. Cooper: When the previous commission reported to the Legislature, it's my assumption that it makes some guesses on population growth in certain areas and allows for some leeway there when it comes to the total number of voters. Are there currently – and this might just be opinion, not necessarily fact – significant differences in the total number of voters?

Mr. Resler: Strictly looking at voters – the legislation deals with population, so I always have to provide that to you. When we look at the difference in the number of electors, the lowest is just under 15,000 electors in Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, and the highest is Calgary-South East, which has just under 46,000, so it's triple the size. There are special considerations for some of the northern electoral divisions, but there definitely are variances.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Cooper: My last question. I'm sorry. Is there a limit to questions?

The Chair: It's usually one supplemental, but finish what you started. We'll be stricter from now on.

Mr. Cooper: I'm more than happy to go around the room. Perhaps Mr. Reynolds could correct me, but is this essentially the replacement for the estimates process, and as a result I should be able to have multiple questions?

Mr. Reynolds: I don't think this is in any way the estimates process.

The Chair: No.

Mr. Reynolds: As I perhaps indicated, this is a period where the Chief Electoral Officer and Mr. Westwater are here, and then the committee, as I understand it, will be considering three decision items after they depart, later in the agenda, so that's the time for discussion. As I understand it now, it's questioning, and in the past the chairs of this committee have limited the questioning so that things can move along in an expeditious manner and every member has an opportunity to speak.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. My very last question, then. The last time the commission reported, what was the total cost of that, and do you anticipate it to be similar in 2016?

Mr. Resler: The budget is through the Legislative Assembly.

The Chair: That's a separate question, I think. That doesn't have to do with what we're talking about today.

Do you have something to say, Mr. Reynolds?

Mr. Reynolds: I just had a very quick point that I would seek Mr. Resler's confirmation of. As I understand it – and he was perhaps too modest – I would think that in Alberta, with a rapid change in population over a short period of time, I believe the Chief Electoral Officer may be concerned about certain ridings falling within the

limits set both by the legislation and by the Supreme Court of Canada with respect to the size of ridings and how much they can depart from the average, as it were.

Would that be correct, Mr. Resler?

Mr. Resler: Correct.

Mr. Reynolds: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

If there are no more questions, then I think we really appreciate having you here. I'd like to thank you, Mr. Resler and Mr. Westwater.

Mr. Nixon: Madam Chair, I had one question.

The Chair: Oh. Yes.

Mr. Nixon: Similar to my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, really quick, I just understand the timeline, so my question would be: if the act was not amended, what would be your opinion on whether you would like to proceed under the eight-year timeline, or given that the act was not amended – and I know we're speaking hypothetically – would you prefer or do you think it would be wiser to proceed under the 10-year timeline?

10:35

Mr. Resler: As far as eight to 10 years, that's just a range of a time period after each second general election. So the time period is each second election, to begin with, within the eight- to 10-year period. If the legislation is revised and it stated that it can follow after a second election and go to a third election, that's something that we deal with, and we can make that work. The concern is whether, as Rob provided additional information on, that is in compliance with the legislation as it currently states. So that would be something that would have to be reviewed outside of my purview.

Mr. Nixon: So, then, just to follow up on that, if I'm understanding this right, no matter what, we need to amend it. So you're saying that we would need to amend – I understand it's not the committee that amends. But there would need to be an amendment to proceed earlier, or essentially, from your presentation, I'm gathering it would be almost impossible for you good people to do your work for the next election.

Mr. Resler: Correct.

Mr. Nixon: But for us to then extend it, it would still need an amendment either way. So either way there needs to be an amendment to the legislation in order to successfully do your role in the next election.

Mr. Resler: Correct.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, and thank you again, Mr. Resler and Mr. Westwater, for coming here today. We'll be following up in writing. We'll be taking our discussions today, the results, to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and copy it to you for your records.

Mr. Resler: I appreciate it. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Okay. If anybody needs a quick break, let me get sorted out for the next part of the agenda.

Now, if everybody is ready to go, we have the two funding requests for 2015-2016 presented by the office of the Ethics Commissioner and by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. Is a member prepared to make the following motion with respect to the funding request from the office of the Ethics Commissioner? And then we'll open the floor to discussion. So the motion is that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the request by the office of the Ethics Commissioner for an increase of \$200,000 to the office's estimates approved by the committee at its December 16, 2014, meeting, for a revised estimate of \$1,153,000 for the 2015-2016 fiscal year for transmittal to the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance by the chair.

Mr. Dach: I so move.

The Chair: Okay. Any discussion on the motion? No? Are we ready? On the phone line?

Okay. I'll call the question, then. All those in favour of the motion? All opposed? Good. The motion is carried.

Okay. We'll now look at the funding request from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. Would a member make the following motion with respect to the funding request from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate? And then I'll open the floor to discussion. So the motion is that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the request by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate for an increase of \$275,000 to the office's estimates approved by the committee at its December 16, 2014, meeting, for a revised estimate of \$13,242,360 for the 2015-2016 fiscal year for transmittal to the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance by the chair.

Mr. Connolly: I so move.

The Chair: Mr. Connolly moves that. Any discussion?

Mr. van Dijken: Just more or less a comment than anything. It seems really odd to me that we tie the hands of our departments with overall government-mandated increases in their ranges and so on and then not supply them with the resources to accomplish what they've been mandated to do. You know, going forward, I think that we can look at how we can better facilitate that to be sure that they're able to manage within their departments as they see fit.

The Chair: Good point.
Any other comments?

Mr. Dach: I just want to assure committee members that this government will certainly be, as part of its mandate, most conscientious in ensuring that any changes in legislation are connected to a proper funding and that funding is followed through so that shortfalls like this don't happen in the future.

The Chair: Okay. I'll call the question. No. Pardon me.

Mr. Cooper: Sorry.

The Chair: No. Go ahead.

Mr. Cooper: Are you going to the phones?

The Chair: Yes. I am so sorry. Going to the phones.

Mr. Cooper: Again, I'm sorry you're all getting used to hearing my voice. I just want to be on the record again that I support the work of the Child and Youth Advocate and the expansion of his

office given that, certainly, the workload and the mandate have expanded. Not that I make a regular habit of thanking former administrations, but I do think that former minister Bhullar probably does need a public recognition of the good work that he did when in Human Services. For whatever reason they chose to do that in terms of being more transparent and open with challenges in care, the net result was the Child and Youth Advocate having some additional work. So I am in support of that and think they deserve some recognition for that.

Having said all of that, I do think that as a committee and as an organization, as we look at the economic future of our province and significant increases to wages within the public service in the range of 3 per cent increase and 2.5 cost-of-living increases at a time when people are being laid off all across the province, this does create some significant challenges within the public sector, and we need to be sure that we are addressing a lot of those cost pressures as we go forward, particularly in the long-awaited budget.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you for your comments, Mr. Cooper.
Anyone else? No. We'll call the question.

Mr. Nixon: Yes, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Oh, yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: I would like to again echo the comments of my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. While I will support this because I think it's important, the work that the Child and Youth Advocate does, ensuring that the five additional positions are fully funded, I do find the 3 per cent wage increases to be slightly troubling given the economic times, and I would just like to make sure that's on the record.

The Chair: Sure. Okay. Thank you for your comments.

Mr. Bhullar: Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Bhullar: I thought: third one on the phone, so I should get in, too.

The Chair: Oh, yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Bhullar: Thanks very much. I, too, echo the sentiments of my two colleagues, both on the phone. As one of the ministers that brought in one of the pieces of legislation that allows and further empowers the Child and Youth Advocate to conduct more extensive research in the lives of our young people, I support conditional resources for new investigators. I, too, share those concerns about increases in wages at this time.

10:45

The Chair: Well, we're just voting today on the restitution or reinstatement of the money that was held back last year. Thank you for your comments.

Now, shall we get on with the question?

Cortes-Vargas: Could we get a recorded vote, please?

The Chair: Okay. I'll call the question.

Mr. Reynolds: Sorry. Did they want you to reread it?

The Chair: Oh. Do you want me to reread it?

An Hon. Member: Yeah.

The Chair: Moved by Mr. Connolly that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the request by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate for an increase of \$275,000 to the office's estimates approved by the committee at its December 16, 2014, meeting, for a revised estimate of \$13,242,360 for the 2015-2016 fiscal year for transmittal to the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance by the chair.

All those in favour?

Mr. Kleinsteuber: In favour.

Ms Sweet: In favour.

Mr. van Dijken: In favour.

Mr. Connolly: In favour.

Cortes-Vargas: In favour.

Mr. Cooper: In favour.

Mr. Nixon: In favour.

Mr. Bhullar: In favour.

Mr. Dach: In favour.

The Chair: All right. Excellent. Thank you. The motion is carried.

The next item for the committee's consideration is the proposed amendment to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act brought forward by the Chief Electoral Officer. We had a detailed discussion on the proposed amendment, and it appears that we have a consensus on the proposed amendment as presented. If the committee supports the proposed amendment, I'd ask a member to move the following motion, that

the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices transmit the proposed amendment to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act presented by the Chief Electoral Officer together with the transcript of the September 24, 2015, meeting to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General for introduction in the Assembly.

Any discussion on the motion?

Mr. Cooper: Yes. I do have some comments to make.

The Chair: Okay. We need a mover first. My apologies.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: I move the motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: While I appreciate the presentation by the Chief Electoral Officer, I'm still not entirely convinced that now is the time for us to be redrawing the lines of the electoral districts in Alberta. You know, we've seen the government change for the first time in 44 years. I'm not entirely convinced that this is the time to literally redraw the political landscape. We have a wide number of brand new MLAs, who are just in the process of getting to know their communities and their electoral districts.

The Chair: It was pointed out that it is a statutory requirement within that eight- to 10-year range, and with the growth in population – this is the thing.

Mr. Cooper: While I appreciate your position, we're going to have to open the legislation one way or another, so we as legislators can choose

whether we expedite the process or delay the process. We have that choice of whether we change the statute one way or the other.

My position and, I would expect, the position of some of my colleagues is to delay that, to change the requirement, to go after the next provincial election. As I was saying, there are a lot of MLAs who are brand new to the Assembly, to their constituencies. They're just getting to know them. I understand that some MLAs might not even have a constituency office open yet. So for us to be undertaking a significant process to redraw those lines at this time, when so much in Alberta has already changed, I'm just not convinced that it's the right step.

We've also seen a significant downturn in the economy. You know, some would say that the current government has done a number of things to destabilize the economy, whether by other types of reviews, and the last thing we need to be doing is creating political instability within the context of adding more things that we're changing within Alberta and continuing down this path.

Now, I respect that we're going to be able to have some robust debate in the Assembly, where I'm sure we will be addressing some of these concerns of the opposition, but at this point I'm certainly not in favour of just making changes right now or in the early part of 2016.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Yes. I'd like to say in response that Albertans don't face political instability for the foreseeable future, and they did vote for significant change in the most recent election, so they're not worried about change either. Members who were recently elected are quite capable of implementing the new boundaries and adjusting to the changes. I think it's important that we respect the democratic rights of Albertans by making sure that they're represented fairly and that the ridings don't have an overabundance of people in them and that we also make sure that we keep the ridings within the confines of legislative requirements sizewise. I think it's incumbent upon us to move forward with this change and be willing to adapt.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any other questions? Anything else?

Mr. Nixon: Madam Chair, can I be on the speakers list?

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: I'd like to echo again my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills' comments. We have to open this legislation either way. That is what the Chief Electoral Officer has presented to us. I would submit that because of the early election called by the last administration, it has thrown the timelines quite out of whack. It seems to me we have two choices. We could proceed with this process and move it to just slightly after the next election to allow for more than adequate time to do it, or we could move it up and attempt to rush it in order to be able to pull it off. Or I guess we also have a third choice, where it could be left alone and, by the sound of it, would not be possible to complete in time for the next election.

Again I would echo my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I think that given the economic times, given all the drastic changes already in the province, in my view, it makes sense to be able to make sure there's adequate time to do this process completely and to do it after the next election.

The Chair: I'm not sure. If the range is eight to 10 years and they're proposing eight years, it falls within.

Go ahead, Mr. Reynolds.

Mr. Reynolds: Madam Chair, if I may. The range is between eight and 10 years to appoint a new commission, so that would make it 2017. What the Chief Electoral Officer is recommending is that it be reduced from eight years, however you want to word it, so they would be established beforehand so that the commission would have completed its work and the changes are in place for what would be anticipated to be the next provincial election, in 2019. While the legislation says between eight and 10 years, for clarity that was based on a phase of two general elections. We've had the two general elections. He's just trying to make it so that they can be in place for the next election.

The other thing, just so everyone is clear, is that the committee voting on this doesn't change the legislation. The committee voting on this just makes a recommendation – well, not just; I'm sure it will be very influential – to the Minister of Justice for possible inclusion in an amendment to the legislation, which, of course, would be debated in the Assembly.

Thank you.

10:55

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair, just a very quick question for Mr. Reynolds on his comment. If the committee decides to make a recommendation to the Justice minister – for example, if the committee wrote a report, there would be the opportunity for a minority report – is there the opportunity for additional recommendations, or does it come as just one recommendation from the committee?

Mr. Reynolds: I'm sorry, Mr. Cooper. Are you talking about the motion that's under consideration right now, or are you talking about the Electoral Boundaries Commission report?

Mr. Cooper: The motion that's under consideration right now. Let's say that the committee says, "Yes, we want to recommend to the Justice minister that we accept the recommendation of the Chief Electoral Officer," and we go ahead and move the date up. Is there the opportunity for, say, dissenting opinions in a recommendation to the Justice minister or not in this case as if we had written it in an extensive report?

Mr. Reynolds: Well, I think what you're talking about with minority reports would be a report by the committee. This is a motion. A motion, as with every motion, can be voted for or against. People, as was done with the last vote, could request a recorded vote so that their support or opposition is on the record, and of course the transcript of the meeting serves as a good indication of people's views. So the short answer is no. There's no minority report on a motion.

Mr. Cooper: A minority opinion perhaps would be more appropriate.

The Chair: Yeah. The recorded vote would state your opinion on the matter, your thoughts on the matter. That's the point, too. Then when it does go to the Assembly, that's the option for speaking out about it more.

Ms Sweet: Madam Chair, can I request a recorded vote, please.

The Chair: Okay.

All right. I'll call the question, and we'll just go around the same as we did before.

Mr. Dach: In favour.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: In favour.

Ms Sweet: In favour.

Mr. van Dijken: Opposed.

Mr. Connolly: In favour.

Cortes-Vargas: In favour.

Mr. Cooper: Opposed.

Mr. Nixon: Opposed.

Mr. Bhullar: In favour.

The Chair: Thank you. The motion is carried.

Okay. We are on number 6 on the agenda, officers of the Legislature, the 2015 compensation review. For information purposes each of the officers' statutes contains a provision directing the annual review of their compensation by the Legislative Offices Committee. It is suggested that the committee move in camera for this item as the discussion may turn to individual officers, their contracts and classifications. Would a member make the motion to move in camera, please?

Mr. Cooper: Motion to go in camera.

The Chair: Nathan Cooper. Thank you.

[The committee met in camera from 11 a.m. to 11:36 a.m.]

The Chair: We're back on the record. I'd ask if a member would move a motion in respect of the 2015 compensation review for the officers of the Legislature. I've read it over.

Mr. Dach: I so move.

The Chair: Okay. Do you want me to read it again? Moved by Mr. Dach that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices adopt a compensation strategy for the officers of the Legislature effective April 1, 2015, providing for an annual cost-of-living adjustment of 2.25 per cent, parallel with that provided to the public service management employees, as well as a salary modifier of 5 per cent, not to exceed the maximum of the position's salary range, and a long service lump-sum payment of 3 per cent to any officer who has served a minimum of five full years in that position as of April 1 of that year.

Any questions or discussion on the motion? Anybody on the phone?

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. I need to be on the record. While I may be able to support a 2.5 per cent cost-of-living increase, certainly at a time when we have seen many, many, many people in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills lose their jobs, accept rollbacks, and have less hope for the future of those jobs coming back anytime quickly, I don't understand how we as legislators in conscience can vote some significant increases to the tune of a 5 per cent modifier and a 2.5 per cent cost-of-living raise, for a total of a 7.5 . . .

The Chair: Pardon me. A 2.25 per cent cost-of-living adjustment.

Mr. Cooper: Okay; 2.25 per cent.

. . . for a total of 7.25 points, when so many Albertans are hurting, losing their jobs. The economic stability of our province is not what it once was, and some would say that the government isn't doing what they can to increase that stability. So I certainly won't be

supporting this motion. Perhaps if the motion was split in two, I may be able to support it, but at this time there certainly will be no way that I'll be supporting a 5 per cent increase for the officers. While I certainly appreciate the work that they do – it is a critical job, and many of them provide a wonderful service to us in our ability to do our job – now is not the time to be raising the cost of wages for members that serve the Legislature or, quite frankly, in the public service either.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Cooper.
Any other questions or comments?

Mr. Nixon: Yes. Madam Chair, I would like to be on the record as well. While I do appreciate the work that the officers do and the importance to our political process, as I travel through my riding, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, on a daily basis, I am constantly running into more and more people that are losing their jobs or accepting rollbacks in their current positions, so there's no way that in good conscience I could vote for an additional 5 per cent raise given the economic situation that is taking place in our province.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nixon.
Any other questions or comments?
Okay. I'll call the question.

Mr. Cooper: I'll take a recorded vote as well, please.

The Chair: Okay. A recorded vote. We'll just go around.

Mr. Dach: In favour.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: In favour.

Ms Sweet: In favour.

Mr. van Dijken: Opposed.

Mr. Connolly: In favour.

Cortes-Vargas: In favour.

Mr. Cooper: Opposed.

Mr. Nixon: Opposed.

Mr. Bhullar: Opposed.

The Chair: Okay. The motion is carried.

We are moving along here to item 7, conference attendance and reporting. The report on the 2014 Council on Governmental Ethics Laws, COGEL, conference was posted on the internal committee website for members' information. Do we have anything to say about that? It's just information.

The exciting part is that the 2015 Council on Governmental Ethics Laws conference is coming up in December in Boston, Massachusetts, and the Legislative Offices Committee budget covers the attendance of the chair, two committee members, and the committee clerk at this conference. As well, three members will be identified as alternates should someone be unable to attend. If necessary, we will conduct a draw. Would members please indicate if they wish to be considered for attendance at this conference? Just a show of hands. Would you like to attend the conference? Remember that if interest exceeds available spots, we'll have a quick draw to identify attendees and alternates. Anybody wish to attend? Mr.

Connolly and Mr. Dach and Member Cortes-Vargas. Okay. We've got a pretty full house now. We've got Mr. Kleinsteuber.

Anybody on the phone lines wishing to put their names in to attend the COGEL conference?

Mr. Cooper: No. I'm not sure that at a time like this we should be spending our resources to go to international conferences, but I'm sure the opinions vary around the table.

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Nixon: I'd echo Mr. Cooper's comments. It seems like a pretty inappropriate time to spend that kind of money.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Bhullar: Madam Chair, is it possible for me to put a motion on the table relating to this?

The Chair: You want to put a motion on the table in regard to this?
Can he put a motion on the table?

Mrs. Sawchuk: If he would like to, he can do so.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead. Make a motion.

Mr. Bhullar: I'd like to make a motion that given our current fiscal situation the Legislative Offices Committee not participate in any international conferences until such time as the fiscal situation of the province of Alberta is one that is more balanced, where people are not losing their jobs in such drastic numbers, and until we at the very least have a budget in front of the people of Alberta so that we have a clear picture of the financial realities of our province.

11:45

Mr. Reynolds: Mr. Bhullar, motions actually don't have preambles. A lot of what you're saying is a preamble.

Mr. Bhullar: Okay. So then the motion is . . .

Mr. Reynolds: The motion would be, if I may, that so-and-so moves or you move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices not send delegates to international meetings or not participate in international meetings – was it just now or until such time as what you said about the fiscal situation?

Mr. Bhullar: I think the bottom line is that, on one side, we're looking at Albertans losing their jobs, Albertans losing their livelihoods, and we're looking at spending taxpayers' dollars to send people to conferences outside of our borders. I just don't think it's something that we should be doing, so I would say that we pass this motion until such time that we review it, two years from now. For simplicity's sake I'll say that we pass this motion that the Legislative Offices Committee not participate in international conferences to essentially save money, and we will revisit this decision in two years.

The Chair: At what point will it be revisited?

Mr. Bhullar: Just for the sake of simplicity we'll say two years.

Mr. Reynolds: Okay. If there hadn't been anything, I would imagine that it would be reviewed annually in the sense that it would be part of the next conference, but you could say: for two years.

Mr. Cooper: I would support a motion that said, “for one year,” you know, until the next conference. That’s a motion that I would support if that helps you, Mr. Bhullar.

Mr. Bhullar: Sure. Let’s go with one year.

The Chair: Okay. More comments?
Should we read it into the record and see what we’ve got?

Mr. Reynolds: As soon as we write it.

The Chair: Okay. I was just looking through transcripts from last year to see if we had any comments last year about this conference because this has been going on for quite some time. I’m not sure when it took place last year.

Mr. Cooper: The motion perhaps could read, “prior to the next COGEL conference,” if that’s agreeable to Mr. Bhullar.

Mr. Bhullar: But I assume that there will be some other conferences that also will arise. That’s why I wanted a minute to just . . .

The Chair: Apparently not for this committee. This is it.

Mr. Bhullar: Okay. Well, then, we can say: prior to the next one.

Mr. Reynolds: Okay. With respect, would it be something like: Mr. Bhullar moves that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices not participate in the COGEL conference in 2015. There isn’t another one till 2016.

Mr. Bhullar: Sure.

Mr. Reynolds: Okay. I’m just trying to crystallize your intention.

Mr. Bhullar: My intention is that we should be showing leadership on this issue of fiscal discipline.

Mr. Reynolds: I think I’ve got it, then. Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Madam Chair, can we have a recorded vote, please?

The Chair: Yeah. Well, I was just going to ask if anybody had any questions or comments on this motion.

No. Okay. We’ll call the question. Let’s read out the motion again, please.

Mr. Reynolds: Mr. Bhullar moves that
the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices not participate in
the COGEL conference in 2015.

The Chair: Okay. All in favour?

Mr. Dach: Opposed.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Opposed.

Ms Sweet: Opposed.

Mr. van Dijken: In favour.

Mr. Connolly: Opposed.

Cortes-Vargas: Opposed.

The Chair: On the phone?

Mr. Cooper: In favour.

Mr. Nixon: In favour.

Mr. Bhullar: In favour.

The Chair: Okay. The motion failed.

Now we have to do the draw. We’ve got five people interested in going. Okay. We’ve got Connolly, Dach, Cortes-Vargas, Sweet, and Kleinsteuber putting their names up to attend, so we’ll need a draw, and then alternates we’ll draw after that. One step at a time.

Mr. Dach: I’ll just be an alternate, not in the initial draw.

The Chair: You don’t want to be? Okay.

Mr. van Dijken: Just for clarification: how many are we planning to send?

The Chair: It would be four: the chair, two members, and the committee clerk.

Okay. Member Cortes-Vargas, you’re an attendee and, Mr. Kleinsteuber, you, too.

Mrs. Sawchuk: That means, Madam Chair, that the other three names will be put forward as alternates. Put a motion.

The Chair: Okay. All right. We have attending – it will be myself and . . .

Mrs. Sawchuk: You can read the motion.

The Chair: Oh, yeah. Okay. So moved by – who’d like to move this?

Mr. Dach: I’ll move it.

The Chair: Okay. Moved by Mr. Dach that
the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the chair,
Denise Woollard; Member Estefania Cortes-Vargas; Mr.
Kleinsteuber; and the committee clerk as attendees; and Mr.
Dach, Mr. Connolly, and Ms Sweet as alternates to the 2015
Council on Governmental Ethics Laws conference in Boston,
Massachusetts, from December 6 to 9, 2015.
Any discussion on this motion or questions?

Mr. van Dijken: Do we have a mover?

The Chair: Mr. Dach.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. A proposed amendment to the motion. In light of the discussions we’ve had, I would suggest that if we are going to send members to this conference, the committee chair and the committee clerk would be acceptable in showing restraint, that we only send two at this time. So the amendment would read essentially that the committee would send the committee chair as well as the committee clerk to the conference.

The Chair: Okay. You proposed that amendment, and everybody heard it. Do we need to repeat it?

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Could that be clarified at this time?

The Chair: The amendment, I understand, Mr. van Dijken, is that rather than sending four people to the conference, it would be two people, the committee clerk and the committee chair.

Mr. van Dijken: That’s accurate. Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Questions? Comments?
Okay. Call the question. Do you want it recorded?

Mr. Nixon: A recorded vote, please, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Certainly. On the amendment.

11:55

Mr. Dach: Opposed.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Opposed.

Ms Sweet: Opposed.

Mr. van Dijken: In favour.

Mr. Connolly: Opposed.

Cortes-Vargas: Opposed.

The Chair: Okay. On the telephone.

Mr. Cooper: Opposed. Sorry. My bad. In favour. I like that van Dijken guy. He's clever.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: In favour.

The Chair: Mr. Bhullar.

Mr. Bhullar: In favour.

The Chair: All right. The amendment failed.

Now we've got the motion. Okay. I'll call the question on the motion. Do we want it recorded? I may as well ask this right now. No. All in favour of the motion, please? The motion carried.

We are on to other business. We are actually getting here. The last thing that we have is the report on the 2014-2015 audit results for the office of the Auditor General. The chair and deputy chair attended a meeting on July 15 with the Auditor General and senior staff from his office as well as the audit team from St. Arnaud Pinsent Steman, the firm under contract to conduct the annual audit of the office of the Auditor General. For the committee's information the 2014-2015 audit was completed without any issues identified, and the final report of the auditor was posted to the internal committee website for members' information.

I would really imagine, probably, that people wouldn't have too many questions about that. Is there anything? We've all seen that. On the phone: anybody have a question about the audit of the Auditor General's notes?

So we move on to part (b), invitations to the officers of the Legislature, overview of mandates. For members' information the committee has from time to time invited the officers to attend a meeting and provide an overview of their respective offices and mandates as well as any issues they wish to bring to the committee's attention.

Just as an aside, from reading transcripts of previous years, it sounds like a very interesting endeavour because you really do get insight into what's going on in each of the offices from the legislative officers' point of view. So I believe this would be a useful exercise for this committee going forward. I would recommend that we again extend an invitation to the officers to attend our next meeting. What are the committee's thoughts on this? I'll open it for discussion.

Mr. Cooper: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. Looks like agreement. Any questions?

All right. Would a member like to move the following motion? The motion is that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices invite the officers of the Legislature to the next committee meeting to provide an overview of their respective offices and mandates and to highlight any issues for the committee's consideration.

Cortes-Vargas: I'll move that.

The Chair: Okay. Any discussion of the motion or questions?

No. I'll call the question. All those in favour of the motion? Okay. The motion is carried. The committee clerk will draft correspondence to be sent to each officer in this respect. She'll notify people.

We are down to number 9, and that is setting the date of the next meeting. I would suggest that the committee meet again within the next two or three weeks and that the items of business include the presentations by the officers on the mandates of their respective offices. Now, if members are prepared to decide on a date, I'd suggest either Monday, October 19, or Tuesday, October 20. This would be a longer meeting: the morning to hear from the officers, then a lunch break, followed by the balance of our agenda in the afternoon. What do people think about that or about those dates?

Cortes-Vargas: October 19 and what?

The Chair: The 19th or 20th is what we're looking at.

Mr. van Dijken: I am available on the 20th but not on the 19th.

The Chair: On the 20th. Good. Do you want to make a note of that? Mr. van Dijken is available on the 20th.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: The 20th seems more reasonable for me.

The Chair: From the phones?

Mr. Nixon: Madam Chair, I'm going to throw a wrench into it, unfortunately. I'm available on the 19th but not on the 20th.

The Chair: Okay. Even with only a few people responding, the committee clerk is now prepared to poll members with the dates that we've got and other dates if need be to give people a chance to check their calendars and see if we can find a date when everybody can attend. Is everybody okay with that?

Mr. Dach: I would say that we have an event on October 19 that might have the country's attention.

The Chair: Oh, my goodness. Sorry, Mr. Nixon. The 19th might not be the date for the meeting. We'll see. We'll have to look into that.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Are we deciding on the 20th, then?

The Chair: Karen is going to phone everybody, and we'll figure out a date.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Figure out a different day. Okay.

The Chair: Those were just two that, you know, seemed good on paper.

Okay. Who would like to make a motion to adjourn if we are finished?

Mr. Cooper: Just briefly while we're talking about polling members and agendas, I know, Chair, that we had the opportunity

to speak briefly earlier in the week, but it certainly would be my hope that we can have agendas at least a week prior.

The Chair: Yes. You did ask me about that, and I agreed.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. Also, while I am pleased that I was able to meet via teleconferencing, you know, to schedule a meeting during AUMA – a number of us represent large rural constituencies. For example, I have 13 municipalities here at the AUMA conference, and I would have really loved to be there in person. However, it proved quite difficult. So in the future if we want to try and schedule our meetings around significant events that are happening in our province, I sure would appreciate that.

The Chair: I take your point completely. I did not foresee it being as much of a conflict as it was. Thank you for giving me that heads up.

Mr. Cooper: Motion to adjourn.

The Chair: Thank you. All right. All in favour? I guess we have to vote on that.

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Meeting is adjourned. Thank you, all.

[The committee adjourned at 12:03 p.m.]

