



PROVINCE OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

Eighty-first Meeting

Wednesday, May 26, 2021

HANSARD

Speaker: Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

The Management Commission met at 9:31 a.m. via video conference.

B. RUSSELL: Okay, Mr. Speaker, I think we're ready.

SPEAKER (Bennett): Okay, thank you very much, Bobbi.

First of all, good morning, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting to order at 9:31 a.m. First of all, I'd just like to welcome all Members here today for our first Management Commission meeting that's being aired live.

Before I start, I'd just like to introduce, for the people out in the public that are viewing this morning, Members of the Commission: first of all, the hon. Steve Crocker, the Government House Leader; Barry Petten, Opposition House Leader; Ms. Helen Conway Ottenheimer, Member for Harbour Main; the hon. Lisa Dempster, Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair; Mr. Jim Dinn, Member for St. John's Centre; right now, Paul Pike, Member for Burin - Grand Bank, is having connection issues, hopefully, he will be able to join us; and Mr. Brian Warr, Deputy Speaker and also Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

Also, with our staff, we have Ms. Sandra Barnes, Clerk of the House of Assembly and secretary of the Commission; and Ms. Bobbi Russell, policy and communications officer. For those who don't know me, I'm Derek Bennett, Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate and also Speaker of the House of Assembly.

Just some reporting items first. As required by the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, the Commission is required to report any decisions from in camera meetings to form part of the public record. The Commission held an in camera meeting on January 5 and also on May 19, 2021. Details from discussions made at these meetings are included in the draft minutes, which will be approved as part of this next agenda item. Draft minutes were circulated to the Commission with their briefing package and are posted on the House of Assembly website as a part of the briefing package for today's meeting.

We'll move to the approval of the minutes. Draft minutes of the Commission's meetings on the following dates require approval from the Management Commission. There were meetings held on December 23, 2020, January 5, 2021 and May 19, 2021. Are there any questions or comments regarding those minutes?

Good morning, Paul.

L. DEMPSTER: You're on mute.

SPEAKER: I think you're on mute.

Again, I'll ask if there – do you want to check your audio there to make sure it's working properly. Okay, I think it's good there, MHA Pike.

Again, we have the minutes of December 23, 2020, January 5, 2021 and May 19, 2021. I'm not hearing any comments or any questions. I call for the motion that the minutes of the Commission meetings held on December 23, 2020, January 5, 2021 and May 19, 2021 be approved as read and circulated.

Can I get a mover to that motion?

Mover, MHA Dempster; seconder, MHA Petten.

All those in favour, by show of hands.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

SPEAKER: The next item on the agenda is regarding the Speaker's report of rulings regarding allowance use. Especially for those new Members and those viewing, the process for ruling on allowance use is outlined in section 34 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*.

The act gives authority to myself, the Speaker, to make rulings when expenditures of Members have been rejected for payment, provided that the ruling is distributed to and received concurrence from the Management Commission.

The report detailing all such rulings for the period ending May 21, 2021, has been circulated to the Commission with their briefing package. It's also posted on the House of Assembly website as part of the briefing package for today's meeting.

There's really no decision needed on this, as we already received concurrence. I don't know if anybody has any questions on it.

Hearing and seeing no questions, we'll skip on into item 3 on our agenda, which is the financial reporting.

Again, there's no decision required on this item. Again, the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* states that the Commission must "regularly, and at least quarterly, review the financial performance of the House of Assembly as well as the actual expenditures of members compared with approved allocations" Financial reports for the Members' expense reports for the period ending December 31, 2020, are included in your briefing package also and also on the website.

I just wonder: Are there are any questions or comments on this item before we move to the next agenda item?

Seeing no questions or comments on the item, we'll move on into item 4, which is the ratification of budget transfers.

This item is related to the ratification of urgent budget transfer approvals by the Management Commission since its last regular meeting. The *House of Assembly Transfer of Funds Policy* delegates authority for approval of a transfer of funds that is required urgently and there is no sufficient time for the Commission to hold a scheduled meeting. There have been three budget item transfers approved using this authority since our last regular meeting, which was held in December 2020. The details of these transfer are also outlined in your briefing package.

I'll open that up for discussion among the Commission Members.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Yeah, I guess we're looking here at the budget transfer ratification that has to do with a shortfall under the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer? Make sure I've got the right one, now. That is it?

SPEAKER: That's one of them there, yes.

J. DINN: Yes.

SPEAKER: I'm going to pull up the file.

J. DINN: I guess I would like just a brief explanation, if it's possible, just for the shortfall, not having been through this before. The \$24,000, okay, why the shortfall.

In particular, I'm looking at the next two items: the \$600,000 and the \$652,000. What would normally be, especially in those latter two, the costs of processing special ballots for the general election and the other aspects, the Transportation, Professional Services and Purchased Services, and a breakdown of that possibly? Would anyone have that answer?

SPEAKER: Clerk, can you give some clear direction on that?

CLERK (Barnes): Sorry, I was on mute.

With respect to those, those are because of the numbers of special ballots that were sent out. In a normal election process, most of the voting would be in person, so we wouldn't have these costs. The difference, I would have to check. I can certainly get that information from the 2019 general election in terms of the special ballot costs and get it back to you. I don't have it right now. As I said, those two amounts are certainly related to the mail out of special ballots in February.

With respect to the Grants and Subsidies for the by-election in Humber - Gros Morne, we don't budget for by-elections, so there would not have been any funding appropriated for that. The only way we would be able to handle it is with a transfer.

J. DINN: Okay.

If possible, then, Sandra, I would certainly appreciate – I guess what I'm looking at,

basically, \$1.3 million or so, or just about, and I'm just trying to get an idea of what it would normally cost, what would the normal breakdown be. 2019, I guess, is a good a year as any to have a look at that.

CLERK: Our trusty chief financial officer is watching and has just texted me and told me it's normally \$200,000.

J. DINN: Wow. And that's just for the mail-in.

How about the other one? Is that \$200,000 in total, or \$200,000 just for the mail-in?

CLERK: The \$200,000 would be for the Transportation and any of the costs associated with special ballots in a normal cycle.

J. DINN: Just to make sure I'm understanding you, normally, in 2019 the total amount for the processing of special ballots and then the other side – the Transportation and Communications, Professional Services, all of that – was that \$200,000 or was that a separate item altogether?

CLERK: It was \$200,000 for the postage associated with the special ballots.

J. DINN: Okay.

Then with regard to item HOABT2021-028, the transfer of \$651,900, and that deals with Transportation and Communications, Professional Services of legal fees, Purchased Services to cover the cost of printing so on and so forth.

I'm just wondering what would the usual amount be for 2019 as a reference point. Is it possible to have a breakdown of what each of these would be? Transportation and Communications, Professional Services – the breakdown of that amount, if possible.

CLERK: Well, we're still processing for the 2021 general election, but I will certainly get that information. I can get that comparative information probably over the next couple of weeks.

J. DINN: Okay and that could be higher than \$651,900?

CLERK: Well, it's just that we would like to make sure that the books are actually closed on all this before I give you numbers.

J. DINN: Okay, good enough. That would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

With that in mind, if we're waiting to have the books closed, is it appropriate to transfer the amount at this point in time?

CLERK: Mr. Dinn, this has already been (inaudible).

J. DINN: Okay.

CLERK: Yes. There was an urgent request sent around to the Management Commission to approve this, because we had a significant invoice from Canada Post, along with some legal that we had to get paid.

J. DINN: Okay.

CLERK: That's already been – and this is part of the accountability process. It has to come back to the full Management Commission after.

J. DINN: Okay.

CLERK: Okay? But we'll certainly get those numbers for you.

J. DINN: Perfect. Appreciate it.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Any other questions regarding this item? As Sandra said, these funds have already been transferred; we just need official approval today.

If there are no other questions, I'll call for the motion that the Commission ratifies the following transfers of funds approvals in accordance with section 5.0 of the *House of Assembly Transfer of Funds Policy*: items HOABT2021-011, HOABT2021-013 and HOABT2021-028.

Can I have a mover to that motion? MHA Petten, and seconded, MHA Pike.

All those in favour, by show of hand.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against?

Carried.

Item 5 on our agenda refers to the appointment of the Audit Committee. The Audit Committee was established under section 23 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*. In accordance with the act, the Committee consists of two Members of the Management Commission appointed by the Commission, one who will be appointed as the Chair, and then two non-Members that are chosen by the chief justice of the province. Now that the Commission has been reconstituted for the 50th General Assembly, the Commission must appoint two Members to serve on the Audit Committee.

I'll open that for discussion. There are details in your briefing packages on that, but we will require two Members to be appointed to this Committee today.

A little quiet this morning. MHA Crocker, we're not usually this quiet, are we?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, no, sorry, Mr. Speaker, we're looking to nominate somebody to ...?

SPEAKER: Correct, we need to nominate two people today. From those two people, we would have to appoint a Chairperson of those two.

S. CROCKER: Okay, sure.

I would nominate MHA Pike.

SPEAKER: MHA Pike.

P. PIKE: Sure.

SPEAKER: MHA Petten.

B. PETTEN: I would nominate MHA Helen Conway Ottenheimer.

SPEAKER: Okay. We got a second nomination there.

Is everybody in favour of that? We will call for a motion of it, but any questions or concerns?

MHA Pike and MHA Conway Ottenheimer, are you guys both willing and interested to serve in this role?

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I'm interested, yes. Thank you.

P. PIKE: Sure. I am as well.

SPEAKER: I don't see anyone else being nominated.

We will also need, out of those, to appoint a Chair. So I will call for a nomination for the Chairperson.

S. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I would nominate MHA Pike.

SPEAKER: MHA Pike has been nominated. Any other nominations for that?

MHA Pike, are you interested in serving in the role as Chair?

P. PIKE: Sure.

SPEAKER: Okay.

Any other discussion on that? If not, I'll call for a motion.

The motion will be the Commission appoints MHA Conway Ottenheimer and MHA Pike as Members to the Audit Committee effective immediately. The Commission also delegates MHA Pike as the Chair for the Audit Committee effective immediately.

Can we get a mover to that motion?

Minister Dempster.

A seconder? Need a seconder. Minister Dempster – or Minister Crocker. Sorry, lost your name for a second.

All those in favour, by show of hands.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

Item 6, Guidelines for Providing Shared Secretarial services: This agenda item is requested regarding the Guidelines for Providing Shared Secretarial Assistance. These guidelines were originally approved by the Commission in 2008 and have remained unchanged since that time.

The Government House Leader has requested the Management Commission to consider amending the guidelines to include in the allocation for shared secretarial assistance, parliamentary secretaries and parliamentary assistants who have their constituency offices in their districts. The current guidelines stipulate that administrative supports, when the House is in session, will be provided based on the number of private Members in the respective caucus. The policy specifically excludes the Premier, Speaker, ministers, parliamentary secretaries, assistants, Leader of the Official Opposition, Leader of the Third Party and the Opposition House Leader.

We do have this request by the Government House Leader. I don't know if you would like to speak to that request, Minister Crocker.

S. CROCKER: Yes, sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, so obviously just outlining the request, the request comes from the fact that the supports aren't available to parliamentary secretaries and parliamentary assistants. As the minister, my supports are available to me through the department in a lot of cases, but you wouldn't find the same for parliamentary secretaries or parliamentary assistants whose constituency offices are outside of the precinct.

SPEAKER: Any other comments on it? Any questions to that?

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Are we looking for an additional cost then? I'm looking at it here. I think there's an amount mentioned of \$16,700.

CLERK: If I might?

SPEAKER: Sandra, yeah.

CLERK: The assistance is provided based on a scale. Essentially, if there are one to three Members, there is one assistant; if there are four to six, there's a second assistant. It's always variable because the composition changes pretty frequently.

At this point in time, the government Members caucus currently has one. This would mean a second shared resource would become available. The cost of that shared resource would be approximately \$16,700, based on the current Parliamentary Calendar.

J. DINN: What we're looking at here is a total amount, then, for those who are parliamentary assistants, an additional cost of almost \$17,000.

CLERK: Yes, but it changes all the time anyway, because in any given year, it depends on what district the Member represents and the roles that they're filling. It is an additional cost, but next year it might not be, that sort of thing, because (inaudible) –

J. DINN: Or it could go up.

CLERK: It could go up or go down. That's the way it works. It's always worked that way.

SPEAKER: It's always based on numbers. One to three caucus Members, you get a certain allocation; four to seven, you get a different allocation.

J. DINN: As I understand it, what we're suggesting now then is to add an extra layer. There is a formula in place for all MHAs. If they have a constituency office in their district, they have that support here in the office. What we're saying, in addition to that, for those who are parliamentary secretaries or assistants, there would be extra administrative support provided. Would that be correct?

SPEAKER: I don't think it would be added support.

Under the current regulations that the parliamentary secretaries – I guess it was assumed at the time the parliamentary secretaries, as assistants, would be availing of resources from the department. Me, personally, I can speak as a former parliamentary secretary;

that was not the case. If I needed supports at the time, I didn't have any resources here in the city to assist with that. All I had was my constituency assistant back in my district.

What they're proposing is that the parliamentary secretaries be pretty well classified the same as a rural MHA, that they would be able to avail of supports through the Government Members Office while they're in the city.

J. DINN: Then, in some areas, we are looking at adding people to the – that's what's happening in this case, right? I'm just trying to get my head around here as to – because as I understand it – and I look at Jordan. While he's here in the House, he does have the advantage of having the – I guess there's an extra person here, shared resources, that would be – and that makes sense, because he's in this role; his main office is still back in Lab West.

Let me ask you this, then: Let's assume, for example, in some alternate reality the NDP was actually the governing party and he was also a parliamentary assistant or secretary or whatever. Would there be extra support with that? I'm just trying to get my head around what are we asking for here.

S. CROCKER: It would be shared. In the case you're referring to, the MHA for Lab West, he's not even sharing it. Our independent MHAs are not sharing it. Each independent MHA is getting, I think, approximately \$23,000 a year for shared sessional services for sessional support.

What we're referring to here is actually even shared services. This position would not be tied directly to a single Member; it would be a shared service within the office. So it just brings the numbers in line with the number of people sharing that service.

SPEAKER: Sandra.

CLERK: If I might, MHA Brown gets sessional assistance in his capacity as a private MHA. If MHA Brown was designated a parliamentary assistant, he would lose that support and have absolutely no support in his MHA role when the House was sitting.

J. DINN: Then he would be looking at someone to replace that role in his capacity as a parliamentary assistant, right? That's basically what's (inaudible).

CLERK: There's no administrative support provided to parliamentary assistants.

J. DINN: No, but my understanding is that's what we're asking here, that basically there will be shared services for the parliamentary assistant.

SPEAKER: Correct. Basically, we're asking that parliamentary secretaries and assistants be removed from that formula so that they would be able to avail of the shared services.

J. DINN: So they would be treated as a regular MHA, would that be correct?

CLERK: That's correct.

SPEAKER: That is correct. A regular rural MHA that has their constituency office back in their district.

J. DINN: Okay. We are looking at a possible addition, of adding to the number of people who are employed there, potentially, depending on the year.

CLERK: It depends on the number of parliamentary assistants; it depends on what districts they represent. It's always variable – always.

J. DINN: Okay.

SPEAKER: MHA Petten.

B. PETTEN: Yeah, I just wanted to chime in on this conversation. I suppose the only problem I have is – well, I understand the rationale, but at a time when we're constantly trying to look at savings of monies and we're not giving raises, everything is being scrutinized, especially under the House of Assembly, I just wonder sometimes is there another means where we can find that support.

The government Members' offices have staff up there. (Inaudible) in my previous lifetime when I worked with the previous administration, I was

quite familiar with the parliamentary secretaries and their roles and what the shortfalls were. There has always been support at times to deal with outstanding needs, especially when the House is in session; you would think there would be a lot more bodies around anyway.

I just wonder sometimes is it money well spent. I understand the need. Don't get me wrong, I fully understand during the House. I'm not arguing that point, I'm just looking at the cost. It's almost like throwing money at a problem. We think we're (inaudible), that we need more people. Maybe there comes a time when we have to look at that. Sixteen thousand dollars is a small amount, I get that, but it's a small amount and it's a big amount. That's just my only concern.

SPEAKER: MHA Crocker.

S. CROCKER: Probably after we address this motion, we can also undertake a full review of shared services for all parties. Maybe we can look at ways that – if you look at how the parties are funded right now, maybe there are things in there that we should do a full review of all the expenditures, from independent right through to government.

SPEAKER: MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: What was the rationale, then, of excluding the Premier, Speaker, ministers and parliamentary secretaries in the beginning? What was the rationale for that?

SPEAKER: Sandra, can you speak to that?

CLERK: It's not documented and none of us were here in 2008. It appears from what we read in *Hansard* that the Premier has support from the Premier's office staff. The ministers have support from the department, full staff in (inaudible) office. The Speaker has support in the Speaker's office and the Leader of the Opposition has core support in the Opposition office. Similarly, the House Leaders have been each assigned a legislative assistant under the caucus funding formula.

All of these officer holders have supports in addition to their constituency support and the general caucus support. It's just for some reason

it seems to have been assumed that the parliamentary secretaries and assistants had administrative support provided in the department and they don't, they never have. There's an inconsistency in that parliamentary secretaries and assistants are treated as private Members in terms of the caucus-funding formula, but they're treated as something different in the shared sessional support formula.

We don't know the reason. As I said, it was 2008 and none of us were here, but there is an inconsistency here.

SPEAKER: MHA Conway Ottenheimer, you had a question?

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Can everyone hear me okay?

SPEAKER: Yes, good.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Okay.

In principle, I support the amendment that's been requested. But I do agree that these are times, as we all know, of very difficult fiscal restraint I think is necessary. The cost factor, obviously, is a concern to me, but I do agree with the suggestion by the Government House Leader that perhaps there be a review that takes place. I wonder, though, about the timing of that review, whether it should be done before this amendment takes place. I'm just raising some of those concerns that I have.

Of course, since we have the House of Assembly starting next week, I guess the importance of getting this addressed now is obvious. I certainly support the suggestion that we have a review of this because the policy needs to be assessed, I think.

I do have concerns about the cost factor. From what the Clerk has said, that may not necessarily be that cost-prohibitive, but there seems to be uncertainty about that if I'm hearing things correctly.

CLERK: There's no uncertainty –

S. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, if I –

SPEAKER: MHA Crocker?

S. CROCKER: Yes, sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Just to MHA Ottenheimer's point, with the House starting next week, I think this would be important for the Government caucus and for those people that need this assistance. Certainly, prior to the fall session, I think the Management Commission could certainly take a look at the entire funding mechanism around the House of Assembly and how all political parties are funded, because in a lot of cases, I think there may be room for improvements.

I would certainly suggest that prior to going into the fall session, we take a wholesome look at how all of our political parties and independents are funded.

P. PIKE: I agree.

SPEAKER: MHA Pike, sorry.

P. PIKE: Sorry.

I agree with Mr. Crocker on this, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly something that I, as an MHA from a rural district, certainly would require: someone in here to help with running the office.

I do understand the concerns on costs, of course. We're watching our pennies, I guess. Then again, this is certainly something that would help a great deal. I'm sure if we took this study and we had a look at it before the fall session, I'm sure – and I agree that we look at all of the funding for our MHAs in the sense of support mechanisms. We may find that we might be able to find ways of actually saving the cost of this particular item.

Anyways, just my thoughts on it. I haven't been around long enough to actually feel the effect of what we're proposing here, but I think it's a good idea that we look at it.

SPEAKER: MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: I'll have to vote against this at this point in time. I'm not saying that this decision will not change.

It's sort of a piecemeal approach. Let's do the review and find out what is needed, what is the role, what are duties, I guess, the workload of

those who are parliamentary secretaries. I can understand it in terms of the MHA. I know the role; I can see how it goes here, the workload that's expected. Is there a sufficient support staff within each of the caucuses to do it?

Also, to Mr. Pike's comment, I'm relatively new to this, so before the request has come across, I'd like to have more information before I make that – \$16,700 is a small amount in the big scheme of things. At the same time, it's the principle right now of what we're expecting. We've added two new departments to the government. We've expanded, I guess, the government, but at the same time we're saying to people: but be ready for austere times.

Somewhere along the line, maybe this is worthwhile. I'm certainly inclined, supporting people in their roles. To me, at this point in time, I think we're sending the wrong message. Show me why this is needed. That hasn't been demonstrated to my satisfaction. I can tell you that if we're going to review anything – and, again, I brought this up; it has to do with the role of the constituency assistants. I know the amount of work they take on. If we're going to review anything, let's review something where we look at their roles and the remuneration that they receive.

Right at this point in time, if you're asking me to approve this, I just cannot do it; it is just insufficient evidence. The amount is small; I realize that. At this point in time I'm not prepared to do that until actually there is some sort of a review of all staffing measures, and then we'll look at it.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Sandra, did you want to comment on that before I get Minister Dempster?

CLERK: If I might.

First of all, the provision of shared secretarial or shared sessional support is not part of your caucus-funding formula; it is a legislative requirement under the act. Section 23(2) of the rules states: "Where a member has chosen to have his or her constituency assistant work in office accommodation in the member's constituency or in the member's ministerial or

parliamentary or special assistant's offices, the speaker shall provide funding to the caucus with which the member is associated to provide shared secretarial assistance in the Confederation Building complex for all members of that caucus in the same circumstances."

Actually, the legislative requirement is broader than the policy right now. The Management Commission in 2008, using its authority under subparagraph 20(6)(b)(i) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* can "... issue directives ... interpreting, clarifying or amplifying the rules ...". In this particular circumstance, the Management Commission actually issued a directive which ratcheted back the provision of secretarial support to all of these positions and limited it to private Members. The current policy currently provides less than what the legislation anticipates. I just want to make sure that's clear to everybody.

If we're going to do a review, we'd have to go back and look at doing a legislative amendment to reduce this requirement here. That's what happened. The Management Commission looked at it in 2008 and said: Wait a minute now, there are certain offices that already have administrative support. So they ratcheted it back just to the private Members; however, in doing so, there is no additional support provided to parliamentary secretaries for assistance. I just want everybody to be clear on what the governing (inaudible) around this provision.

SPEAKER: Minister Dempster, you had a question or comment?

L. DEMPSTER: I just wanted to weigh in on this very important conversation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As someone who has been representing a very rural area for almost eight years, as someone who spends Fridays and Sundays on the road in essence losing two days for travel each week, in comparison to some of my MHAs on the Avalon or some who might only have a seven- or eight-minute commute from Confed each day, the workload, the type of work is extremely varied between urban and rural MHAs.

Folks will remember that when we formed government, in the really difficult fiscal climate we were in at that time, salaries were taken from parliamentary assistants. As someone who spent 3½ years as a minister in a large social department, my parliamentary secretary stepped up many, many times, a strong support to assist the minister in roles. They do that without pay, and at the same time have no support around them because their constituency office is far from where the seat of government happens.

I remember the eye-opener for me when I first came in, when I would have colleagues who had their constituency assistant down the hall, they could go back and forth and work was done immediately. Mine was 1,259 kilometres and a ferry away at best, just far out of sight. Having that support, basically, in essence, what we're talking about is this relatively small amount of money – even though I know things are very difficult right now, it's something that would impede MHAs from representing their constituency.

There would be an imbalance for them not having that. It's about sort of levelling the playing field among Members to support them with the very, very important work that we all do, collectively, serving the people of the province. I just wanted to sort of chime in as a rural MHA.

SPEAKER: MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Is this request, then, only applied to parliamentary assistants who are also rural MHAs?

SPEAKER: Correct, parliamentary assistants and secretaries.

J. DINN: No, no. Is it saying that this would only apply to a rural MHA who is basically taking on the role of a parliamentary assistant?

SPEAKER: Correct. Yes, that was the intent, to remove those two positions from the calculator to determine the amount of staffing supports they received. It would only include those that do not have a constituency assistant in the St. John's area that they can use the resources of. It would apply to rural ones only.

J. DINN: But they would still have their shared resources as secretarial support at that time, correct?

SPEAKER: Correct.

J. DINN: Again, I'm going to go back to the fact that the policy here says specifically – excludes and lists. I would say I'm certainly not the Leader of the Opposition or the Third Party or anything like that, I would suggest that all such people should have their – we should be looking at the workload of all of these people. Again, I still say no to this.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Minister Crocker.

S. CROCKER: Just to Mr. Dinn's point, again, to what Minister Dempster said, this is about a rural MHA who doesn't have the ability to have a constituency office located here in the Confederation Building. This is not about a parliamentary secretary or anybody that has the ability to have their office in this building.

Things have changed a lot since 2008. It was around 2007-2008 MHAs first – because it was only after the Green report that MHAs actually had constituency offices in their constituency. This is a relatively new thing for us. Being a rural MHA and looking at the screen here this morning, most all of us would have our constituency offices located away from here and I think so they should be. I think there's a great benefit of having our constituency offices located where our constituents are doing that job. Really, we're only taking about a parliamentary assistant or a parliamentary secretary whose constituency office is not located in the Confederation Building.

Let's be clear: that's who we're talking about. It's the rural MHA whose constituency office rightfully so is located in their constituency to be helping the people that it should be there to help. That office is not here to provide support. I can remember back in the day when all the constituency offices were located right across from the Member's office. That office doubled then as an office that actually provided support when the House was in session.

Really, this is about adding a layer of assistance to an MHA whose job – again, to Minister Dempster's point – is two days' travel from here. This is about adding support for that Member, not a Member who has the ability to have a constituency office located here in the Confederation Building.

SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister Crocker.

Any other questions or comments?

Seeing there are none, Bobbi, can you put forward the proposed motion so we can at least put it to a vote?

B. RUSSELL: The motion that I have summarized: The Commission direct an amendment to the Guidelines for Providing Shared Secretarial Assistance to allow parliamentary secretaries/assistants who have constituency offices in their district be included for the purpose of allocating administrative support when the House is in session.

SPEAKER: Minister Crocker, is that the intent of the motion?

S. CROCKER: (Inaudible.)

SPEAKER: We'll ask for a mover to that motion.

We have Minister Dempster, and seconded by Minister Crocker.

By show of hands, all those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against?

It's three and three. I guess I will have to cast the final vote.

Before I vote, I will say I have served as a parliamentary secretary for three years, and I know the work that's involved as a parliamentary secretary. It does take a great deal of work from your constituents. You do not have the resources available that you would need to assist while you're sitting in the House of Assembly. For that reason, I'm going to vote in favour of the motion.

The motion is carried.

Item 7 on our agenda.

CLERK: Excuse me, Speaker? There's a second part. While we were looking at this policy, there was a second inconsistency there. It has to do with the clarification of when sessional support will be provided.

Essentially, the policy states specifically the spring and the fall sittings; however, in recent years it has been very common for us to have extraordinary sittings; as an example, when we go in and it's not part of the calendar. So technically, unless we amend the policy to be generalized in terms of a sitting period, then if we go into an extraordinary sitting, there will be no shared sessional support for anyone, with a strict interpretation of the policy.

SPEAKER: So we would need a motion to change that policy?

CLERK: Yes, please.

SPEAKER: Okay.

Bobbi, do you have the motion summarized for that?

B. RUSSELL: Yes.

The Commission direct an amendment to the Guidelines for Providing Shared Secretarial Assistance to provide a general reference to sittings so that shared secretarial assistance will be provided as a continuous employment period beginning one week prior to a sitting period of the House of Assembly and ending one week after the closing of that sitting period.

SPEAKER: Okay.

Can we get a mover to that motion?

Minister Dempster and seconded by MHA Pike.

All those in favour of the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Sorry, I'm seeing hands going up everywhere.

First of all, all of those in favour of the motion, by a show of hand.

S. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if everybody wants to – if Bobbi would like to read the motion again or the issue here, because this is a broader issue. I have no problem supporting the motion or voting against the motion, but I think it's important that we realize that this affects the shared sessional across the board, Madam Clerk?

CLERK: Yes.

For example, just say the House had to be recalled in August for a sitting – and if we look at the past number of years, that's not far-fetched – then there will be no shared sessional support. Currently, MHA Brown gets shared sessional support; he would not have it for that period. Similarly, Ms. Conway Ottenheimer, there's shared sessional, and you would not have it if the House was called back outside of the Parliamentary Calendar.

L. DEMPSTER: I missed that, too.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I missed that, too.

Thank you.

SPEAKER: Thank you, Sandra, for clarifying that.

Are there any other questions to that? I'm seeing no questions.

We have a mover and a seconder for that motion, correct, Bobbi?

B. RUSSELL: We do.

SPEAKER: Okay.

All those in favour of the motion, by show of hands.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

The final item on our agenda is a request from the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands regarding the monthly automobile allowance options provided to districts in the capital region and the District of Corner Brook under the I&E allocation for *Members' Resources and Allowances Rules*.

The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands has requested that the Management Commission review the applicability of the monthly automobile allowance options provided to districts in the capital region and the District of Corner Brook. The Member notes, in particular, that the District of Humber - Bay of Islands includes a portion of the City of Corner Brook.

The automobile allowance option for the districts noted above is provided under section 38(2.1) of the *Members' Resources and Allowances Rules*. The provision was the result of recommendation 27 of the 2016 Members' Compensation Review Committee, the MCRC, which is outlined in the briefing package along with commentary from the 2016 MCRC report on the rationale for making the recommendation specific to the districts of the capital region and the District of Corner Brook. There is further information including a full analysis and also options in your briefing package.

I'll open this to the floor for discussion.

Minister Dempster.

L. DEMPSTER: I guess I would have a question and I would have a comment.

First of all, this decision was made independently from the last MCRC, correct?

The other thing is a yes to this request, where does that lead us in terms of other sitting MHAs who cannot come in? Unless I'm missing something.

Maybe the Clerk can provide some clarity.

CLERK: Yes, I can speak to that.

It was an MCRC, which is an independent committee, a recommendation. It was accepted

by the Management Commission and followed the standard process in terms of the change to the rules and the promulgation of those rules to the Members.

There could be other districts, and notably Labrador West, for example. That's a district that could possibly have some interest in the monthly automobile allowance. Gander is another one. We don't know. There are a few ways to handle this.

In his letter, MHA Joyce is asking for a prorated approach. That's not doable the way it's currently structured. There would be issues with even attempting to prorate, but we could certainly do a review of what districts might benefit or maybe all districts. Maybe it could be an option for all districts.

We do have lots of data. We know approximately how much mileage is used for I&E travel for every district over the last 12 years. We do have the ability, but you're quite right; there could be other Members. Corporate and Members' Services did have a number of calls asking about it. They send out an email every year to the Members in the eligible districts, but it doesn't go to all Members, because it's only certain districts that are eligible.

The other option is to refer it to the next MCRC, but we can certainly do some work here on that to see if it might have a wider flexibility. I don't think pro-rating would be an option. It would have to be an allowance or not.

SPEAKER: MHA Conway Ottenheimer.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: I'm just looking for some clarification and understanding. When I read through the notes I do indicate that – MHA Joyce had indicated that he's not permitted to claim mileage for travel throughout the Corner Brook portion of the district and the notes indicate that is not the case.

Is that perhaps the key here, that there is a misunderstanding about what he is entitled to do and what he isn't entitled to do? I'm just trying to get at what the real issue is here, because all Members may claim mileage for intra-constituency travel and he's under the

understanding that he cannot. Is that perhaps what we need to be looking at here?

SPEAKER: Correct me if I'm wrong, Sandra, but he is able to claim mileage.

CLERK: He is.

SPEAKER: However, he's looking at the option of doing the other option of taking the allowance. He is able to claim mileage and I think that is what's happening currently.

H. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Okay.

SPEAKER: Minister Crocker.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that Members who claim the mileage allowance versus the actual mileage, it's the choice you make, it's not a blended system of the two, right? As an MHA, if I were to choose the fixed rate, I can no longer then claim mileage on my I&E, correct?

SPEAKER: That's correct.

CLERK: Correct.

SPEAKER: You choose one or the other is correct and no blending. I think Sandra may be right there, we probably need to do a further analysis on this here, as there are many other districts that may fall under this allocation that we – of given the option of taking an allowance versus a mileage, as many of them are.

I think Gander would probably be another example. Most of the travel is within the community versus the broader districts, like MHA Warr there, that has a very vast geographical district.

Any other comments on that? Did you have your hand up, MHA Pike?

P. PIKE: No.

SPEAKER: Okay, sorry.

No other comments?

Is it the wish that we defer it and to do further analysis? Is that the general consensus for today?

I'm seeing some nods there. Will we need a motion to that, Sandra?

CLERK: Yes, please.

SPEAKER: Bobbi, do you have a motion for that?

B. RUSSELL: Yes, I do.

The motion today would be do not direct an amendment to subsection 38(2.1) of the *Members' Resources and Allowance Rules* at this time, and direct officials to undertake a review of the implications of extending the monthly automobile allowance provision to Humber - Bay of Islands, and potentially other districts, for the consideration of the Management Commission.

SPEAKER: Any questions to that motion before I call to a vote?

Seeing no questions or comments, I'll ask for a mover to that motion: MHA Petten; a seconder: MHA Conway Ottenheimer.

All those in favour, by show of hands.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

That concludes the items on our agenda today. We will adjourn the meeting now. I do thank everybody for their time.

We did manage to stay within our one-hour allocation. I appreciate everybody's time today and their input to these very important issues. We will send out a notice as to when the next meeting will be called.

With that, I'll call for a motion for adjournment. Minister Dempster.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Thank you everyone. Have a great day and stay safe. We'll see you Monday when the House reconvenes.

On motion, meeting adjourned.