



Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

HANSARD VERBATIM REPORT



No. 1 — January 23, 2024

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

Hon. Randy Weekes, Chair
Biggar-Sask Valley

Mr. Terry Dennis
Canora-Pelly

Hon. Jeremy Harrison
Meadow Lake

Mr. Matt Love
Saskatoon Eastview

Hon. Tim McLeod
Moose Jaw North

Ms. Alana Ross
Prince Albert Northcote

Ms. Nicole Sarauer
Regina Douglas Park

[The board met at 09:00.]

The Chair: — Okay, we'll get started. Welcome to the meeting of 1/24. Joining us today from the government are the Hon. Jeremy Harrison, Hon. Tim McLeod, MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Alana Ross, and MLA Terry Jensen, and from the opposition, MLA Matt Love.

First order of business to approve the proposed agenda for meeting 1/24. Could I have a mover and seconder? Mover is the Hon. Jeremy Harrison. Secunder, Mr. Matt Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Now we need approval of the minutes from meeting 6/23. Could I have a mover and seconder, please?

Mr. Dennis: — I so move.

The Chair: — Mr. Jensen.

Mr. Dennis: — Dennis. You got the Terry part right, not the Jensen.

The Chair: — My notes are wrong. Sorry, Mr. Dennis. I do have problems with your name, don't I? Mr. Dennis. Secunder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Item no. 1, tabling item. I would like to table the *Mid-Year Report on Progress* for the period of April 1 to September 30th, 2023 for the Legislative Assembly Service.

Item no. 2, tabling item, the annual statement for the independent member for the fiscal year 2022-23.

Conflict of Interest Commissioner Registrar of Lobbyists

The Chair: — And now we'll go to item 3, decision item, review of the 2024-2025 budget and motion to approve budgetary and statutory expenditure estimates for the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and the Registrar of Lobbyists. I'd like to introduce Mr. Maurice Herauf, Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists, and I would ask that before he begins his presentation to introduce any of his officials. Mr. Herauf.

Mr. Herauf: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Members of the Board of Internal Economy, before I introduce my budget as you indicated, Mr. Chair, I wish to acknowledge the presence of Sandra Arberry, the deputy lobbyists registrar and executive operations officer for the Conflict of Interest office. Sandra's assistance to me is always invaluable.

I also wish to acknowledge the assistance we receive from the staff from LAS [Legislative Assembly Service] for their contributions and assistance in all financial and IT [information technology]-related matters.

For the past three fiscal years with the generous assistance of this board, we have been able to accomplish major initiatives on both the conflict of interest and lobbyists side of our mandate. These initiatives include the launch of the commissioner's website, the addition of fillable online financial disclosure forms, rebranding of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner logo, and security upgrades and user enhancements to the lobbyists registry.

The lobbyists registry upgrade will be completed by the end of this fiscal year. The upgrade includes the system software which has not been updated since the inception of the system in 2016. As mentioned last year, the system required updating in order to be compatible with other systems which were moved to Microsoft 365 and the cloud. We anticipate slight changes in user experience, but these modifications should streamline and enhance the process of registering lobbying activities.

I mention these accomplishments from past fiscal years as a segue to our current budget submission. Simply put, we have no major projects targeted for the 2024-25 fiscal year, and the result, we have no need for additional funds for new initiatives. Consequently our budget request reflects a reduction for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

Before highlighting our specific budget request, I would like to outline some of our accomplishments for the current fiscal year.

The financial disclosure process for 2022 went well. There was 100 per cent compliance with the statutory filing timeline, which includes the three new MLAs who were elected in the August by-elections. We are now gearing up for the 2023 disclosure process and all members will have received notification of the requirements.

The disclosure process expands in an election year to include members who, for various reasons, cease to be members. The most obvious reason is retirement. So far there are an additional 11 members who fit in this category. There will likely be more. These former members are now required to file financial disclosure from January 1st, 2024 to the date they cease to be members. In addition members who fit within this category must also have a final consultation with me, an exit interview, so to speak.

We are also expanding the information for members on our website. We recently added an information bulletin on sponsored travel which I encourage you to read. In short order we hope to provide a short bulletin for individuals who may be contemplating becoming candidates in the fall election. This bulletin will set out statutory obligations pursuant to *The Members' Conflict of Interest Act* that will come into play for those candidates who become members.

Finally, with the assistance of the Ministry of Justice, we undertook a complete overhaul of *The Members' Conflict of Interest Act* regulations. Most of these had been in place since 1993 or '94 and many were no longer relevant or needed to be updated.

With regards to the lobbyist side of my mandate, the registry upgrade is the biggest accomplishment. But this coming year we will also create some additional content for the lobbyist website.

Specifically education and step-by-step videos of various pieces of the registration process will be created and posted so that lobbyists have another tool to use in understanding the legislation and how to properly register. We anticipate the use of these videos will increase compliance and decrease the amount of phone calls we receive on administrative matters such as username and password resets.

Administratively, both in-house and consultant lobbyist registrations have increased, so that has been keeping us busy. Saundra did a recent presentation at the Levene School of Business and also presented at the conference on government ethics and law on the topic of accepting cultural gifts. Next year she has been asked to once again be a presenter at that particular conference.

Saundra is also working on election-related materials aimed at lobbyists and how a provincial election may affect the way lobbyists conduct their activities. All information bulletins will be posted to our website and perhaps distributed to public office holders as well, so everyone is on the same page with regards to lobbying activities during an election period.

Now let us examine our budget.

With respect to salaries, there's no increases anticipated and salaries remain the same.

Travel and business: we continue to budget to attend three professional development conferences, namely the conflict of interest and ethics commissioners conference, registrar of lobbyists conference, and the conference on government ethics and the law. These conferences address issues relevant to the dual mandate of my office.

The budget item increase reflects my attendance at the conference on government ethics and the law conference. This will be the first time that I will attend this particular conference. The best practices and procedural discussions are valuable for ongoing administrative processes.

Contractual services: there are no changes in this area.

Communications: costs will remain the same, though we plan to produce instructional videos and election-related materials. We will endeavour to produce these in-house at no extra cost.

Supplies and services: as already noted, the upgrade to the lobbyists registry and website will be completed by the end of this fiscal year. The completion results in a substantial decrease in expenditures in this category, as last year we received additional funding to facilitate this project.

Equipment and assets: there's been a substantial decrease in this area largely due to a decrease associated with the current upgrade to the lobbyists registry and website. With this upgrade, we have moved from paying to house our data on servers in a tangible location to housing our data in the cloud. This is considerably cheaper.

Our budget request for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner and the Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists is as noted on the submission. Overall the budget request has decreased from last

fiscal year for the reasons provided. Our request and the percentage decreases are noted on page 4 of the budget proposal.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Completes my submissions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Herauf. Any questions from the members? Mr. Harrison.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure. Not a particular question, but I just want to say thanks, Commissioner, for the work that you have been doing, and I'm glad to hear that the migration of the database and website have been going well. That is good news. And I also want to say thank you for a decrease of 9.4 per cent. Unfortunately didn't set the trend for all of your colleagues, but I appreciate the work that's gone into this.

Mr. Herauf: — Now you know I carefully avoided from saying that number. So thanks a lot.

Mr. Dennis: — It's good you went first. Set the tone.

The Chair: — Any other questions or comments? Seeing none. Thank you very much, sir.

Ombudsman Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner

The Chair: — Next will be item 4, decision item, review of the 2024-2025 budget and motion to approve budgetary and statutory expenditure estimates for the Office of the Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner.

I would like to introduce Sharon Pratchler, Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner. And I would ask you before you begin your presentation to introduce your official.

Ms. Pratchler: — Good morning, Mr. Speaker, and members of the Board of Internal Economy. With me to my left is Charlene Mouly, my manager of corporate services. Charlene comes to us from the Ministry of Finance, particularly previously working at treasury board.

And as the entirety of our budget request focuses on accommodation, I've also asked representatives from SaskBuilds and Procurement to accompany us today. And to the back of the room to my left is Sara Nichols, the assistant deputy minister of infrastructure design and delivery, along with Candice St. Onge, the director of capital and space planning.

There are two parts to my submissions today, first to review our work and highlight a number of our key projects from last year and report back on their progress, and also to review our current budget request.

To start, we continue to have a high volume of requests for assistance to our office, totalling 3,660 in the 2023 calendar year. Two of the pieces that are particularly important in our work to citizens are that they feel they are heard and that they receive timely responses. I'm pleased to report that of the total files closed in 2023, 96 per cent were resolved within 90 days while 99 per cent were resolved within 180 days. Only 1 per cent of our files continued after the 180-day mark. This is a credit to our team members who are very dedicated and passionate in the work

that they do.

I want to particularly recognize the work of two of our team members on two of the important initiatives we worked on this year. The first is our new case management system. We replaced our case management system this past fiscal year. The old system had been provided through the BC [British Columbia] Ombudsperson's office. It had reached the end of its life and would go down regularly causing issues with both productivity and access to case information.

We worked with a developer to design our own system, and that system was seamlessly implemented in March of 2023 and is working very well for us. We were able to successfully transfer our case files over to the new system. We turned off the old system on a Friday, transferred the data over a weekend, and were able to work on the new system the following Monday.

The seamless and successful nature of that transition was due to a number of individuals in our office, but in particular, Niki Smith of our Saskatoon office worked to train everyone on the system when it came online and extensively tested the new system before it went into operation.

The second piece of work I'd like to highlight is our work on education this year. An important part of our mandate is to provide education on fairness as well as the powers and duties of the Ombudsman's office. I am pleased to report that we were able to restart a flagship program which our office had not been able to offer since 2019, the fundamentals of fairness. This is a two-day program that is skills-based and allows an opportunity to apply the principles of fairness to a number of situations. It also allows for dialogue and discussion between our office and public officials. Christy Bell of our Saskatoon office updated this program and has been responsible for leading the delivery of the sessions since it was relaunched.

[09:15]

We focused on delivering these sessions to officials from Social Services, including both front-line operation staff and supervisors, and were able to provide it to 68 employees from Social Services. In addition we launched a new training opportunity for public officials and executive government, titled the tool box series, which focused on providing tools for relational fairness in dealing with citizens, including active listening skills and non-defensive communication.

We had participation from all ministries in government in this series, which was offered as four one-hour sessions delivered virtually over the course of four months. The virtual presentation allowed as well for participation throughout the province including as far north as La Loche.

Both of these training opportunities directly relate as well to our commitment to truth and reconciliation and our commitment to Call to Action 57, which is to provide education to public servants, including skills-based training in conflict resolution.

We've also added to our own tool box of skills by providing training to the members of our team in trauma-informed approaches to service delivery. Due to the high interest in trauma-informed approaches, we also hosted a session for public

servants in October through both in-person and virtual delivery of the workshop. We think these training opportunities are important and are directly related to the decrease which we saw this year in complaints about delivery of service by Social Services. We appreciate the support which was provided by all ministries for these training opportunities.

We also increased our outreach to the public and various organizations this past year, with our office participating in 36 events over the year, which is a lot on top of just the regular day-to-day intake of complaints.

I will highlight the outreach to the municipal sector in particular. For the first time since our office received jurisdiction in relation to municipalities, we provided trade show booths at the SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] and SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] conventions at their invitation. I also travelled to Prince Albert to deliver a presentation to the northern municipal administrators. I also spoke at the Urban Municipal Administrators' Association of Saskatchewan in Regina. We think it's important for municipalities to have the opportunity to speak to us and learn about the role of our office outside the complaint process.

The final piece that I will mention is our focus on recruitment and retention to fully staff our office. We recently received 1,000 applications for vacancies which we advertised, which we think is an exceptional result and demonstrates a high level of interest in working with our office.

Turning to our budget request, our focus is on covering the increased costs of accommodation for our Regina lease as well as to anticipate potential increased costs for the proposed move of our Saskatoon office.

I want to start by thanking the board for giving us time to consider the proposed Saskatoon office move by not moving forward with it last year. Amidst all the projects which we were engaged in, it would have proven a daunting task to also consider a move of our Saskatoon office, so we appreciated that time to consider the change and to do our due diligence.

From our perspective, the first important point is that this is an initiative of the advocate who has indicated she needs our office space in Saskatoon for her program. As a result of it being the advocate's initiative and not something we sought out, a move of the Saskatoon office would fall under the forced move policy of SaskBuilds. What that means is that the cost for any necessary tenant improvements and moving costs would be borne by the advocate's office.

We understand that the advocate is in agreement with this point, and it is an important point for us as we wish to ensure that the additional costs associated with the forced move do not have to be absorbed within our existing budget.

Going forward, our office would need to bear the costs of the increased lease in Saskatoon. We currently pay 40 per cent of the cost of the shared space in our Saskatoon office, which includes a conference room, meeting room, lunchroom, storage room, and washrooms. Going forward, we would have to pay the full cost for these areas. Those shared areas make up a significant portion of the current Saskatoon office space.

The second important point is that, in the event the board wishes us to move, we have worked with SaskBuilds on our space needs. We have ensured that our space needs are reasonable and based simply on replacing the existing space versus expanding. We are trying to be as cost-efficient as possible in our approach.

Thirdly that cost-efficient approach will also characterize how we approach lease negotiations for a new space, and SaskBuilds will endeavour to have a portion of tenant improvements included as inducements.

At SaskBuilds's suggestion, we also respectfully request that if the board approves the funding for the move, that the board also specifically indicate that we are authorized to enter into a 10-year lease agreement. As SaskBuilds usually has to engage in a specific process to gain authority to enter into 10-year lease negotiations, it would give them comfort to see that authority specifically provided by the board in the minutes from today's meeting, if at all possible.

And I also want to thank SaskBuilds for the work that they have done to support us in evaluating costs associated with this proposal and in preparing the assessment of the space that we will require in a new Saskatoon office.

At the end of the day, although this is not our initiative, we always try to take the pragmatic and reasonable approach to such things, consistent with our statutory mandate. We've had a year to consider the proposal, and if the board wishes to approve the proposed move initiated by the advocate, we will work to make it happen and we will work to ensure that it happens in the most cost-effective way possible.

Before I conclude, I want to also express my thanks to the staff of the Legislative Assembly Service and the Speaker's office who are always very supportive of our work. We respectfully submit our budget request to the board.

The Chair: — Thank you very much for your presentation. Any questions from members? Mr. Harrison.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure. Maybe I'll ask at least one. So I was actually before the meeting reviewing some of the minutes from the BOIE [Board of Internal Economy] meeting on January 15th, 2013. I was on the board at that point, and what we were discussing, it was a very similar process to what we're going through here today but was a submission from the Office of the Ombudsman — at that point the Ombudsman was Kevin Fenwick — and a submission from the Children's Advocate. At that point Bob Pringle was the advocate.

And it had been, you know, a result of a significant amount of work that the board and the Speaker's office had done leading up to that 2013 meeting. And the proposal before the board at that point was to bring the offices together. And I think that, you know, obviously both the advocate and the Ombudsman were not in their current roles at that point as I indicated in my preamble, but there had been a lot of consideration. Central Services, obviously the precursor to SaskBuilds, had done the technical work.

And we were asked during that process, this board was asked to provide funding in the amount of over a million dollars between

the two budgets to accommodate the bringing together of the two organizations into a space that . . . It had been a government space. I think the Ministry of Highways had been in there prior to the two offices moving together.

But you know, we were — and again having reviewed the *Hansard* — given a very detailed rationale as to why this made sense, why both offices felt that this needed to happen. And based on that, you know, 10 years ago the board allocated over a million dollars plus, you know, kind of ongoing costs, but a million dollars for fit-up, for renovations, all of that to go forward.

So you know, I think I probably said a bit of this last year, but I would say the government has concerns about this. And I understand this is not the Ombudsman's initiative, and I appreciate that being pointed out and clearly pointed out as well in the preamble. But also understand that you have 12 FTEs [full-time equivalent] — is that right? — that are in Saskatoon.

Ms. Pratchler: — That's correct.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Okay. And it's basically one of the hallways, right? Okay, yeah.

Ms. Pratchler: — Just to give you some sense, it's built as one unit so it's all shared space. Really it's flow-through. I mean not all shared space, but the central area is shared.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — And that's where there's like a meeting room there and . . .

Ms. Pratchler: — Yeah.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Okay. So kind of that being the background, I guess I would ask, you know, have there been kind of challenges as far as the space? Are there implications? I just want the board to kind of understand clearly, you know, what's being asked for. And again understanding not the Ombudsman's initiative here, but you know, really what I'm getting at, is there an issue from the Ombudsman's office perspective to maintaining residence in the current space?

Ms. Pratchler: — We're fine with whatever the board decides. We can make either one work. That's kind of our culture. So as I noted in the written submission, we're not advancing the business case. That's the advocate's part of the submission. What we're more focused on are what are the cost implications because we appreciate the significance of that. But we can make either situation work.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — No, I'm very much appreciative. That's all I have.

The Chair: — Mr. Love.

Mr. Love: — I'll just start by saying thank you for your report today and for all the work that you do for the people of Saskatchewan in pursuit of fairness. I appreciate your work immensely.

With respect to this forced move, I guess one of the questions I have is, as a satellite office occupying 40 per cent of your staff — and I'm recalling a discussion last year on the need for some

of these extra spaces — could you comment further on why you would need access to specifically the kitchen, the boardroom, the shared space? Like as far as . . . I see that there's no space available currently, you know, on the roster of available spaces, so they'd be putting out a request for proposal. Are all of those requirements? Are some of them wishes? Could you just comment on specifically why they remain on that list of what you need to serve your duties?

Ms. Pratchler: — Yes. You bet. And on this we invited, and they certainly took us up on the invitation, the discussion with SaskBuilds. They, you know, challenged us: do you need all the space? They asked that question, so we went through that process with them.

But my premise was really to rely on SaskBuilds and their advice in terms of how to approach it, which was to look at a like-for-like situation. So my staff currently have available to them a kitchen area, so I'm not sure I could just move them into a space that's just all offices because that doesn't seem like a reasonable thing to do in terms of a move. So they're very basic kind of amenities that one would expect in an office.

If we could find an office-sharing situation where we shared a boardroom, we would certainly be open to that because we don't necessarily need the boardroom every day. However we would like to also extend our training into Saskatoon, so bringing people into that space, the Social Services people or people from the North, you know, for that. And then a meeting room so that if we have somebody come in to meet with us.

But we're not really asking for more than that. Even file storage we've moved primarily to electronic, so we don't need that kind of space in the way that we would have previously in the operation of the office. But we don't have any extras built into the space. But we certainly have the SaskBuilds's people here, who I think would be prepared to say we've been quite reasonable in our approach. We aren't looking for anything extra.

Given our mandate and the work that we see and the needs that we see, we're pretty careful about not asking for more than we need because we appreciate all the other demands on that public purse. So I hope that answers your question.

Mr. Love: — Yeah, thank you.

The Chair: — Any other comments or questions? I have something I'd like to ask you. Given the sensitive nature both of your office and the Children's Advocate office, is there any concerns about confidentiality? You have common hallways and things, so people coming in would go to one office or the other, but there's people from both of the offices would know or see these people. And just both of your offices, I'm sure there's some animated discussions from clients and things. Is there a concern that people from the other office might hear conversations and things that are going on?

Ms. Pratchler: — As a legislative officer, I start with the premise that I share space with another legislative officer, and we're both subject to high confidentiality. So if there was a concern, there could always be a statutory fix for that if there was an actual concern in terms of privacy. But because often our clients, if I can use that word, move across our statutory

mandates, sometimes there is a need to actually discuss a file.

But because that issue has been raised, my staff have been very vigilant about closing their doors. So right now the situation is at, in their one hallway, they close the door for any discussions. So we can't just sort of freely collaborate in the hallway, because that concern has been raised. But I don't particularly share that concern because we are legislative officers and subject to a high degree of confidentiality.

[09:30]

The only issue that I might flag — and I don't want to get into detail in it unless we went in camera on that issue — is just because it's built as one unit, security is common to all. So that might be the only issue that I would just flag for the board, so that if somebody comes into the office on either side they have access. But beyond that, no, I don't have a particular concern on the privacy.

We talk about confidentiality and privacy. My staff are very well trained in that issue and they're very careful in what they do. And we've done measures like pull the plug on the fax machine, which was a shared service. We've bought a shredder so that we shred all the documents before they go into the shredding bin. So there's always practical fixes on the ground that you can look at for issues like that.

So I think my answer to that question is no, I don't share that concern.

The Chair: — Thank you. Any last-minute comments? Thank you very much for your presentation.

Ms. Pratchler: — Thank you.

Information and Privacy Commissioner

The Chair: — We'll move on to item no. 5, decision item review of the 2024-2025 budget and motion to approve budgetary and statutory expenditure estimates for the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

I'd like to introduce Mr. Ron Kruzeniski, Information and Privacy Commissioner. And before you begin your presentation would you please introduce your officials.

Mr. Kruzeniski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To my right is Diane Aldridge who is the deputy commissioner, and to my left is Tristan Hungle who is the executive director of corporate services. And in the front row is Alyx Larocque, executive director of research and compliance, and Richard Yachiw who is the director of compliance. So that is the team today, Mr. Chairman.

Today is probably the last time that I will be presenting to this board as my appointment expires June 30th. And I wanted to take the opportunity to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and previous Speakers and members of the board and previous members of the board, for their consideration over the years as we've come each year and made budget requests and tried to adjust our budget to the needs that we see are out there. So it is interesting to be here for my last time. It has been a great 10 years. I've enjoyed every

minute of it, and I certainly owe a lot to the staff too for the successes we've had.

A number of years that we've come to this board and asked for money for additional staff — and again I'm quite appreciative that the board has accommodated that — but I need to point out with some pleasure that last year we did not ask for additional staff, and in this budget request this year we're not asking for additional staff. I must confess our request isn't quite as positive as Mr. Herauf's, but we are trying.

This 2023 has been a year of accomplishments and also a year of thinking forward as to what we plan to do in the future, and I wanted to ask Diane Aldridge to just take the part about the goals for the coming year and some of the accomplishments that we have had and are very pleased about this last year. Diane.

Ms. Aldridge: — Good morning. In terms of the goals that our office has set for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, in the package in front of you it's pages 2 to 5. I'm not going to go through them all because it's quite lengthy, but there are a number that I would like to highlight for you.

So starting on page 3, under the heading education awareness, the first one I want to draw your attention to is: update our resources to ensure that they provide citizens, public bodies, and health trustees with the latest information. So even if we have previously posted a blog or a resource, we are looking to make sure that it is the most timely, up-to-date information, because things change over time.

Secondly, we are promoting on a regular basis mandatory annual access and privacy training for employees within public bodies and trustees, as what we find in the course of our investigations is that often problems occur when people are forgetting, or they weren't properly trained in the first place. And our memories fail over time, so it's really important that that is revisited on a regular basis.

And thirdly under that category: implement procedures and allocate resources to manage the expanded definition of "trustees" under the HIPA [*The Health Information Protection Act*] regulations that came into effect on August 1st, 2023, which we were thrilled to see. And there was finally the proclamation of 17(1) around record retention and disposition. So just additional education and becoming more familiar with those specific sections as we undertake our work.

On the next page, under navigating a digital world, you will see the promotion of the elimination of the traditional fax machines in the health sector. And why is this important? Back in September of 2023, the federal-provincial-territorial privacy commissioners and ombudspersons came together and we made the call for the elimination of the traditional fax machine. Because even in our office over the last 19 years that I've been there, what we're finding is the most common type of privacy breach is misdirected faxes and emails.

And most recently the commissioner just issued, back on the 17th of this month, an investigation report that involved 14 different trustee organizations who had been sending misdirected faxes to one particular physician's office, involving multiple faxes in each case. And what we found was, in that case, some of the faxes

were through the traditional fax machines but others were digital. And so it's not going to completely address the problem. We know there's still going to have to be additional technical fixes, but we're definitely working to make sure that everything that can be done is being done.

An additional one is on page 4. Under the heading advocating for improvement, is the goal of promoting modernization of FOIP [*The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*], LAFOIP [*The Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*], and HIPA to recognize that we've moved from a paper-based system to a digital one — but not completely, especially when we work sometimes with municipalities. We find there's still a lot of paper records.

On page 5, under the heading efficient while effective, we are looking to enhance the security protections afforded to our extremely confidential case files, which we also take every opportunity to raise with the different public bodies and trustee organizations that we communicate with.

In terms of timelines, we have set the target of providing feedback on consultation files and resolving some review investigation files by early resolution — and that's prior to going and undertaking a formal review or investigation — within 30 calendar days. And I believe we've done that about 48 times in the last fiscal year, which of course isn't even a full fiscal. So we think we've been having some great success there.

And finally, for those files that cannot be closed by early resolution that go to review or investigation, we've had the target of 180 days. And in particular if you look at chart 3 on page 8, it tracks the amount of time, the average amount of time it's been taking us to close review or investigation files by report or by other means, which could be informal resolution. And what we're shifting now for the new fiscal year is moving from the 180-day target — and this is calendar days — to 150 days. And you'll see by the chart, in terms of reviews we actually . . . our average has gone down to 117 days to close those files, and in privacy breach investigations, 124 days.

So why only move to 150 days? Well if you look at the other charts you'll see on the previous page, the number of case files that we've opened in this past fiscal year, or actually calendar year, has gone up to 341. So we are seeing an increase again. And the average number of the active files that our analysts presently have before them is again slightly on the increase. So it's one of those things where we have to monitor over time to see if this is actually a trend that will continue in terms of our increase or if we will see fewer files in the future. But again we can't predict that.

And that's all for me. Back to you, Ron.

Mr. Kruzeniski: — Thank you very much, Diane. So those charts really reflect a very good year. And the goals, it turns out to be the coming-up year is a year of transition. Number one, I'm there for three months. The board then, you know, has to initiate that search process. Once the new commissioner is selected, he or she has to take on the office and get oriented. So it's really a time of transition.

And in that we acknowledge that when the new commissioner is

appointed, he or she may change some of the goals that we've outlined here. But we've also tried to select goals that have been there for a while — like modernizing the legislation, promoting annual training, promoting security — are things that hopefully new commissioners would say yes, keep doing that. But we do acknowledge that it is a time of transition, that a new commissioner can come in and actually make very critical comments about the previous commissioner, which is a worrisome thing. But I won't listen to the news and that way hopefully I won't hear it.

So with that, you know, we have consulted with staff on these, and particularly the people that are here with me today, to make sure that these are kind of goals that are reasonable in a year of transition.

Turning to the estimates themselves, and that starts at about page 9, I first want to talk about security protection. And I think this is our biggest ask of the board, and I need to take an opportunity to discuss security. And it starts with . . . We've gotten some wonderful benefits from digitizing and use of the internet, but it does come with some risk and challenges and we've had . . . I almost read headlines every day of a breach that's happened somewhere in North America or in the world. And my prediction is that breaches will continue because organizations, mainly outside our country, have found a way of making it very profitable.

We've had some breaches close to home. eHealth had one. SLGA [Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority] had one. Diane and I looked yesterday and we didn't have "significant" ones in '23 in Saskatchewan, but if you, again, read the headlines, Ontario hospitals had a significant breach. The top Toronto Public Library had one and the Toronto Zoo had one. And no doubt, you know, within January and March other significant organizations will have breaches. It's a constant threat. In our speaking records or our website, we don't talk about if a breach occurs — it is when a breach occurs.

One of my greatest fears, which is that my office have a breach. We hold most sensitive information in records because, as we're doing an investigation, ministries and agencies are providing us with their sensitive records, some of which they don't want to release. So a greatest fear is that we have that breach in our office. So I think it's quite necessary that we take further steps to increase security.

Now I did talk to the board last year about that and we did take one step in that direction. There are additional steps that we should take. There are a provider out there, and the additional step would cost about \$35,000. Now since you approved \$8,000 last year and that is already in the estimates, the net increase is about \$27,000. So I would ask that the board give that serious consideration. And I can tell you, as long as my term goes on and I'll be encouraging the leaders that are with me, that every time we get to talk to an organization, we are going to promote the idea that they increase their security, and it is going to cost money unfortunately.

The next heading is cost of operations. I think, like other organizations, we experience operating costs going ahead, and we've used the percentage of 2.2 per cent which I believe other organizations are using.

[09:45]

Accommodations: we are a tenant of SaskBuilds. And basically in the fall they give us a notice of what they expect our rent to be, and they then go to treasury board for getting approval of their budget. And usually they're pretty accurate in terms of what costs they will be conveying to us, so that is in there.

Cost of living on salaries: there's no request here. That hasn't been determined government-wide so I think, according to past practices, we've not addressed it there.

The next one: in-range movement. This applies to those people that are in a range and not at the top of the range. If you're at the top of the range, that's as far as you can go. The PSC [Public Service Commission] usually sends out a set of guidelines, and we attempt to follow those. They set the percentages for excellent performance, or meets basic needs.

We have a small increase due to a maternity leave in our office. And under salary alignment, you know, as we restructure and attempt to have the best organization that we can to produce the results and getting those reports out quickly, we have an increase there.

We put in also a cost for a new commissioner. This is somewhat arbitrary, but usually with a new commissioner some related costs come, whether it's a new laptop, whether it's a new piece of software, those types of things. So that is kind of put in there as a one-time cost, and once the board finishes its work, you know, that probably doesn't need to be in next year's budget.

So in summary, I'm so pleased that I'm not asking this board for additional staff. And I'm so pleased that some of my predictions, that if you allocated us money for the staff we have, that we could start showing results. And in what Diane has talked about I think there are some results that I'm very proud of.

I do believe that citizens are entitled to get answers from us quickly, and I like those numbers. Like 117 days, 120 days is about four months, and you could say, couldn't it be faster? Yes, it'd be nice if it would, but there's a lot of players and we're asking information for lots of people.

So in summary, our overall request for your consideration is \$98,000 which would give us a new budget of 2.703 million. I would request your consideration of that amount. I'm pleased to answer any questions that you might have, and those that I don't know the answers to I'll ask Diane to help me answer.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and board, for listening to us. And certainly glad to answer any questions that you have.

The Chair: — Thank you, sir, for your presentation. Any questions or comments? I recognize Mr. Love.

Mr. Love: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. First, thank you, Mr. Kruzeniski, on your service to this province, and congratulations on getting to the end of your term. You do such important work that we benefit from as legislators. And again, on behalf of the opposition, I want to thank you and congratulate you.

Thanks also for sharing several comments about the changes to

security protection. In your remarks you did answer several of the questions that I came in with, but just maybe wanted to follow up seeking further detail on engagement with Arctic Wolf. How did you and your staff engage in this process to land on this organization as the best provider of these security services? Could you maybe provide a few comments on the process, if there were other proposals considered, and how they compared in terms of cost and scope of service?

Mr. Kruzeniski: — Thank you for that question. The provider that we've selected is the one that provides service to the LAS, to our office, and to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. So it gets very interrelated how we provide our service. We are assisted by the LAS IT unit. They engage with Powerland that provides supplementary and backup service to LAS and to us and the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. And the product that they're recommending is one that they service and provide, so we have not gone through a rigorous selection process.

If we went to any other product not provided by Powerland, it would create significant difficulties in the interactions in how our IT service is provided, monitored, and kind of integrated. So we're kind of in under the LAS/Powerland umbrella, and that basically moves the selection of the added security within that umbrella too, to end up with Arctic Wolf.

Mr. Love: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Mr. Harrison.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. First I just want to say thank you so much, Ron, for your decades of service to the province. As you well know, I had the pleasure of being on the selection committee 10-plus years ago, along with David Forbes, that we went through the process — a very in-depth process, very competitive applications — and Commissioner Kruzeniski obviously was the candidate that the legislature felt to be the appropriate one after a significant and successful career at the Ministry of Justice prior to that.

So I just want to say thank you, Ron, for your service to the province. It's been just genuinely appreciated, and for all the right reasons. So we want to thank you for that.

One of the discussions we'll likely have here at the board or between the government and opposition, the June 30th time frame is a little awkward right before the election. So you know, we'll maybe have a discussion about what a path forward might look like on that, and obviously we'll have a discussion with the office as well about what that might look like.

But mainly just wanted to say thank you. Appreciate the budget submission as well, both this year and last year, because we've obviously had some good discussions in previous years. And you know, I think the board was very supportive of the work you've been doing, and that was reflected in the allocation of resources for additional staff at the office. So we appreciate the submission, and just want to say thank you.

The Chair: — Any other comments or questions? Seeing none, I'd just also like to thank you for your many years of service, and good luck in your retirement. Thank you, sir.

We're running ahead of schedule, so let's take our break right now till quarter after 10. We'll recess until then. Thank you.

[The board recessed for a period of time.]

[10:15]

Advocate for Children and Youth

The Chair: — Okay, we'll move on to item no. 6, decision item, review of the 2024-2025 budget and motion to approve budgetary and statutory expenditure estimates for the Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth.

I'd like to introduce Ms. Lisa Broda, Advocate for Children and Youth, and please ask for you to make a presentation. But first introduce your colleagues. Thank you.

Ms. Broda: — Thank you so much. Good morning, Mr. Chair, hon. members of the board. Joining me today is Caroline Sookocheff, our manager of finance and administration, and Leeann Palmer, our deputy advocate, to my left. As the Ombudsman had already noted in her submission, Sara Nichols and Candice St. Onge are also present to assist us with any questions related to our request today, and thank them for attending here as well. They're at the back at the right here.

We're pleased to be here today to present our budget request for the '24-25 fiscal year and thank the board for their ongoing support and the opportunity to present our proposal today.

Prior to making the request, I'd like to make a few introductory remarks regarding the work of our office over this past year. First I would like to extend my gratitude for the work of our leadership team and, more importantly, our staff in serving children and youth of this province. Their passion, knowledge, competencies, expertise in doing what is more often than not extremely difficult work, given what our office deals with on a day-to-day basis, is commendable. It has been a distinct privilege to work alongside this team during my tenure thus far.

In spite of the difficulties, the work of the advocate's office is also rewarding as we advocate for better outcomes for children. I make recommendations for system improvements, support government to implement our recommendations and to work to make a difference in the lives of the children served. Working together for better system outcomes is going to help all children live to their full potential, as is their right.

Families and children continue to be deeply impacted by issues made complicated since the pandemic. The calls we receive and the issues we investigate continue to be critically complex and are multi-faceted. Most pressing for children and youth are the increasing issues related to mental health and addictions and the ongoing difficulty in obtaining services for getting help.

Our office also continues to see abuse and neglect within group homes; youth who are struggling to transition to adulthood; families who are experiencing their own struggles that impact children, such as poverty, mental health and addictions, and the intergenerational trauma that continues to plague Indigenous families' ability to care for their children.

As noted in our submission related to our accomplishments this past year, we continue to experience the pressure of an increased volume of advocacy investigation files in our office. Despite this volume, our advocacy cases, which often require urgent attention due to the acute and complicated nature of these files, continue to be prioritized and resolved in a timely manner. Advocacy is a critical function of our office in terms of ensuring children receive immediate and long-term services to which they're entitled to safeguard their safety and well-being.

Additionally the volume of investigation files we assessed this past year has led us to confirm that children and youth continue to suffer with unaddressed mental health issues, resulting in suicide attempts and ongoing suicidal ideation. Our office only receives a small sample of what is evidenced in the broader population of young people. These young people need immediate and sustainable services that are not typically always available or readily available.

This puts pressure on other resources and systems because of this lack of long-term intervention, but it also puts pressure on our office when families and young people and stakeholders are calling to help . . . us to assist. As a result we continue to advocate and recommend for full development and implementation of a robust child and youth strategy.

We are pleased the government has accepted this recommendation for this strategy, but we need one that includes benchmarks and measures effectiveness of the coordinated and targeted services for children across sector. The strategy is integral to address those multitude of issues that children face that lead to poor mental health outcomes.

The other 13 recommendations made from our *Desperately Waiting* report are also key to addressing the problem in both the short and long term, such as structured middle-tier care and increased mental health support in schools.

We are very encouraged by the government's acceptance of these recommendations specific to mental health and addictions. From our perspective the recommendations are critical in getting underneath those issues I mentioned earlier in addressing the lack of services, or increase services for children and families, and it also demonstrates why it's so vital that government works together to address those common gaps across sectors.

Also in 2023 we've been fully out across the province meeting with young people, stakeholders who serve young people, and providing public education presentations to various entities, inclusive of our self-advocacy workshop, and teaching them about our mandate and rights of children.

You will also note in our submission that our office completed three major systemic reports this year related to social services and educational programs, making a total of 46 recommendations to address broader change for better services that significantly impact children. Our office also handled several systemic and consultation files throughout the year, and we work to continue to collaborate and support ministries or entities involved, whether addressing issues raised or implementing the recommendations for best outcomes for children.

In spite of these ongoing pressures and challenges, we continue

to maintain a strong operational team, managing this volume of work within our existing complement, and to adapt and adjust to ensure we fulfill our core responsibilities and advance our goals of our strategic priorities.

With respect to our budget request for the fiscal year '24-25, our office continues to demonstrate fiscal responsibility. During my tenure as the Advocate for Children and Youth, upholding the statutory obligations of the office while displaying stewardship in the expenditure of public funds has been paramount. As such, for our '24-25 budget submission, we continue to focus on fulfilling our legislative mandate with our existing staff complement and to internally offset those pressures where we can without compromising client services to the children and youth of the province.

At this time I would like to direct your attention to our written budget submission. Beginning on page 5, we outline the assumptions we have made in developing our '24-25 budget request regarding economic adjustments, in-range salary progression for eligible employees, statutory expenses, operating expenses, and FTE requirements. With the exception of the increase to the consumer price index, we are either indicating no cost increase, status quo, or proposing that our office absorb the incremental increase, as is the case with respect to in-range progression.

We'd also like to note that in '23-24, the current fiscal year, we fully implemented our new case management system within our existing budget allotment and for '24-25 are proposing to finance the ongoing operating costs within our existing funding.

Moving to page 8 of our budget submission, the details of our '24-25 request are outlined in full. As previously indicated, we are requesting funding for two items. The first relates to an increase related to the consumer price index. We are requesting an increase in budget funding of \$15,000 for goods and services. This relates primarily to the increased costs of utilities in accordance with direction provided by the board for '24-25.

The second component is a request for one-time funding for office accommodation expenses. As you will recall from our previous budget submission and deliberations during the '23-24 budget cycle, our office had requested funding to initiate the planning, design, and possible options for our office accommodation needs in advance of the expiration of our office lease in January of 2025. At that time, we outlined to the board the operational deficiencies pertaining to the current co-shared office arrangement with the Saskatoon office of the Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner.

With the existing configuration, our staff cannot conduct our operations in an efficient, effective, or private manner. Our reception area is inadequate and does not protect the privacy of callers or walk-ins. Our operational staff are doubled up in offices, making it very difficult to effectively perform their duties, and more critically, to maintain privacy and confidentiality in accordance with section 12 of our Act, which clients deserve and which we are legally obliged to uphold.

As the board is aware, our office was prepared to move so as to not displace the Ombudsman. However the board deferred its decision on this request to the '24-25 budget year, requesting that

we come back and that the advocate consult with the Ministry of SaskBuilds and the Ombudsman to refine the request with respect to options and cost implications and to return this budget year to make the request.

This further consultation and collaboration had resulted in a mutual agreement between our office and the Ombudsman and a revised funding proposal, which would see the Saskatoon office of the Ombudsman relocate to new premises within Saskatoon, and for our office to take over the lease for the space in T&T Towers vacated by the Ombudsman's office, which is the most cost-effective option.

We thank the Ombudsman for their agreement. This alternative will address the issues identified by both offices for more operational space for delivery, privacy concerns due to the lack of each entity having its own office, in addition to the security concerns raised by the Ombudsman's office regarding the existing location.

With respect to the one-time cost estimate, this estimate has been prepared by the Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement. A copy of their memo is attached to the budget submission for your reference. Additionally officials from the Ministry of SaskBuilds are also here in attendance to provide any clarification that you may require. In accordance with the SaskBuilds and Procurement forced move policy — a technical term, as there was mutual agreement for this request — we are requesting a one-time funding to cover the costs of the Ombudsman's office move and tenant improvements for their new accommodation.

The estimated one-time funding expenditure is projected to be up to 700,000 for '24-25. The actual cost is expected to be less based on existing space availability and several options and fit-ups within the Saskatoon market. Again SaskBuilds could speak more to this if desired.

At this time, approval in principle for annualized accommodation funding of 142,000 per year is also requested, although this funding will not be required until '25-26 fiscal year.

Overall the '24-25 budget proposal reflects a 0.5 per cent increase in general operating expenditures and one-time funding in the amount of up to \$700,000 for leasehold improvements to fulfill the requirement to make the Ombudsman's office whole under SaskBuilds's forced move policy.

With that I respectfully request the Board of Internal Economy recommend to the Legislative Assembly an appropriation for the Advocate for Children and Youth under vote 76, as outlined on page 8 and 9 of our submission for the fiscal year of '24-25.

Thank you again for the opportunity and the support of the board in providing our submission and allowing me to make remarks. And I'd be pleased to answer any questions as I can. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Ms. Broda. Are there any questions or comments from the board? I recognize Mr. Harrison.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just firstly I just wanted to say thank you for the work that you do, and through you to your entire team for the work that has been done. It's genuinely appreciated. Yeah, I made kind of my

comments a little bit earlier, had some comments on the record with regard to the move, and you know, we'll obviously be considering that at the board here over the course of the day. So thank you for your submission. I appreciate it.

The Chair: — Yes, Mr. Love.

Mr. Love: — Yeah, I'll say a quick thank you as well to the advocate. Thanks so much for the work that you do to advocate for the children and youth in Saskatchewan, in particular in the areas of the needed mental health supports and recommendations made to the government in that area, your work on the pronoun policy and parental rights.

You've been a strong voice for children and youth in our province, and your work is appreciated by the official opposition. I believe it's incredibly valuable to the people of Saskatchewan. I want to thank you and all of your staff for the work that you do in service of our children.

With respect to the budget you've brought to us today, you've certainly given us lots to think about. We'll continue to dialogue with members of the board on this. I wanted to maybe just give one opportunity to see if you could comment at all on the concerns around privacy. We've heard differing opinions on this. Of course that's to be expected. We know that we're here because of a difference of opinion. But I was just wondering if you could offer any more detail on concerns that you're hearing from your staff or how that relates to the changes that you've brought to us today in the budget.

Ms. Broda: — Thank you. Thank you so much. Yeah you know, with respect, I did hear Ms. Pratchler's comments about, you know, we're statutory officers and therefore we're going to keep things confidential, but we each have our own Act. That is true for sure. We do know that. There's just, you know . . . If somebody were to say, hey, can you guarantee the privacy of the clients that walk in your office or the information that they bring? You know, I can't sit here and say 100 per cent that that can be guaranteed.

Our staff are oathed. People do come and go, and you can have clients at the same time walking in. Or I think the most pertinent issue that we see in our office in a shared space is that our reception has no privacy. You walk in, there's just . . . there's not a wall or anything. So our staff, our reception staff have said, you know, they hear everything going on in the Ombudsman's side when they're answering their phones, and they hear all of our stuff too.

And we've tried to mitigate some of that with respect to, if there's a call that one of our staff have to take, they can take it in another room, but they're literally leaving the reception area to take it. Otherwise they're talking in code to a youth who's, like, desperate or a family that's desperate. And there's names. And there's not just one name; there's lots of names.

[10:30]

So we aren't adhering to section 12 of our Act, which causes me great concern, because I do believe that we have an obligation legally to uphold that section regardless of our statutory positions. And certainly when we need to share, like if there's a

common client we have that has been also . . . Those names aren't shared. You know, those names aren't shared to us if we have a common client. And certainly we're cognizant of our ability to share as well.

I mean this, to me this is in our best interest of our office to have our own space. We're the only statutory office that does not have their own space. And I think that that's a really important piece for us to be able to efficiently and confidentially do the work of the advocate's office. And certainly I am grateful Sharon, Ms. Pratchler, agreed to mutually come to this place with this and to carry and make this request, for us to make this request and respect, either way, the board's decision.

But certainly it does create a lot of . . . It compromises our operational delivery and our confidentiality, I guess is the bottom line. And we, you know, shutting of the doors on the other side isn't helpful always because when someone walks in, and if I know that person that's a client of theirs, I should not know who that person is. People walk in regularly for service. I just think that's the most pressing.

And secondly, our staff are doubled up in their offices. They have to leave often to go and take a call, and that confidentiality is compromised because of the fact that they have to go to an interview room or the boardroom to take those calls, which can be heard. All the information in our offices, regardless, can be heard if it's loud enough or whatever. So all I'm saying is that, yeah, thank you for the opportunity to comment on it, but certainly I believe our legal obligation is to respect that at minimum — in addition to all of the other noted concerns that I have with respect to space. Thank you.

The Chair: — Any other questions or comments? I just want to raise one thing. Is there an option of, from an infrastructure on the site, to alleviate some of your concerns about privacy and confidentiality? Can there be some renovations to improve the situation?

Ms. Broda: — You know, I don't think it would alleviate the situation. The way the office is . . . I mean I think Ms. Pratchler spoke of this. But the way the front is set up is, there's no way to put a wall. You can't put a defined wall between us. There's shared boardroom space, shared washroom space, shared interview space. So there isn't really a way to split off the office.

And just with respect, it would not address all my other operational service delivery needs of our people being doubled up in offices, and again us not having . . . you know, being the only independent office that doesn't have their own office space.

The Chair: — Thank you. Anything else? Okay. Thank you very much, Ms. Broda, for your presentation. We would just take a very brief recess until the next officer is here.

[The board recessed for a period of time.]

Chief Electoral Officer

The Chair: — Item no. 7 is a decision item: the review of the 2024-2025 budget and motion to approve statutory estimates for the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Saskatchewan. I'd just like to welcome and introduce Michael

Boda, the Chief Electoral Officer, and ask that before he begins his presentation to introduce your officials. Mr. Boda.

Mr. Boda: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair, for inviting us today to discuss our budget for 2024-25, our budget estimates, with you and board members. The coming fiscal year will of course see the administration of a general election, one of the largest events, if not the largest event, that will be run in the province of Saskatchewan.

Beside me I have Jennifer Colin. She's our chief operating officer and also deputy chief electoral officer for corporate services and electoral finance. Richard Hall is behind me; he's the executive director for the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer. And Aaron Thompson is with us today as director of finance.

With your permission, Mr. Chair, I'd like to take about 20 minutes to offer an overview of our budget estimates, and then I'd be pleased to take some questions.

The Chair: — Sure. Please.

Mr. Boda: — Well it's January 23, which means that in nine months we will likely be well into our second day of early voting. By the end of day one we'll have served tens of thousands of voters. In 2020 that was about 40,000 people on the first day of voting. Candidate nominations will have closed, ballots will have been printed and distributed, election workers hired and trained, and by the time voting ends the following Monday evening, we'll have served close to a half a million voters and maybe — hopefully — more.

We'll have voting in Uranium City, in Wollaston Lake, Creighton, Lloydminster, North Portal, and I truly mean it when I say that we will be voting in all corners of our province. While my office may oversee the administration of the event, it will be the people in those communities who truly deliver the election. And so this fall, when you go to cast your ballot, when you're in Moose Jaw, in Saskatoon, Meadow Lake, Regina, Canora, Prince Albert, or Biggar, I hope that you will take a moment and thank the people working at your voting location. Because we could not do this without them, and they are the ones that make this event a success.

An important question every time there is an election is, what's different this time? I want to begin here this morning by focusing initially on some big-picture changes. Everyone in the room will have memories of our 2020 event, which was conducted during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. I am pleased to say that at present we are not planning to procure masks, plastic barriers, or hand sanitizer.

One area that you will also notice big-picture change is in our constituency boundaries, which have been updated for the first time since 2011. For an election management body, the first election after boundaries are changed, it typically results in increased calls and complaints about voting locations — individuals who have voted in one location and now have to vote in another location, those type of issues.

And then there is a metachange that I definitely want to bring to your attention, simply that the tone and tenure of democracy in Canada and North America has evolved over the past four years.

While I'll talk more about this later, I have significant concerns about what is unfolding, and our election — which comes right after provincial elections in British Columbia and New Brunswick and right before the American presidential election — could be conducted in the middle of a perfect storm, so to speak.

Let's transition to some more tangible process changes. I'd encourage you to have a close read of pages 10 and 11 of my submission, as these changes are more fully described there than I'll be able to go into today.

Modernization has been an overarching priority throughout my tenure as CEO [Chief Electoral Officer], and I cannot even estimate the number of times I've used the word "modernization." But I want to be clear that modernization should not be understood as an election worker using a computer, because it's about so much more.

Modernization is about moving forward to serve the needs of stakeholders in the manner in which they want and expect to be served. We cannot abandon our democratic traditions, but we also can't allow them to become stagnant and out of touch with what society expects. It's through a methodical, thoughtful evolution of democratic methods that we will be able to guard the democratic traditions that we've carefully curated in this province over a century.

Ultimately, modernization should be viewed as a process that won't be fully achieved during the coming election, but a process involving change over the next few cycles as we continue to reinforce the foundations of our democracy here in Saskatchewan. For now, I hope that we can focus on achieving specific goals and milestones that will allow us to move forward together, ensuring that our election system works and allows us to take the next steps needed to modernize further in the next general election.

I will focus here on three specific changes that you will notice this fall. In our communications with the public and with political stakeholders, you will notice one important change. You won't hear about advance voting or election day, but instead you will hear about early voting, last day of voting, and voting week. For decades, all voting happened on one day, election day, and voters were geographically tied to a single ballot box managed by two election officials. In recent years we've seen the beginnings of flexibility with this system — the introduction of advance voting.

The formalization of voting week is an important first step in acknowledging the need to place the voter at the centre of our system as we seek to broaden voters' access to the secret ballot, introducing multiple days, multiple places, and multiple methods of voting that offer greater convenience for the voters but, most importantly, the ability of all eligible voters to participate in choosing their leaders. The introduction of voting week is a first but a very important step in this direction.

A second tangible change surrounds how we will create and use polling divisions. In the past, legislation required that we have a polling division for every 300 voters, served by two election officials on what was known as election day. This has become increasingly inefficient, as we've already begun to broaden access to the ballot by using other methods of voting, including

vote by mail and early voting. As the system has evolved, many of these polls would serve just a fraction of the number of voters because voters preferred other methods that have been introduced.

For this election we will create polling divisions with the number of voters assigned based on driving or walking distance, whether the voting location will use an electronic poll book or not, and what facilities can reasonably serve as voting locations. Constituencies that use electronic poll books — primarily densely populated urban constituencies — will have a smaller number of polling divisions and a corresponding smaller number of voting locations, with all being open for all six days of voting.

Constituencies without electronic poll books, primarily in the rural areas, will have larger polling divisions than in the past but will generally have about the same number of polling locations as in the past, as we continue to hit our service commitment of no voter needing to drive more than 30 minutes in order to cast a ballot — a measure we have used for several elections now.

A third tangible change, and I've referenced this already, is the introduction of electronic poll books. Now an electronic poll book is an ordinary laptop accessing specialized software containing voter information. Our plans will see electronic poll books used in all constituencies which are primarily urban — all in Regina, all of Saskatoon, both constituencies in Moose Jaw and Prince Albert, in Yorkton, Swift Current, and The Battlefords. The benefit of an electronic poll book includes faster processing of voters, as well as a real-time data sharing with candidates and parties. When a voter casts their ballot, they are struck off and that information is shared immediately.

With those differences described, Mr. Chair, I'd like to talk about some of the challenges Elections Saskatchewan faces in the months ahead before I turn to our priorities for the coming year.

[10:45]

Now no general election is without its challenges. I'm going to introduce a few for you today but there will of course be the unknown unknowns. Things which we can't even anticipate happening. When I was sitting here four years ago there were two significant unknown unknowns. The first being the real possibility of an early election call and the second being that a global pandemic would emerge.

A first and very tangible challenge that we have not yet seen progress on is regulatory changes that are necessary to conduct the coming election. On November the 1st of last year, my office submitted a request for regulatory change, both updates to regulated forms and also increases to fees we are allowed to pay election workers. To date, while I have received confirmation of receipt from the Minister of Justice, I do not have a firm timeline as to the status of those changes. Should some of them not be made, we would find ourselves paying workers less than minimum wage this fall. In the coming days I will be writing to the Minister of Justice to request an update on progress of my request.

A second challenge is the growing risk around cybersecurity and threats to democratic processes, both internal and foreign. When this topic is mentioned, some will say that Saskatchewan is

simply too small and no one is paying attention to our election in the broader world. I can tell you that this is not true. The country's Communication Security Establishment has been in active communication with me and other elections management bodies across the country on this topic. And if there is broad interest on this topic, I would be pleased to offer an in camera briefing to members and to your parties on steps we are taking to address this issue.

The third and final challenge that I'll mention is one that will be familiar to board members. It's how we are going to count ballots given that vote-counting equipment was not approved by the board for this general election. My recommendation has been, and continues to be, that the integrity of our system is guarded by pairing electronic poll books with vote-counting equipment and not using one or the other alone.

The primary reason for this is that the efficiencies introduced by each machine needs the other machine to compensate. One worker with an electronic poll book can process voters far faster than our traditional system. So fast in fact that counting of the number of ballots cannot necessarily be completed within the time allotted for this process.

The rejection of vote-counting equipment has meant that we've had to create entirely new processes and new election worker positions and even an entirely new procedure of bringing in additional vote-counting teams if the number of ballots at one station gets too high.

Through all of this, my primary focus has been on ensuring the integrity of our system is maintained and that the public and political stakeholders, of course, get results in a timely, reasonable amount of time once voting ends. I believe we have managed to create a system that will do this, but it's not without risks.

I'd next like to pivot and focus on our organizational priorities. I think this question will help to offer a fuller sense of what it takes to run a general election. Our budget document lists six priorities, but I'll focus on just three of them today.

The first is ensuring event readiness. We need to finish getting ready to conduct this event. We have been planning for this election since even before the last general election, but the coming months will see significant increase in the scale and the pace of our preparations.

Event readiness means having a field leadership team, returning officers, and election clerks in place and training them to ensure that they can complete their responsibilities. It means engaging with stakeholders — parties and candidates, vendors and service providers, voters, anyone who we rely on or anyone we need to offer services to. And one more example from an extremely long list: it means being ready to equip and supply 61 returning offices. And they'll need desks, computers, phones, printers, paper, pens, and other office supply needs. And they'll only need it for a few months. It's a significant logistical challenge.

The second priority is to administer voting in Saskatchewan's 30th general election. The administration of the 2024 general election will, in many ways, reinforce our goal of broadening access to voters by offering more hours of voting than ever

before. During the first five days, all voting locations will be open from 10 to 7, nine hours each day. In 2016 that was seven hours per day, meaning we have added 10 hours of early voting since 2016 and five since 2020. And on the last day of voting, we'll be open from 9 to 8. And this is all in addition to a robust and easy-to-use vote-by-mail process, as well as the option of homebound voting for those who qualify, special hospital and personal care facility voting options, and so on.

A third priority I'll point to comes in after the election is over and we need to take apart the temporary structure we spent the last years building. Returning offices must be closed and an election's worth of materials needs to be shipped back to our warehouse. In our offices we'll experience significant turnover as our temporary employment contracts come to an end. We need to offboard those staff and ensure that we capture the knowledge that was gained throughout the election.

But of course as some activities wind down, others pick up. All candidates and all registered political parties must file election returns and my office must review these and once again process reimbursements. This is a significant amount of work, which can very easily be lost in the post-event shuffle, but it continues for more than a year after the election and is very important to the health of our democracy and to the public's trust in the political system. And then of course as soon as one event ends, we need to begin planning for the next one and to consider any by-elections that come forward.

Now before I speak about the actual dollars, I'll take a moment and explain our budget development process. This will be familiar to some, but I think it's important context and especially in an election year.

Consistent with how Elections Saskatchewan has developed its budgets in recent years, we classify costs into two categories. The first focuses on ongoing administrative costs: salaries, rent, and other operating costs for our head office. The second category is event-related costs, and these costs are associated with preparing for and delivering scheduled electoral events. We have also developed this budget with several key assumptions in mind. These assumptions are described on page 6 and 7 of the budget submission, but I'll mention the first, that being that the last day of voting for this election is on October 28th, 2024.

I don't believe I should rehash 2020, but I do want to be clear how much of a budget impact political speculation of an early election will have. I am of course not including media speculation. Columnists and commentators are allowed to say whatever they wish and their speculation will not have much of an impact on our planning position. But if speculation begins to come from government or from MLAs, then my office may find itself in the same position we did in 2020, forced to begin serious, earnest preparations for an early election, and that will have considerable operational and financial impact.

For the coming year, our administrative budget is just over \$3.4 million, which is an increase of about \$200,000 over last year, the majority of which can be traced back to the fact that this is an election year. Portions of this relate to how we track and account for vacation liabilities. My team will take considerably less vacation this year than they will in the next. We work hard to manage this over the course of the four-year election cycle, not

on an annual basis.

Other increases are simply due to inflationary factors and the increased amount of transactions and business that my office will conduct over the year. We will find ourselves paying for more photocopying, long distance, and other routine office costs due simply to the activities that we're working on.

Moving to our event budget, we have set it at 25.8 million for the next fiscal year as we prepare to administer a general election. A significant portion of this money, about 56 per cent, are funds that by legislation we have to spend and we have little control over. This includes payment to workers and field staff. This includes rent costs for voting locations and returning offices as well as money for printing necessary supplies and of course ballots.

Finally it includes the funds we reimburse to parties, candidates, and auditors as part of the election expense process. There's some ability of my office to affect these costs. For example, we will hire fewer workers than in previous events. We are actually attempting to reduce our reliance on people by about 50 per cent. We are exploring options to have more than one returning office in a location if it makes sense, primarily urban areas where constituencies are geographically smaller.

The remainder of the cost covers a wide variety of areas. We will hire temporary staff at our head office to assist us in delivering this election. There is far, far too much work for our core staff to manage, but many if not most of those temporary staff members will see their employment end before the end of the fiscal year.

We need to train our field leadership team, the returning officers, the election clerks who work in each of the province's 61 constituencies. In 2020 COVID forced us to move all training online. That was far from ideal. And for this cycle we are using a hybrid model, using remote learning where it makes sense and for lecture-style sessions, but bringing people together for training that is best done hands-on, such as technology onboarding.

We are currently in the process of selecting a public call centre vendor to answer voter inquiries this fall. In 2020 our call centre handled more than 1,100 calls on the last day of voting alone.

I could, of course, go on for some time as there really is an extensive list of activities and processes needed to make an election a success, but the last one I'll mention is that we will create and staff multiple internal support desks. I mentioned our public call centre which is where voters can get information, but we also need significant infrastructure to support our teams who have questions about the conduct of the election, financial and payroll issues for the thousands of workers being hired. And then there will be an IT support desk fielding traditional technology questions from our returning offices, and for the first time in the general election, we'll have support available for election workers using electronic poll books.

Now before we finish, I want to move away from this year's budget for just a moment and look at the election cycle as a whole and what we anticipate the cost of the election to be over a four-year period. Further information is found on this on page 12 and 13 of your budget submission.

The total cost of an election has been a priority of mine throughout my time as CEO. I have long believed that the costs of general elections were growing exponentially over time. Saskatchewan has seen increases as much as 50 per cent between events, and clearly this was a problem and something that simply could not go on indefinitely.

In January 2020 when I presented our budget, we had a plan in place that would essentially flatline the cost of elections with inflation. Ultimately those plans would change due to COVID-19 and the possibility of an early election. But as we transition to this cycle, I wanted to return to my previous commitment of flatlining costs. And so as detailed in our submission, if you take the total cost of the 2020 general election and remove those COVID-19 related costs and then compare to our estimate for 2024 against 2020, we come in about 15 per cent higher. Inflation over this period ran about 14 per cent so we really are on track here.

Now to be clear, because I know it's difficult when I'm orally presenting numbers and figures and percentages, I am removing all the COVID costs because I believe those are unique, one-off costs. Were we to leave them in the comparison, it would have in fact looked better as the per cent increase would be less.

When we plan for elections, we remain very mindful of costs, but a significant portion of them are set. Paying election workers, renting voting locations and returning offices, reimbursing candidates and parties — these are costs that we don't have much flexibility on. Consistent with our last two elections, following this general election, I will provide a complete and detailed accounting of what we spent to administer this general election as part of my post-election reporting.

For clarity, I am transitioning away from total election costs and back to my budget request for '24-25.

Elections Saskatchewan budget request for the coming fiscal year balances a commitment to ensuring an accessible, trusted election event while also taking into consideration efficiency and ensuring the responsible use of public dollars. And therefore I would ask that the Board of Internal Economy recommend to government that the allocation of \$29,240,856 to Elections Saskatchewan be approved for the coming fiscal year.

[11:00]

Mr. Chair, let me thank you and the board for your support over the last four years. An election year is challenging for an election management body, but I also know that it's challenging for candidates and registered political parties. Just as it is for everyone who works in this building here at the Legislative Assembly, Elections Saskatchewan's goal is to serve every voter in this province. But I also want you to know that we're here to serve you and every candidate and every political party, and we want to help you in any way you can be assisted.

And so with that, I would be pleased to take any questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Mr. Boda. I will open it up to questions. I recognize Mr. Harrison.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure. Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the Chief Electoral Officer for the presentation, thorough and detailed, and thank the CEO and, through you, your team for the work that Elections Saskatchewan has been doing over many years, but you as the Chief Electoral Officer for many of those years. And it's appreciated.

The other thing that I would highlight, and I actually think it's quite unique to Saskatchewan in how we work through and work together in this system, because really it does only work, especially at this level, with co-operation between the opposition, the government, the Speaker, and the Chief Electoral Officer and the Ministry of Justice as well. Really I think it has been a very productive discussion, relationship, and process that we, you know, don't have necessarily formalized, but the way it has worked in practice I think has been consistent over about three different election cycles.

And you know, at the end of the day not everybody gets exactly what they might aspire to or strive for, but I think we all have the opportunity to have a respectful discussion and I think, at the end of day, a confluence of views generally on what we can agree to. So none of these systems will ever be entirely perfect. But I can tell you, it does not work that way everywhere, and frankly it doesn't work that way in most places where government just decides and puts forward what changes are going to occur.

So you know, I think it's been though a useful process where we have worked together with all of the different elements to this, which can be challenging and somewhat messy sometimes, but I think we get to where we need to go.

So perhaps we'll get to that on the regulations imminently going to be enacted. We can have further discussion just on process around that, which would bore everybody. But we've been working through the process element of that, and they will be very consistent with what the Chief Electoral office has submitted and which has been agreed to between the parties as well.

So with regard to the budgetary request, obviously these are statutory items and of course will be supported by government members of the board consistent with the statutory provisions. And we have full confidence that the Chief Electoral Officer will be, you know, in a position to implement the election in October.

The Chair: — Mr. Love.

Mr. Love: — Yeah, I want to join with other members of the board and thank you, Dr. Boda, for all of your work with Elections Saskatchewan, to all of your staff who are here with us today. In particular I want to thank you for . . . You mentioned how many times you've used the word "modernization," that you continue to use that word and continue to take on that work with so much thoughtfulness.

I do have a question in relation to that, to one of your comments that you'd shared with us verbally today as well as in your written report. And not to rehash previous discussions that we've had here and recommendations that you've brought to this table, but you mention that we will be the only jurisdiction to proceed with electronic poll books without having vote-counting machines. For clarification, is it the only jurisdiction in Canada, in North

America, and what are the budgetary implications of that?

As you mention in your report that Elections Saskatchewan has and will continue to work towards the goal of ensuring stability, integrity, and accuracy, what are the budget implications in terms of extra work, extra human resources to maintain that stability and accuracy without the pairing of those two modernization efforts?

Mr. Boda: — So I'll begin with the pairing of the two pieces of technology. And I have articulated consistently that it's best practice when you're introducing technology to use both, so either have none or have both. And I've articulated the reasons for that, how that has unfolded over time. It basically puts pressure on the back end when you introduce the electronic poll book because you have more ballots that are going into the ballot boxes.

And so we have made adjustments, which I can certainly talk about, in order to compensate for the increased number of ballots. I have continued concerns about it. I would say that in terms of those who are introducing this technology, the large systems, we are the only one that is doing this in this manner. New Brunswick, for example, has used both pieces of technology for over, well over a decade now, but the other systems that are being introduced, you always see this continuation of the consistency of using both of the pieces of technology.

I'm sure you could maybe find one municipality that has a very small number of voters that has used one or the other, but this is not best practice, and that is why I continue to say it's important. It won't be used in the 2024 because we're moving well along in this regard in order to ensure that we're compensating.

In terms of the budget considerations, that's a difficult one to tell at this point because it would be the first time that we would be introducing the back-end technology. We're already introducing the front-end technology.

But I would skew to what the long-term goal is. And going back to my definition of modernization, it's not about technology alone. It is about reinforcing the capacity of our system in the longer run. And what we know is that we cannot rely on people to the extent that we have in the past. 2016 had over 12,000 workers. This time we're hoping to get it down to 5 or 6,000 workers because we are using technology on the front end. We're hoping to reduce that number.

It's about maintaining the capacity of the system and maintaining the integrity of the system. You know that people are working, and they're counting after they've been at the polls for many, many hours and they're very tired. And it is the reviews of the literature and those who work in my industry that the integrity is better, far better, in this context using a piece of vote-counting equipment than not.

So in the end we are compensating. We will do our best. There are still risks, and we are actually introducing a new position at the polling location called the ballot box officer. And that will take the place of the tabulator that would be there. So does that answer your question, sir?

Mr. Love: — Absolutely. Thank you.

The Chair: — Any other questions or comments? Seeing none, thank you, Mr. Boda, for your presentation.

Mr. Boda: — Thank you.

Legislative Assembly Service

The Chair: — We are running ahead of schedule, so we will move on to item no. 8.

Decision no. 8 item, review of the 2024-2025 budget for the Legislative Assembly Service. No. 1, approval of the refurbishment asset replacement fund for furniture restoration and technology modernization projects. No. 2, approval of the Assembly budgetary and statutory expenditure estimates and revenue estimate. I'd like to introduce Iris Lang, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. And please, before you make your presentation, please introduce your officials.

Ms. Lang: — Good morning, Mr. Speaker, ministers, and board members. It's a pleasure to be here today to present the Legislative Assembly 2024-25 business plan. It's been an honour to lead the Legislative Assembly Service this year, and I'm grateful for our dedicated team who's comprised of professionals and experts driven by passion for supporting and promoting the democratic process in Saskatchewan.

Before we present the business plan and funding proposal, I'd like to introduce the members of the LAS team who have joined me today: Cindy Hingley, executive director, corporate projects and financial services; Krista Halayka, principal director, member services; Judith Majkut, senior manager, financial services; Kari Olson, acting director of parliamentary publications. And our executive team: Melissa Bennett, Legislative Librarian; Kathy Burianyk, Deputy Clerk; Ken Ring, Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel; and Marieke Knight, executive advisor. These members of the team are here to help answer questions you may have about our plan for this year as well as any specific operational questions.

I'll begin by providing some brief introductory remarks about the proposed 2024-25 operational business plan, and then I'll hand the presentation over to Cindy and Krista who will take you through the details of the Legislative Assembly funding proposal.

This year's business plan concentrates on strategic, operational, and contingency planning, with a centralized focus on improving services for members and planning for the future. Our objectives are found on page 5 through 7. They all look like this, if you guys are following through. So each objective in the plan was viewed through a lens of fostering teamwork, optimizing resources, and minimizing risk.

As our core mandate is to sustain the Assembly through change, and one of our initiatives this year is the implementation of our election preparedness plan, with the provincial general election scheduled for October 28th, 2024, the LAS will review, revise, and update our dissolution and orientation processes, ensuring that members are supported and the services of the Assembly are maintained before and after the election. We are also looking to the future beyond the election. We are going to build a comprehensive three-year strategic plan that will instill a shared sense of responsibility, increased operational efficiency, and

strengthen trust.

Modernizing our IT infrastructure and improving business processes to ensure we are meeting our clients' needs is also a top priority this year, as well as the restoration and purchase of furniture for members in the Chamber and for their offices in the building.

We will continue to produce digital versions of parliamentary and Assembly publications; implement a refreshed legislative tracker, which is our electronic record-keeping application; continue to research options for an electronic request for payment filing for members and constituency assistants; and develop a modernized electronic file architecture for LAS records.

This year we will also work to align the LAS and the Assembly with recent provincial accessibility legislation. We will procure and implement closed captioning service for the Assembly's video recordings and we will be reviewing our digital platforms, the legislative website, the MLA portal, and the LAS intranet to ensure that we meet the new standards.

Lastly we plan to manage all this change effectively with improved project management support and enhanced governance structure. This will allow us to be innovative, collaborate on complex projects with the whole LAS team, and be proactive in identifying potential risks.

As I wrap up my comments I would like to reiterate how grateful I am to the LAS team for their support and dedication. I'm proud to lead such a valuable and well-respected organization.

[11:15]

As I indicated earlier, our strategic goals and key actions for 2024-25 began on page 5 of the business plan. These actions outline our plans to ensure a smooth transition to the thirtieth legislature, modernize our technology and services, preserve legislative history, and enhance our services to members. The total budget request for the Legislative Assembly vote 21 is \$33.063 million. This reflects an overall increase of 2.862 million or 9.48 per cent over last year's appropriation, which predominantly consists of election-related costs and CPI [consumer price index] increases.

I'll now turn the presentation over to Krista and Cindy who will discuss the details of the Legislative Assembly funding proposal.

Ms. Halayka: — Thank you, Iris. Good morning, Mr. Speaker and board members. I am pleased to present the business plan and Legislative Assembly funding proposal for 2024-25. In a year where we are preparing for a provincial general election, this budget is built upon fiscal responsibility to offset the financial pressures that are associated with elections. This year's budget request, as Iris just mentioned, for the Legislative Assembly is 33.063 million which, again, is an overall increase of 2.862 million or 9.48 per cent over last year's appropriation. On pages 10 and 11 of the proposal you will see the increases for 2024-25 are broken down into five categories. Statutory and MLA-related expenses account for 90 per cent of this year's increase and they make up four of the five different categories. The remaining 10 per cent of the increases are non-statutory costs.

The first significant statutory increase is election-related costs. These account for 1.135 million, or 39.66 per cent of our increase. Included in these costs are 870,000 for anticipated transition allowance based on members that we know will not be returning; 180,000 for constituency assistant benefits, which also includes the related transition allowance; 60,000 for additional IT resources grant under the caucus operations; and 25,000 for telecommunications and related expenses, specifically related to web design.

The next statutory increase is the consumer price index. So these increases, which account for 946,000 or 33.05 per cent of our increase, we have applied a modest 2.2 per cent based on the Ministry of Finance's initial CPI forecast to our budget for goods and services as well as impacted member directives.

The third area of increase is other MLA statutory costs. These costs are a result of post-budget directive changes approved in 2023-24 related to constituency service expenses and members' annual indemnity. The impact of these directive changes resulted in an increase of 358,000 or 12.51 per cent.

The fourth MLA-related increase is related to interparliamentary associations related to grant and membership fee increases, which account for 129,000 or 4.51 per cent.

The final increase category is non-statutory items, which account for 294,000 or 10.27 of our total increase. Costs in this category include the Assembly composite photo, recruitment costs for an officer of the Assembly, hosting a Law Clerks' conference, and salaries. These increases are also outlined in the budget recommendation details on page 13.

I will now turn the presentation over to Cindy to discuss the final pieces of our proposal.

Ms. Hingley: — Thanks, Krista. Our summary of appropriation and expenses is outlined on page 14, which provides a full overview of the 33.063 million budget request. And as Krista has already presented the key increases, I won't walk through this section line by line. But we are happy to answer any questions at the end of the presentation.

The proposed revenue estimates for the upcoming fiscal year remains unchanged at \$10,000. Finally, I will touch on the last section of our funding proposal, the Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund, or RARF, which begins on page 16.

This funding was approved by the board for five years ending March 31st, 2027. For the upcoming fiscal year, the LAS is proposing to dedicate funding to furniture restoration and information technology modernization projects.

Under the umbrella of furniture restoration, several Chamber furniture pieces require repair including the Page seating area and MLA desktops and chairs. Funding will also be used to update furniture within MLA offices within the Legislative Building.

We also plan to pursue a new closed captioning project to improve the accessibility of the Assembly's proceedings. The LAS is one of the only jurisdictions in Canada that does not provide closed captioning to the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community through its daily broadcast or recorded proceedings.

This initiative is part of the LAS's commitment to align our organization and the Assembly with recent accessibility legislation.

Our remaining IT projects include internet development, website enhancements, digital publications, file architecture and records management, and redevelopment of the Legislative Tracker.

In closing, this budget reflects our dedication to serving the Assembly and its members as well as enhancing our service delivery into the future. Thank you for your time and consideration of our proposed budget, and I now welcome any questions you may have for us. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. I'll open it up to questions or comments.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yes, sure. I just want to start by thanking you, Clerk, for the work that you've been doing. And, Iris, through you to your entire team for the work that is just very, very good that your team does in supporting members, making the place work. And we can't tell you how much we appreciate it. Really, honestly, we can't.

You know, as far as the submission I think this was all entirely appropriate. It's almost all statutory expenditures as far as increase, and I think the RARF allocation is an appropriate one as well. So not a whole lot to add beyond that other than just to, again, convey the government caucus's thank you to your team.

The Chair: — Mr. Love.

Mr. Love: — Yeah, I'll join with the Government House Leader and express thanks, Iris, to your leadership and your work as Clerk of the Assembly. Your professionalism, your knowledge in your role is appreciated by all members, I'm sure.

While we're here talking about the budget, I do have a question. On October 10th we began a special sitting of the legislature that continued for a couple weeks throughout the month of October 2023. Can you report to the board on what the costs were for the extra sitting days?

Ms. Lang: — Actually I did anticipate that question because I had a question from the press regarding that, so we did compile some dollar value to what the special sitting cost. So we compiled . . . of course it's not exact to the penny but certainly it's around \$110,000 for the special sitting. That includes our LAS budget as well as the statutory side for members.

Mr. Love: — Thanks. And was there any extra costs in terms of like staffing? Was there any extra overtime costs or anything like that for any building staff related to the extended hours?

Ms. Lang: — That number in our payroll for LAS was included in that number so about \$56,000 for . . . Most of our employees are full-time, so there would be some overtime costs for some employees. But, you know, there's people like our ushers, our Pages, additional hours for broadcast, procedural service, and of course the bulk of it would have been for the parliamentary publications, the Hansard staff.

Mr. Love: — Thanks for those details.

The Chair: — Any other comments or questions? Well thank you, Ms. Lang. So at this time we are running ahead of schedule. Takeaway lunch is available for the board members. And would it be okay if we reconvened at 12:30?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure.

The Chair: — Is that okay?

[The board recessed from 11:25 until 12:30.]

The Chair: — Okay, colleagues, we will reconvene and I'd ask for a motion to move into camera. Mr. Harrison. We will be moving into camera at 12:32.

[The board continued in camera from 12:32 until 12:46.]

The Chair: — Okay, we are coming out of camera at 12:46. We will proceed to decisions.

We'll start with item 3, agenda item 3, and the motion reads:

That the 2024-25 expenditure estimates for vote 57, Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Registrar of Lobbyists, be approved in the amount of \$569,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, \$569,000; and further,

That such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Could I have a mover and a seconder, please? Ms. Ross, mover. Ms. Ross moved it and Minister McLeod seconded. Are you still in favour of that?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — All in favour. Yeah. You're agreed.

Item no. 4. The motion reads:

That the 2024-25 expenditure estimates for vote 56, Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, be approved in the amount of \$4,694,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 4,455,000; statutory, 239,000; and further,

That such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Mover please? Mr. McLeod. Secunder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Item no. 5. The motion reads:

That the 2024-25 expenditure estimates for vote 55, Information and Privacy Commissioner, be approved in the amount of 2,703,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 2,464,000; statutory, 239,000; and further,

That such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Mover please? Mr. Harrison. Secunder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Item no. 6. Motion:

That the 2024-25 expenditure estimates for vote 76, Advocate for Children and Youth, be approved in the amount of 3,041,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 2,802,000; statutory, 239,000; and further,

That such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Mover? Mr. Dennis. Secunder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Agenda item no. 7. The motion reads:

That the 2024-25 expenditure estimates for vote 34, Chief Electoral Officer, be approved in the amount of 29,241,000 as follows: statutory, 29,241,000; and further,

That such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Mover? Ms. Ross. Secunder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Agenda item 8(1). Motion reads:

That for the 2024-25 fiscal year, the Refurbishment and Asset Replacement Fund be approved for furniture restoration and technology modernization, \$350,000.

Mover, please? Mr. McLeod. Secunder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Agenda item 8(2). Motion reads:

That the 2024-25 expenditure estimates for vote 21, Legislative Assembly, be approved in the amount of 33,063,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 11,041,000; statutory, 22,022,000;

That the 2024-25 revenue estimates for vote 21, Legislative Assembly, be approved in the amount of \$10,000 as follows: revenue to be voted, 10,000; and further,

That such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

A mover, please? Mr. Harrison. Seconder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Item no. 9, discussion and decision items, the proposed changes to directives.

Item 9(1). The motion reads:

That the directive #3.1, MLA Travel and Living Expenses, subclause 11(d) be amended by removing:

“, which shall be available for examination by the public during normal business hours at the Clerk’s Office”

And further, that the statutory declaration form be amended by removing:

“Note: This declaration shall be available for examination by the public during normal business hours at the Clerk’s office.”

A mover, please? Mr. Dennis. Seconder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Agenda item 9(2)(A). Motion:

That directive 4.1, Constituency Service Expenses, clause 4 be amended by inserting after “install,” the word:

“, repair”

A mover, please? Ms. Ross. Seconder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

The agenda item 9(2)(B). The motion reads:

That directive 4.1, Constituency Service Expenses, clause 21 be amended by replacing “Financial” with:

“Member”

A mover, please? Mr. McLeod. Seconder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Agenda item 9(3). Motion reads:

That the Members Capital Asset and Disposal Policy be amended to clarify that the policy applies to all member

assets with a purchase price of \$350 or more and that assets less than \$350 will be removed from the member’s capital asset listing; and further,

That all instances of “Financial Services” be replaced with “Member Services”.

Mover, please? Mr. Harrison. Seconder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Agenda item 9(4)(A). Motion reads:

That directive #19, Board of Internal Economy Indemnity and Expenses, clause 1 be amended by removing:

“the Chair of the Board of Internal Economy and”

Inserting after “excluding”:

“the Chair of the Board of Internal Economy and”

Mover, please? Mr. Dennis. Seconder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Agenda item 9(4)(B). Motion reads:

That directive #19, Board of Internal Economy Indemnity and Expenses, clause 6 be amended by removing:

“a Minister of the Crown (cabinet minister), who serves on the Board of Internal Economy, is”

And inserting the following:

“the Chair of the Board of Internal Economy and ministers of the Crown (cabinet ministers), who serve on the Board of Internal Economy, are”

Mover, please? Ms. Ross. Seconder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Agenda item 9(5). Motion reads:

That directive #23, Caucus Accountability and Disclosure, subclause 3(a) be amended by removing:

“generally accepted accounting principles”

And inserting:

“Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations”

A mover, please? Mr. McLeod. Love seconded. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Oh, just something came up. Can I have a motion to go in camera please?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure.

The Chair: — Mr. Harrison. We have gone in camera at 1 p.m.

[The board continued in camera from 13:00 until 13:10.]

The Chair: — We've come out of camera at 1:10. So, colleagues, we have a motion to rescind. I'll read it:

That item no. 4, approval of the 2024-2025 budget for the Office of the Ombudsman and public interest commissioner, voted on earlier today, be rescinded.

A mover, please? Mr. Harrison. Seconder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Agenda item no. 4. Motion:

That the 2024-25 expenditure estimates for vote 56, the Ombudsman and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner, be approved in the amount of 4,563,000 as follows: budgetary to be voted, 4,324,000; statutory, \$239,000; and further,

That such estimates be forwarded to the Minister of Finance by the Chair.

Mover, please? Mr. Dennis. Seconder? Mr. Love. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Is there any other business? None. Have a motion to adjourn, please? Ms. Ross. We stand adjourned till the call of the Chair. Thank you.

[The board adjourned at 13:12.]