



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSE SERVICES

Hansard Verbatim Report

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSE SERVICES
2004**

Hon. P. Myron Kowalsky, Chair
Prince Albert Carlton

Mr. Rod Gantefer, Deputy Chair
Melfort

Ms. June Draude
Kelvington-Wadena

Mr. Glenn Hagel
Moose Jaw North

Mr. Don McMorris
Indian Head-Milestone

Hon. Andrew Thomson
Regina South

Hon. Harry Van Mulligen
Regina Douglas Park

Mr. Kevin Yates
Regina Dewdney

The committee met at 15:00.

**General Revenue Fund
Supplementary Estimates
Legislative Assembly
Vote 21**

Subvote (LG01)

The Deputy Chair: — Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the committee meeting on the House services. We're here to consider the supplementary estimates, vote no. 21, administration (LG01), general administration, supplementary vote of \$267,000. I would like to invite the Speaker to comment on this appropriation and introduce his guest.

Hon. Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Members of the committee, I'm pleased to have with me Greg Putz, Deputy Clerk, and in charge of this portion of the Assembly vote 21.

We're here to request \$267,000 as recommended by the Board of Internal Economy to replace the audio system and the access to the computer for use in the Legislative Chamber and to improve the sound in the visitors gallery.

As you know, over the last few years we've had several failures of the system. Fortunately we have a sound crew here that really is quite intimate with the system and they have known where to find the parts and have been able to keep it going for us for quite a while. In some cases they've had to go as far as Ottawa to get parts, but they have been able to keep it going.

But this has been sort of at the top of our priority capital list so that we could get this thing in place by the spring session. And we have put a process into place to put a new sound system in and I would ask Greg just to give us a brief overview of the status of this renovation.

Mr. Putz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief because many of the members on this committee are also . . . have been on the board and involved in one way or another in this decision which has been hanging for the last year and a half. As you said, in May 2003 we had a catastrophic failure of the sound system, and that's when it came to the top of the agenda.

Since the board approved a decision item to replace the sound system in August, the Assembly has proceeded with going to an RFP (request for proposal) process to find a supplier to replace the sound system. That process was initiated in September. That closed at the beginning . . . at the middle of October and we're in the process . . . we've just selected a vendor for this. And the anticipated commencement of the project is to take place immediately following the adjournment of this fall sitting. So the plan is that once the fall sitting is concluded that the sound system that exists in this Chamber right now will be dismantled and the process of replacing it will take place.

As the Speaker said, this project has got three main components, the replacement of the audio system, which dates

back to 1978 so it's time that it be replaced. But some things that we want to add while we're in the process of replacing the sound system, to improve the efficiency of members, is we wanted to bring electricity to their desk as laptops are in common use by members. It'll allow members to not have to run on their batteries. We figured this would be a good piggyback on doing the wiring for the audio system — bring in electrical cable along with the project.

And as well we're going to bring data cabling to each of the members' desks as well, so that members won't have to rely on wireless to access the Internet. As you know, the wireless system isn't foolproof, that it's subject to interference; and well that's a good reason for replacing the audio system. That has been one of the aggravations of this sound system. Actually since 2003 there's been a number of problems and you've probably noticed some of these feedback problems in the past year and a half or so.

So the idea is that this project will start immediately at the end of this fall session and hopefully be wound up and in place and operational by the time a spring sitting commences which we anticipate to be March. Now if there is to be an emergency session of some sort before that the Speaker, along with the Office of the Clerk, is working on a contingency plan so that the House can meet elsewhere in order to have that emergency session.

So I don't know if there are any questions on this, on the cost of various components of it. We're open to questions.

The Deputy Chair: — Members, are there any of the members that have questions to the Speaker? Mr. McMorris.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess my question would be with the, first of all, the data cable installation. And I mean technology is advancing so fast I'm sure by the time we get it laid or installed it will be practically outdated. I mean, I know that there is wireless available. I guess my question is, will we be, you know, revisiting this in a couple of years?

I mean, will you think . . . What are the chances of there being, you know, advancements in wireless that . . . You know, I know the security issue is definitely there. You know, I'd hate to see us put data cable in and then three years later saying we've got a 100 per cent secure wireless system that people won't have to then hook up to when they're at their desk. I mean, I use my laptop here and am able to access the Internet. But I know it's . . . I mean, you watch what you're doing on it. And I'm just . . . I guess I have a concern on that.

Hon. Mr. Kowalsky: — I can, I guess I can just ask Greg to do perhaps a more technical answer but our idea on the wireless is that the members will have this as a secure and private system and that's the reason for it. Now not every member is going to use it, but while we're rewiring anyway for electrical we might as well put those cables down there. And that is a minimal cost comparing to the whole cost of ripping up the carpet and moving all the desks, inserting it and changing the tops here. Maybe you might want to add to that.

Mr. Putz: — That's exactly right. The data cabling wasn't what

was driving this project. It was while we're laying the electrical cable it just seemed to make sense to put the data cable in as well.

Now what I'm told is that what we're still using what is called Cat-5 cable and that's the industry standard. We're going one better than that while we have this advantage and we're putting in what's called Cat-6. And what I'm told is that it should last for years and years and years, and that there should be no reason to change that.

The wireless I mentioned are the Internet accesses. It's just one component of that. Now the caucuses have their own networks and the government ministers have their own networks. This will allow at some point in the future if there's any desire to link into your various caucus or ministerial networks to do that in a very secure way, because as the Speaker outlined, wireless is inherently insecure.

And it's also a little bit flaky in this building because of the amount of steel and concrete and marble here. And we've done some tests in the building and there are dead zones here and there. And as members who have been using the wireless, even in this Chamber, know that it's subject to interference. For instance, the wirelesses blinked out just because we discovered that some of the cordless phones that are used in and around the Chamber are on near or the same frequency as the wireless, so that that has caused some problems.

So with the hard-wiring we're just taking advantage of bringing the electrical wire in and it's not that much more just to add the data cable along with it.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you for that answer. I guess my other question then is, because they'll be ripping up the carpets to put in electrical and the data cable, what's the timeline for carpet? Is this carpet going back down or are we putting in new carpet or what's the issue around the carpeting?

Hon. Mr. Kowalsky: — Well if the Board of Internal Economy sees fit, we will be quite prepared to bring in a proposal. It's on our long-term strategic plan. The plan is one also that the board has to consider to look at some green carpet in here and . . . but that does require additional funding and so the plan is not to bring it in at that time.

The Deputy Chair: — Ms. Draude.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm wondering about the actual work. Is that going to be done in-house or was the contract tendered?

Mr. Putz: — As I indicated, we went to an RFP process so it's akin to a tender process. We had two companies that made a bid for this project and it was on that basis that one of them was picked. And one of the criteria of that RFP was that we use our in-house resources because we do have technicians who are capable of doing a lot of the work and we're utilizing them as much as we can in this project. In fact our estimate is that we're probably going to save about 50 to \$60,000 on the project by using our own staff here, our broadcast technicians as well as our information systems computer people.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. I just have one other question. I know that a couple times in the year when we have a lot of visitors in, we often have people downstairs and setting up a sound system downstairs or something that I know is a little . . . has to be done at times. Is there going to be work done in the downstairs rotunda as well?

Mr. Putz: — That's not really part of this project. And it's my understanding that for events such as the budget, that's something that the Minister of Finance or whomever is in charge of that for the overflow capacity, that they make those arrangements.

What this project entails is doing some improvements to the sound quality in the galleries. And our role in that part of it is actually quite minimal. That's being driven by SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation). They made a proposal that, to improve the sound quality in the galleries, that some acoustic fabric and insulation be put into the seats to absorb some of the sounds.

One of the problems is that, with all the hard wooden surfaces in here, sound waves bounce off of those and cause feedback and reverberation. So they can't really bring the sound system up to a level that allow people to hear. Hopefully this will do something but, like I said, SPMC is driving that part of the project. And for sure our new sound system will help because we'll have much greater flexibility and be able to equalize the sound in this room.

But as far as the overflow capacity in the other rooms in the building, we really have nothing to do with that.

The Deputy Chair: — Okay, thank you. Mr. Hagel.

Mr. Hagel: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just one quick question. I know that over the years there's been a good number of complaints that we've received about the ability to hear in the public galleries here. Can you just very quickly — I'm not looking for any lengthy explanation here — just give us some indication as to what is seen to be the solution? I recognize the hardwood in here is a bit of a difficulty just in terms of ricocheting sound and that sort of stuff. But I'd take some interest in knowing what they're looking at.

Hon. Mr. Kowalsky: — There are two things we can do, Mr. Chair. One is to put a fabric on to the backs of the benches, an acoustic fabric. We'll be looking at several samples of that. A second item is adding speakers and being able to vary the speakers. Before we make any of those decisions, I believe SPMC has seen fit to hire an acoustical expert and to get advice, the best advice we can on the matter.

Mr. Hagel: — And does that mean that in the supplementary estimate being approved here, that would sufficiently provide for options to be implemented? Or only to be investigated?

Hon. Mr. Kowalsky: — Well we . . . You never know what the end figure of this is going to be exactly, but we believe we can cover, cover all of these costs. The cost for the fabric is included, is included in this estimate.

Mr. Hagel: — Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: — Are there any further questions? If not I refer you to the Supplementary Estimates book, page 15, vote 21. I would ask for a member to move that administration (LG01), general administration, vote 21 for \$267,000 be approved.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — I'll move it.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Van Mulligen. All those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That's agreed. Thank you.

Subvote (LG01) agreed to.

The Deputy Chair: — I also need someone to move a resolution that I'll read:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2005 the following sums for Legislative Assembly, \$267,000.

Ms. Draude. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Vote 21 agreed to.

The Deputy Chair: — And I need one further . . . I've got to sign this. I need one further motion that's been circulated to you in regard to reporting this decision to the Assembly.

Be it resolved that it be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2005 the following sums for Legislative Assembly, \$267,000. The committee recommends that upon concurrence with its report by the Assembly, the sums as reported and approved shall be included in the Appropriation Bill for consideration by the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Hagel. All those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — That's agreed. Thank you, members. I believe there is no further business in front of the committee. Do we need a motion to adjourn? Motion to adjourn, Mr. Trew. Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 15:20.

