

HANSARD

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HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

Wednesday, April 27, 2011

Committee Room 1

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**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
MANAGEMENT COMMISSION**

Hon. Gordon Gosse (Chairman)
Hon. Frank Corbett
Ms. Becky Kent
Ms. Pam Birdsall
Mr. Maurice Smith
Hon. Manning MacDonald
Mr. Andrew Younger
Hon. Christopher d'Entremont
Mr. Neil Ferguson, Chief Clerk of the House of Assembly
(Non-Voting Member)

Counsel to the Commission:
Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Speaker's Office Adviser
Ms. Deborah Lusby
Director of Administration
Speaker's Office

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27, 2011

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

11:35 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Hon. Gordon Gosse

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would like to bring the House of Assembly Management Commission meeting to order for Wednesday, April 27, 2011. The first item on the agenda is the approval of the minutes from March 29, 2011. Mr. Ferguson.

MR. NEIL FERGUSON: The minutes have been circulated and unless there are any changes that anyone has, it would be appropriate to have a motion.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: I so move.

MS. PAM BIRDSALL: I second it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Moved by Mr. d'Entremont, seconded by Ms. Birdsall. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The second item on the agenda is franking and travel review. Mr. Ferguson.

MR. FERGUSON: This is on the agenda because in the regulations there is a requirement, Regulation 42(3), which says, "Within twelve months, the Commission shall review and assess the amounts pertaining to postage and travel . . ." which is under franking ". . . as separate entities and reset the amounts accordingly." So we wanted to get it on people's radar that this was necessary. It's not something that we're suggesting has to be dealt with today, but you'll see in the package there's a table that Ms. Lusby prepared, which breaks it out for the transition period we just went through.

It's quite clear that different members have quite different patterns of usage for the franking and travel. Some use a significant amount - you'll see there are percentages here of their total for the travel, perhaps they're in a large, rural constituency - and others use much more of theirs, percentage-wise, for the franking. So it's going to be a task to do that, but we thought the caucuses should have the opportunity to look at it and discuss it so that we can come up with something that complies with the regulations.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Younger.

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Quickly looking at this, I just wanted to make a couple of observations so that people are maybe thinking about it. One, obviously, is we've only had the benefit of looking at a short year which is probably not necessarily reflective of a complete year. One option the commission may wish to consider is to amend it to look at it after we've looked at a whole year, that would be one option, because some people would have sent out newsletters to householders, some wouldn't have and things like that.

The other thing, because there is such a variation - and we did talk about this at one time before - was taking the postage amounts at some point and moving them into just the regular constituency expenses. I'm sure there's some historic reason why they were never there and I'm not suggesting that we do that right now, but that may be something to look at in the future as well.

Another thing to consider - and these numbers actually show it to some extent - is there is a difference in some respect between the way inside and outside members would use it for a couple of reasons. One, for example, I have an urban constituency and for me to mail out a householder is \$1,200, but I know that the member for Digby-Annapolis can do the exact same thing for \$400 because they have the same number of households but different distribution options.

Likewise, an outside member would be covered on return trips to the Legislature and can make stops for meetings of any Party along the way. Obviously they're only being covered for the return trip, but inside members don't have that so if they go to a meeting in Truro or Cape Breton and they don't do it overnight, then they would cover the mileage under the franking, whereas an outside member wouldn't, so there are a lot of different variations. I think we probably have - that's why I would almost suggest that we look at it as a full fiscal year. I don't know if anybody has any other thoughts but it's something worth thinking about anyway.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ferguson.

MR. FERGUSON: Certainly the information that we're using is as a result of us having gone on to SAP and there's certainly a very meritorious argument that it would be a lot easier for the commission to do a reasonable analysis, if you amended it, and provide it for a longer period of time, so that's a very good point.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I also think that it's not a long enough period of time because most of us are just getting used to making up our travel lists and making sure we put it in. I can tell you I'm doing a horrible job of it, that I'm going to lots of things that I'm not listing because ultimately, even though I can claim it, why would I? I'm going to a breakfast - most people don't get their travel covered for a breakfast, so there's lots of stuff that I know many of us will not be claiming because it's just not worth the discussion, the hassle.

I don't know where we're going to get on this whole thing but I think after a year we'll have a better feeling for it.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Is that a motion?

MR. YOUNGER: I'll make a motion, if you want.

MR. CORBETT: I'll second it.

MR. YOUNGER: Okay, that's fine then, I'll make that motion. (Interruptions)

MR. CORBETT: Yes, you're the one who has to deal with a lot of this stuff.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, so we have a motion from Andrew. What is the motion?

MR. YOUNGER: That we look at a full fiscal year.

MR. CORBETT: That we use the fiscal year 2011-12 to figure this out. Before we go, Deborah, you're the one who deals with this.

MS. DEBORAH LUSBY: Absolutely, I agree wholeheartedly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, so we have a motion from Mr. Younger, seconded by Mr. Corbett.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

MR. FERGUSON: So just for the purposes of the resolution, it would say within so many months after the end of the current fiscal year. So let's say within three months after the end of fiscal 2011-12, is that . . .

MS. LUSBY: Yes, we'd have that information by then.

MR. FERGUSON: Okay, great.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. 3 on the agenda is caucus funding. Mr. Smith.

MR. MAURICE SMITH: Yes, this is basically a response to the Treasury Board request that all departments look at their budgets in terms of trying to come up with some savings. I think 3 per cent is the aim for this year, followed by next year at 1 per cent and the following year by another 1 per cent. I guess there's some documentation? Okay, Mr. Ferguson is going to circulate it.

I guess what I'm suggesting is that we pass a motion to that effect, that each of the caucuses will be reducing their budget for the fiscal year 2011-12 by a 3 per cent figure and for the following fiscal year 1 per cent and the year after that a further 1 per cent.

The document that Mr. Ferguson has circulated indicates the effective new amounts for this fiscal year and the following two fiscal years. It also provides for if somebody new would be coming at the pro-ration of the MLA portion. (Interruption)

Yes, I'll make a motion to . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Amend the regulations.

MR. SMITH: Well, is it a substitute or . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's to amend . . .

MR. SMITH: All right, to amend Regulation 33(2).

MR. FERGUSON: And a new 33(2A).

MR. SMITH: And 33(2A) is just a housekeeping section.

MR. FERGUSON: It relates to the CPI matter that I was going to explain.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, that's the next item.

MS. LUSBY: Do we need a seconder to the motion before we get to . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just wait, I think - ok, Mr. Younger.

MR. YOUNGER: No, I'll second it. I did have a question I was going to ask you about.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MR. YOUNGER: This may be what everybody has been advised of. I just noticed that it goes up in 2011-12, 2012-13 and then drops in 2013-14. I actually don't know if that's what was sent out. (Interruptions)

MR. FERGUSON: It's dropping each year.

MR. YOUNGER: Sorry, I read a five there, sorry.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So everybody has read those and we have a motion on the floor by Mr. Smith to amend the regulations 33(2) and 33(2A). The motion has been seconded by Mr. Younger.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Item four on the agenda should actually read . . .

MR. FERGUSON: That's Regulation 52.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's Regulation 52, is what that should read, actually. Now, Mr. Ferguson, to explain.

MR. FERGUSON: This is something that has come up quite recently. Section 52 of the regulations says that every year, all the fixed amounts are going to go up by CPI. The figures for CPI, over March of last year, just came out and they are quite startlingly high. It's 3.9 per cent, which would, in effect, undo all the budget reduction changes that we've just approved. It would negate everything, all the work that has been done in terms of cost savings. So we have to consider what our options are with respect to that, how we deal with it. One of the options, of course, would be to suspend it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Corbett.

MR. CORBETT: Yes, I was going to say that I would make a motion that we suspend it for a year and see where we're at. The other issue relates to the CPI for Nova Scotia, and I understand that's 4.9 per cent, but if we're using the national CPI, it would (Interruption) 3.9 per cent, I'm sorry, and using the national would be 1.7 per cent. So that's a 2 per cent difference and I think, as you said wisely, we would be lowering it on one side and bringing it up on the other.

MR. FERGUSON: Yes. We have a resolution dealing with the first aspect, which is not the reduction to 1.7 per cent, but we can easily do that. (Interruptions) So what I've distributed is simply - this is the sort of thing that everybody's familiar with, with respect to salaries, indemnities, every now and then you can suspend them. This effectively just suspends it for the one year.

Now, the other issue that the Deputy Premier raised is whether or not we should stick with the Nova Scotia CPI or amend that provision to say, for instance, the national core CPI, which was 1.7 per cent this year, which is much more reasonable and doesn't take into account things like fluctuating energy costs. The change to CPI, the most dramatic portion of it, came in the last month. It went up 1.2 per cent because of fuel. So to tie changes and things like stipends for being a Whip, or similar expenses, to fuel costs doesn't make sense. It would make a great deal of sense to do what the Deputy Premier is suggesting and we adopt the core national. (Interruption)

Or you could say whichever is lower. It's not likely Nova Scotia will be lower because the fuel component is disproportionate for Nova Scotia because we use more than the national average, so it's unlikely to be lower. We have then two things: We have the one I distributed, and then I could easily just craft the wording for a change to the other one.

MR. CORBETT: This motion is on the floor? Do you want me to move this motion and get a seconder and then we can discuss it?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I second it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Moved by Mr. Corbett, seconded by Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. SMITH: Are we now saying then that the CPI that we'll be using will be the national?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's the next item.

MS. BECKY KENT: My question is, just so I understand, suspending this year, period, and anything after 2012 if that resolution passes that you're talking about next, it would be applied after 2012 or would it be applied this year?

MR. CORBETT: The purpose would be to see that this year would remain zero and then we would revisit it in the fiscal 2012-13 year.

MR. YOUNGER: Not to throw a wrench in this, and this probably relates to the second motion, but last year the core CPI was negative - it was actually minus 0.7 or something like that.

I'm not trying to throw a wrench into the second motion, I just wondered.

MR. CORBETT: I think if we showed prudence this year we can show prudence on the other side too.

MR. YOUNGER: I'm just asking the question.

MR. CORBETT: No, no, it's a valid question, I don't disagree with you, but if we can suspend the rule this year for an amount that's going to . . .

MR. YOUNGER: Oh, I see, you suspend it . . .

MR. CORBETT: We can suspend it again next year.

MR. GORDON HEBB: I would point out the regulation doesn't provide for a decrease, it only provides for an increase.

MR. YOUNGER: And maybe we would want it to be decreased . . .

MR. FERGUSON: Once we've dealt with this one, I have some wording crafted for the change.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

MR. FERGUSON: Regulation No. 52 says that the increase will be the increase in the Consumer Price Index for Nova Scotia. If we struck out the words "Consumer Price Index for Nova Scotia" and substituted the "core Consumer Price Index for Canada" that would, I believe - or if you wanted to make it, whichever is lower, then we could . . .

MS. LUSBY: . . . say whichever is lower.

MR. FERGUSON: Okay, we would simply add the words "the Consumer Price Index for Nova Scotia or the core Consumer Price Index for Canada, whichever is lower."

MR. HEBB: Is there a core index for Nova Scotia or is there only a federal one?

MR. FERGUSON: I'm not familiar with a core one for . . .

MR. CORBETT: No, there is not, not that I've come across.

MR. FERGUSON: Just to repeat it then, we would be adding after Nova Scotia the words "or the core Consumer Price Index for Canada, whichever is lower."

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's moved by Mr. d'Entremont, seconded by Mr. Corbett.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Is there any other business? If not, we stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:54 a.m.]