



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Members' Services

Wednesday, November 16, 2011
10 a.m.

Transcript No. 27-4-1

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature
Fourth Session**

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Kowalski, Hon. Kenneth R., Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (PC), Chair
Campbell, Robin, West Yellowhead (PC), Deputy Chair

Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)
Anderson, Rob, Airdrie-Chestermere (W)
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (AL) *
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)
Evans, Iris, Sherwood Park (PC)
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
Knight, Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC) **
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND)
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)

* substitution for Bridget Pastoor

** substitution for Genia Leskiw

Also in Attendance

Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AB)

Support Staff

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| W.J. David McNeil | Clerk |
| Allison Quast | Special Assistant to the Clerk |
| Bev Alenius | Executive Assistant to the Chair |
| Shannon Dean | Senior Parliamentary Counsel/ Director of House Services |
| Robert H. Reynolds, QC | Law Clerk/Director of Interparliamentary Relations |
| Brian G. Hodgson | Sergeant-at-Arms |
| Cheryl Scarlett | Director of Human Resources, Information Technology and Broadcast Services |
| Scott Ellis | Director and Senior Financial Officer, Financial Management and Administrative Services |
| Jacqueline Breault | Manager, Corporate Services, Financial Management and Administrative Services |
| Liz Sim | Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i> |

10 a.m. Wednesday, November 16, 2011

[Mr. Kowalski in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It being 10 o'clock on November 16, 2011, this meeting, having been appropriately advertised to all members and to the public of the province of Alberta, will now come to order.

We have a number of members who are in attendance in the room with us this morning and a number of members who will be joining us via teleconference technology. The chair is here. Mr. Campbell is here. Mr. Anderson, you're joining us via teleconference. Is this correct? Are you with us?

Ms Quast: He hasn't called in yet.

The Chair: Oh. He has to call in?

Ms Quast: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Amery, you're here. Mr. Elniski, you're here. Ms Evans, you're here. Mr. Hehr, are you here with us via teleconference?

Mr. Hehr: Yes, I am.

The Chair: Wonderful. How are you this morning?

Mr. Hehr: Great. It's great to hear your voice, sir.

The Chair: Well, that's a mutual thing, Mr. Hehr. I appreciate your being there.

Mr. Knight, you are here. Mr. Lund is to join us as a substitute for Mrs. Leskiw. Mr. Mason, you are here. Mr. Chase, you are to join us as a substitute for Ms Pastoor. Are you with us?

Mr. Chase: That's correct. I'm not nearly as good looking, but I'm definitely here.

An Hon. Member: I'll second that.

The Chair: Somebody said they would second that. That's really not required.

Mr. Rogers, you're here.

Other than Mr. Anderson, who has not called in yet – is that correct? Mr. Lund has now joined us. Okay. Mr. Anderson is aware of the arrangement that he is to call, is he?

Ms Quast: Yes, he is. He was e-mailed, and we confirmed with him.

The Chair: Is someone in a position to contact Mr. Anderson to see when he might be joining us? Is that possible? Okay. That will be done. A phone call will be made to Mr. Anderson to see if he can join us via teleconference.

Others associated with the Legislative Assembly Office of Alberta are here, led by the Clerk, Dr. McNeil, and other people.

We have an agenda, and the agenda is laid out in front of you, ladies and gentlemen. Might we have approval of the agenda? So moved. Okay. Seconded as well. Fine. Is there any discussion arising out of the agenda?

Mr. Mason: I just found my agenda.

The Chair: Well, thank you for being up to date. What would you like to do on the agenda?

Mr. Mason: Nothing.

The Chair: Oh, because we're now into the discussion stage. Any discussion on this? All right. Okay. Then approval of the agenda? We've had a motion, and we've moved it and seconded it. Done.

Approval of the minutes of February 17, 2011. Mr. Campbell moves. Second? Mr. Amery. Discussion? All agreed? Okay.

Old business. Before we get to old business, just to advise all members, because some of you also participate in your caucus leadership, I had sent a memo dated November 3, 2011, to the House leaders. It had to do with the election of the Deputy Chair of Committees with the resignation of Mr. Mitzel, and I had asked the House leaders to get back to me today. I gave them several proposals on how we might proceed with the election of the Deputy Chair of Committees. I haven't received that yet, so if you're talking to your House leader sometime in the next several hours, please tell them that I would sure like to hear from them as to how we should deal with this election.

I gave them three options. We could deal with the election on Monday, November 21, after Orders of the Day are called, but I have some concern because it might interfere with private members' day. Monday is the only private members' day we have, and the last time we were here, several weeks ago, we lost that private members' day.

The second option for it would be Monday after the regular business is concluded at 6 p.m., but this can only occur with the unanimous consent of the Assembly to continue after 6 p.m. I can't put a time frame on it because I have no idea who is anticipating letting their name stand for this position, Deputy Chair of Committees.

The third option is Tuesday, November 22, after Orders of the Day are called.

Our standing orders indicate that the Assembly shall proceed immediately to fill the vacancy, and we're governed by our standing orders with respect to that matter. I'm also cognizant of private members' business on a Monday, and I don't really want to have that interfere with too much of the Routine. However, there we are.

Mr. Dave Taylor has now joined us as well.

Okay. Motion 501, 2010. You have in your binder a copy of that motion that was dealt with. Motion 501 said:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish an independent commission to review the current salaries and benefits for Members of the Legislative Assembly and to report to the government and this Assembly on whether the current overall remuneration for members is fair and adequate.

That motion was dealt with on February 22, 2010. It was agreed to, as I recall, almost unanimously or may very well have been unanimously. I've read the text of it all.

Then the question is: well, what transpired with respect to Motion 501? We had several discussions with respect to this matter at previous Members' Services Committee meetings, and the concern always was that the motion called on the government, not the Legislative Assembly. My knowledge is that there was some discussion back and forth between the two previous leaders of the government and the Official Opposition. The bottom line was that nothing really transpired.

As events progressed through the year 2011, the government had a leadership contest, and the person who emerged as leader of the government indicated publicly that the new Premier wanted to have an independent review of this matter done. There has been some consultation with me in the last several weeks. In a very, very brief discussion in my office I advised the Leader of the Official Opposition, the leader of the ND caucus, and the deputy of the Wildrose caucus that I was anticipating receiving a letter from the Premier asking for there to be an independent review of items.

I have received such a letter from the Premier. The Premier wrote to me on November 1 – and it was addressed to me as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, not as chair of the Members' Services Committee – basically saying:

On behalf of the government, I would like to request that you convene a Commission to review the compensation package for Members of the Legislative Assembly.

I would like to recommend that we work with all of the parties of the Legislature to create an atmosphere where the recommendations of the Commission are endorsed without debate.

I am committed to an open and transparent compensation process that is free from political theatrics and influence.

I would like to seek your guidance if the Commission should report directly to you or through the Member Services Committee.

In addition, I would like your guidance regarding the scope of the Commission. My instinct is to include salary, transition allowance, pension/RRSP and health insurance provisions. Items outside of the scope could include expense policy and office costs.

Finally, I have committed to begin this Commission within 90 days of being elected to office. I also feel the report should be received by the Legislature before the spring session.

Having had that letter addressed to me, I have spent the last number of days looking at this and coming up with terms of reference with respect to this. You have in your binder a draft of the terms of reference that I would like to share with you today. My purpose today is to share this with you to seek some thoughts from you but, essentially, at the conclusion to proceed with the establishment of an independent commission, and the terms of reference will tell you what the process is.

10:10

The objective:

An Independent Review of Compensation Benefits of Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

The process. What would the process be?

1. The Government asks the Speaker to initiate a Review.

That has happened.

2. The Speaker clarifies the terms of reference in consultation with the Members' Services Committee.

That's the purpose today.

3. The Panel would be selected by the Speaker.
4. The Panel would undertake its work and submit the Report to the Speaker within 120 days of the agreed start date.

It would be my intention within the next two weeks to basically have that start date go, and it would be 120 days after whatever that would be.

The Panel would determine its work schedule and processes and required professional resources. Assembly funds would be allocated to support the work of the Panel.

We can only guess what this panel might cost in terms of all the resources and everything else. At the moment I cannot give you a definitive number other than to say that it could be as much as a quarter of a million dollars.

5. The Speaker would immediately make the report available to Members and the Public and table it in the Assembly.

In essence, the panel would go out and do its work. When it had the report, it would deliver it to me, to my office as Speaker. I would immediately make it available to all members and the public, and if the House is sitting, I would table it in the Assembly that day. This is the process I use with all the reports of all the Leg. offices. They deliver them to my office. Everybody is notified that they'll be in my office at a certain time. I don't even read the report before I make it public; it just goes. The same process would apply here.

For number 6 there are two options.

6. The recommendations of the Report could be debated in the Assembly and if approved be forwarded to the Members' Services Committee and the Government to implement recommendations in their respective areas of responsibility or . . .

and this is the one I do not recommend,

. . . the Report could go directly to the [Members' Services Committee] and to Government to implement the recommendations.

I strongly believe that once the report comes, it is tabled in the Assembly, and all members of the Assembly should have an opportunity to debate the report and make resolution of the report.

I've got two assumptions in here with respect to this.

1. The recommendations implemented would come into effect following the next General Election.

There's nothing retroactive about this process; this is a process for the time frame after the next provincial election.

Two is a wild, wild, wild hope in my mind.

2. Members will agree in the pre-Report period to ACCEPT the recommendations of the Independent Panel

even though I have no idea what these recommendations are going to be. We want to have an independent panel. What's the purpose of having an independent panel if it isn't to basically hear what they say and implement what they say?

By whom? Who would do this? Well, the emphasis is on the word "independent" panel of one member, which has happened in this country on occasion, or a panel of up to three members, which also happens. Recently there were two panels that were selected and tabled reports. One was in New Brunswick a couple of months ago, and on November 3 in the province of Nova Scotia a panel there tabled a report on pensions. We've got the whole litany of all the reports and how they have been done.

I read very, very carefully all the debate and all the comments on Motion 501. There were a couple of themes that basically came through. There was great emphasis by the members who participated in that debate that the panel be independent; in other words, that it be without pressure from outside sources. Two, there was a strong feeling in here that whoever is on the panel should understand what an MLA does and what the pressure points are and what the tension points are. Three, there should be comparatives. We'll come back to this.

Just carrying through, what would be the mandate? Well, it pretty much covers everything.

To review and make recommendations to the Assembly regarding the compensation, benefits and allowances to be paid to the Members of the Legislative Assembly under the authority of the Assembly or the Government of Alberta, such items to include:

1. Member Indemnity and Tax Free Expense Allowance
2. Allowances for offices other than the MLA (Premier, Speaker, Minister with Portfolio, Minister without Portfolio, Leader of the Official Opposition, Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees, Deputy Chair of Committees, Leader of a Recognized Opposition Party)
3. Special Members' Allowances (Official Opposition House Leader, Third Party House Leader, Chief Government Whip, Assistant Government Whip, Chief Opposition Whip, Assistant Opposition Whip, Third Party Whip)
4. Compensation for serving on Legislative Assembly committees
5. Compensation for serving on Government committees and holding other government funded offices
6. The RRSP Allowance
7. The Transition Allowance and/or consideration of a pension plan
8. Health Care Benefits and Life Insurance Provisions

9. The impact on Members of “double-dipping” provisions in some pension plans.

If there's more to add, we can come back to that in a second.

What would the benchmarks be?

The Panel would make appropriate compensation and benefit comparisons to other jurisdictions including:

1. Canadian federal, provincial and territorial parliaments
2. Comparable Commonwealth parliaments
3. Alberta Queen's Bench and Provincial Court Judges
4. Senior public servants in Alberta including provincial, university, municipal, education and health care sectors
5. Others as determined by the panel.

It could include everybody.

Six, what are the expectations?

1. The Panel would review the above matters and provide recommendations for consideration by the Legislative Assembly or the [Members' Services Committee]
2. The Panel would make recommendations on the process for future review and adjustment of Members' compensation, benefits and allowances.

Nothing will be conveyed to anybody by way of percentages, numbers, or anything else. We're talking about the principle of the overall mandate and the like.

I'll stop there, and I'll invite any kind of comment that members would like to make with respect to this. In terms of the three people who are teleconferencing, you're going to have to interject to let me know that you want to participate.

First of all, members of the committee. Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm looking for some clarification between point 6 in your process and your second assumption. You're recommending or suggesting that the report of the panel be “debated in the Assembly and if approved be forwarded to the Members' Services Committee and the Government,” et cetera, et cetera. Your second assumption, though, assumes that “Members will agree in the pre-Report period to accept the recommendations of the Independent Panel.” Those look contradictory to me.

The Chair: They may very well be, but I can only tell you my hope, which may be naive. If the process is to have an independent panel and if we don't accept the recommendations of the independent panel, then how can we say that we endorse an independent panel?

Mr. Taylor: But how . . .

The Chair: Just let me finish first. You know, then we're right back to us making the decisions. There is a contradiction, in my mind, about the two philosophies. Independent? Okay. If we have an independent panel, why would we then change it? If we do, then we're right back to where we are making these decisions again, so what was this process all about?

I also said that I don't believe the number 2 assumption would fly. I said that that was naive, my expectation.

Mr. Taylor: My sense is that the minute we bring it back to the Assembly for debate, we're likely to open up that possibility, where we don't accept the recommendations, where we revise the recommendations of the independent panel. On the one hand, I get what you're saying about respecting the independence of the panel. On the other hand, we do need the final say even though that's a minefield, right?

The Chair: Okay. Let's quit talking about an independent panel, then, because if we have the final say, we are the ones who are

making the decision, exactly where we're at today. This is where my mind gets very, very confused with respect to this.

I also indicated that I thought I'd be rather naive to believe that this would happen, but you have to accept that I wanted it, too.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Chair, would you add the name of Harry Chase to your list?

The Chair: I'm going to add Mr. Chase to it. We're just going to conclude this with Mr. Taylor. I know that others will be commenting on that as well.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers: I thought I'd be after Mr. Chase. It's your call, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Well, I was going to go back and forth. Go ahead.

Mr. Rogers: Okay. That's fine. Well, I, too, want to add some comment in this area, Mr. Chair. I think that we have to be careful as we move through this process. We talked about an independent panel. While I, certainly as every other member around this table, respect the Legislative Assembly and would never want to presuppose what decision might be made in the Chamber, I too want to add my thoughts.

If we are moving down the path of a truly independent process, as was the premise for where we are today on Motion 501, we would appoint an independent panel. It's very counterproductive that we would spend – I remember your rough estimate, sir, and I'm not trying to tie you down to this, but you warned us that this could cost up to a quarter of a million dollars, which is certainly not chump change. If we are going to go down this road, seek some eminent individuals, whoever they may be, to provide us with their advice, then I think it's only reasonable to expect that reasonable people sitting around this table and the rest of our colleagues who are not here should be willing to accept the recommendations of this process. I, too, like you, would hope that that is the direction we would be headed.

10:20

The Chair: Mr. Chase, then Mr. Lund.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Echoing George's comments, the definition of independent suggests free from manipulation or further filtering. If the panel is truly independent and its recommendations are provided, rather than it being debated in the Assembly and then further filtered by the Members' Services Committee, we believe that that independence should be recognized and accepted. Obviously, the report will need to be tabled in the Assembly so that it can be made public, but that's the whole point.

We're a year and a half, in my mind, behind from when Motion 501's recommendations were initially accepted, as you noted, if not unanimously, very close to it. Now we're adding on another 120 days. The reality is that the election will probably be sooner than later, and as you've noted, the recommendations of the independent panel would hopefully take effect immediately following that election.

The point is that if you're defining independence, let the people have their independent evaluation and decision, and that's it. It's not subject to debate or further filtering of the process. It's a done deal. It's externally done, as was the nature of Motion 501, and therefore should be accepted.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Lund.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. In order to move this along, I would like to move a motion that would say that we ask the Speaker to move forward with finding some eminent Canadian that would chair this commission, and if in consultation with that individual they thought it was necessary to choose a maximum of two other people to sit on the commission, that would be entertained. I also want to include in the motion that the funding for this exercise would come from the Assembly.

The Chair: Well, we're going to continue the discussion and debate on this, but we can focus it now on a motion. Everything in these terms of reference can be discussed as part of that motion before we bring it back.

I think we'll go with Mr. Mason and then Ms Evans.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I wonder if I can start by asking you to table the letter that you received from the Premier with respect to this matter.

The Chair: The letter is exactly, word for word, what I talked about. What I put into the *Hansard* is the letter.

Mr. Mason: All right. Thank you.

The Chair: It's word for word, whatever I said.

Mr. Mason: I have a number of concerns with respect to this. First, I want to deal with the question of true independence or so-called true independence, meaning that we, as you naively suggest, agree to accept the recommendations of the panel.

The Chair: I said that I may be naive.

Mr. Mason: I think you're pretty close to being right.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: The fact is that in law, in the rules of this Assembly and so on, the Legislative Assembly has delegated authority to make decisions with respect to compensation to this committee. In fact, this committee makes it on behalf of the Legislative Assembly. That would have to be changed if we were to in some way further delegate. I don't believe we have authority to further delegate that.

The point I want to make is that I have participated at the municipal level in the past with committees that are independent and external that review compensation of politicians. My experience is that in at least two cases that I'm familiar with with Edmonton city council, recommendations were not for reductions, which I think is on the minds of many of the people in the public, but for increases. What I want to avoid is being bound by any recommendations that would come forward from this commission that would actually increase our compensation.

I think it's a moot point in any case because ultimately, whether we debate it in the Legislature or not so that members can get on the record before the election where they stand on this, that would be the only function of that process. The actual decision will have to be made by the Members' Services Committee unless the Legislative Assembly changes the resolutions affecting this committee and its responsibilities.

I want to go to a number of concerns that I have. I would like the opportunity, notwithstanding the motion that Mr. Lund is

wanting to propose, to amend these terms of reference. I have several things that I would like to amend.

The Chair: Well, I think we should be really, really careful about this. The letter was sent to me as the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly to try and attempt to take – I just happen to be the Speaker, but I also happen to be the chair of this committee. I wear two hats with respect to this. If the Speaker is to be the neutral member – and you have to believe that there have to be some thought processes behind that – then my attempt here is to depoliticize this as much as possible. So I'm sharing this as a courtesy as much as a desire on my part to invoke the thought processes of the members of the Members' Services Committee.

But if the words were perhaps "make a suggestion" instead of "amend," I'd feel much more comfortable because if we start amending this thing, we're going to be here for three weeks from now. Somebody will want to change this word or that word. I don't believe that the wordsmithing in here is the best in the world.

Mr. Mason: I'm not talking about wordsmithing. I'm talking about fundamental questions.

The Chair: Okay. Proceed.

Mr. Mason: Let's begin with the benchmarks. This also flags the concern for me that this committee may in fact be heading in a direction of increasing our compensation. If we look at the benchmarking, number 1, "Canadian federal, provincial and territorial parliaments": perfectly reasonable, perfectly acceptable.

"Comparable Commonwealth parliaments." Does that mean that we're going to be benchmarking ourselves against the parliament in Nigeria or the Bahamas or, you know, other countries like that in the parliament? It doesn't seem to me that they have a lot of relevance.

"Alberta's Queen's Bench and Provincial Court Judges": paid significantly more than we are.

"Senior public servants in Alberta including provincial, university, municipal, education and health care sectors." Dr. de Bever of AIMCo receives \$2.1 million a year in compensation. The Edmonton city manager receives somewhere between \$280,000 and \$330,000. The president of the University of Alberta several years ago had compensation of \$627,000. These benchmarks, if they're utilized in the development of this report, will tend to lead whoever is developing the report to suggest substantial increases in our compensation. So I want to amend to leave number 1 and take the rest out because I don't believe they're appropriate.

I also think that the terms of reference for this committee must be adopted by this committee and that the panel should be selected by the committee and not by you, Mr. Chair.

Those are my concerns with this report. I think that it looks to me like if we approve this as it is, we're going to get a panel that is going to come back with substantially increased compensation as its recommendations. If we preapprove it, agree to approve it in advance, then I think we're going to be stuck in a very bad situation, and I don't want to be involved in that situation at all, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: Can I be added to the list?

The Chair: Okay.

10:30

Ms Evans: With the wide-ranging comments of the previous speaker attacking various portions of this for amendment, it may be appropriate, Mr. Speaker, to try and parcel this out in a different fashion and then deal with the mandate portion, benchmarks, or something in some other fashion.

What I was going to address was simply the position that you have recommended in number 6, and that would be in support of the motion that the report be debated in the Assembly. I've heard Mr. Taylor's comments, and I agree. If it's an independent commission, why would we? This Members' Services Committee has actually taken the direction of Motion 501 and taken the direction of almost unanimous support in the House for Motion 501 for an independent commission, so in some ways the Legislature has already set the tone for the Members' Services Committee by getting that agreement in the House for an independent commission. I think that the best way we can manage that is to take it back to the House with the hope, as the Speaker has suggested, that people will respect the intent of that independence as identified and ratify it as an independent commission.

The whole intent of an independent commission – and I respect what Mr. Mason said. You set up an independent review panel. In local government inevitably they come back and say that, well, they wouldn't do it for the amount of money they're paid. They want you to pay more. So as soon as we accepted that – I don't know – one could tongue-in-cheek say that every member who voted in favour of that motion knew that likely if an independent commission was struck, there would be increases in some portion of the compensation.

I think by the very process of us accepting the direction from Motion 501, then it behooves us to take it back and report to the Legislative Assembly, and even if it becomes a discussion item without conclusion, like we do sometimes on motions, it would come back to Members' Services Committee for dispatch through the government or the respective areas of responsibility as noted. So I am speaking in favour of that.

As to one other comment that was made – and this is where you may wish to digress and deal with the proposed amendments in a different fashion. The panel would be selected by the Speaker, and I'm going to speak very favourably to that because the Speaker is elected by every Member of the Legislative Assembly. Every member votes for you. Every member votes for the person that's put in that chair. You are charged with the responsibility, like it or not, of being as eminently fair as possible. I would take, from the last 14 and a half years of my tenure here, your continued service in that chair to be one of endorsement in that you haven't only appealed to the government side, but you've appealed to the opposition and to the third party and other people for the most part or you would not have a majority to put you in that chair.

I don't think, quite frankly, that you can dodge the responsibility of appointing the panel. To bring that panel or the membership or the personalities here in all of our wisdom collectively will open it up to various subjective attitudes. It's been identified as independent, a Canadian, as Ty has pointed out, that could be selected that would be familiar with the area of responsibility and would render, hopefully, a report and a decision that we could accept.

I'm in favour of the motion with the proviso that we deal with only item 6 up to the word "or," not taking this report unto ourselves as the Members' Services Committee. This committee hasn't had a track record of unanimity of expression. It usually, in fact, goes out with some considerable digress from independent

viewpoints on what the committee has done. I think the Legislature deserves to take this responsibility back from whence it came and at least discuss it even though the final ratification may come to the Members' Services Committee.

I would also be a speaker in favour of the Speaker being the one to have to select the panel. No great choice, but there, it's yours; the big buck stops there.

Mr. Hehr: Well, to add to some of the comments, I'm in favour of looking at the process, and the process is outlined in item 3, where it says that "the panel would be selected by the Speaker." I understand what the last member said, that the Speaker has served in this capacity for 14 and a half years, and he has his position to play the referee and the judge and the peacemaker and all that good stuff.

Nevertheless, I believe that to be an independent panel, our committee could have some reference points, be part of the selection process, that may add to – we don't really want to use the term "debate" – the mix of who that panel would be. I think our committee could be part of that process. I agree with the suggestion of Mr. Mason. That would be, at least, what I would prefer. I believe it would reflect more the opinions around the table and would add to the independence of the panel more so than the Speaker making the selection.

Those are my comments.

Mr. Chase: Can you please add Harry Chase to the list again?

The Chair: I'm sure, Mr. Chase, that you'll be wanting to come in very frequently.

I just want to make a comment. I'm not debating this issue, but I do want to make a comment about the selection process. If the Speaker would go to the Judicial Council and seek the name of a judge, it would be most inappropriate, I believe, to have that judge's name brought back to this committee for debate around this table, where politics seem to serve most of the argument. I would suspect that the judiciary would say: we want no part of this process with you at all.

In the most recent report that was done in the province of Nova Scotia, the Speaker there conveyed a message to the chief person in either the provincial bench or the Court of Queen's Bench – I forget – and asked the leader. You have to seek permission. You cannot appoint a sitting judge just willy-nilly. We have to seek permission. The Chief Justice provided a name. The Speaker accepted that name, made the arrangements, appointed him. The judge went out and, in fact, added two people to the panel. He appointed them, not the Speaker, not the Members' Services Committee.

One has to be really, really careful about this. If we want an independent thing, then we've got to put a lot of arguments back into the folder and not bring them out. We're not going to get an independent one if we play politics, and I will not play politics with this issue. I want to assure you of that. I will not do that.

We'll come back to Mr. Mason in a second after we hear from Mr. Campbell and Mr. Chase.

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, I just want to agree with what you just said, but I also want to go a step further in the sense of some of the comments that Mr. Mason brought forward. I think it's important to understand that this motion was brought forward by a private member. This wasn't a government motion. This wasn't the opposition bringing forward a motion. This was a private member's motion saying that they wanted the Assembly to urge the government to establish an independent commission to review the current salaries and benefits for Members of the

Legislative Assembly and to report to the government and this Assembly on whether the current overall remuneration for members is fair and adequate.

Right? This isn't a government motion, so there's nobody from the government going out and saying: well, we all know it's going to be more; we want more money. Okay?

Personally, I think that we're going to waste a lot of taxpayers' money on this because the Speaker has done a number of comparisons across the provinces in Canada and the federal government as to where our remuneration stands with the other provinces. To me, you know, we're spending taxpayers' monies, I think, in a very inadequate fashion.

The second thing is that we have to have benchmarks. I mean, no matter what industry you're in, if you're looking at compensation for your employees, you're looking at what other comparable competitors in your industry are paying, and that's what you set your standard for raises on. So, again, we have to have benchmarks. You know, I see nothing wrong with these benchmarks of where we're going.

You know, what concerns me about this motion is that it's urging the government to establish something that the government really hasn't got the right to establish. But we didn't talk about that, and none of the members, when we had this discussion in the House, raised that issue. Well, I'll have to check *Hansard*, but I don't remember that being discussed.

You know, I think the fact being that we're going to move forward with this motion, I agree wholeheartedly with the Speaker's recommendations. I think it has to be independent. I think that we have to take the politics out of it and find out where we stand. Like I say, I don't want to prejudge, but I'm pretty sure about where I think we stand as far as compensation with the rest of the provinces in this country.

So I would suggest that we accept the motion brought forth by Mr. Lund and move on with the process.

10:40

The Chair: Mr. Chase, followed by Mr. Mason, then Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. With regard to Mr. Lund's motion I support the idea of a panel of up to three members.

With regard to the appointment of an individual, whether they choose the other two or not, I want to very briefly talk about independence. I'm in a fairly unique position here in that I'm retiring. I announced that a year ago. So I'm not going to benefit or have benefits reduced as a result of this. I am concerned, as Mr. Mason pointed out, about the benchmarks. If we have faith in the independence of the person who is selected, then they would certainly have the wisdom to review whatever factors they felt were relevant to the circumstance. By suggesting these five areas, while the first one potentially makes sense in terms of equity and equivalency, the others are prejudiced. They're predetermining the independence of the decision.

I would like to suggest, whether it's the Speaker or whether it's through the committee, that whoever this person or the group of three persons selected is, through due diligence that appointed person or committee would have the intelligence and the scope to review what they felt was necessary to come up with a fair, independent decision.

Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: Can I be added to the list, please?

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.
Mr. Mason, Mr. Rogers, and Mr. Hehr.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Well, Mr. Speaker, with regard to the suggestion that we would make a request to the Judicial Council for the appointment of a judge to do this work, that's something I could accept. But that's the first I've heard of it. It doesn't say that here.

The Chair: Well, no, it doesn't. I said a distinguished Canadian.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Well, there's a difference. Now, if in fact the motion says that we will request the Judicial Council to recommend or appoint a judge in order to conduct its work, that's something I can accept, but I think the motion needs to say that. Otherwise, it would be my preference that this go back to you and come back with terms of reference and composition of the committee, that the committee would then debate and vote on. That's failing having a clear motion.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead. Conclude, though.

Mr. Mason: That is my view. But it's very important, in my opinion, that we delete benchmarks 2 to 5 as they drive whoever does the work to look at much higher rates of compensation. We could include, for example, firefighters.

The Chair: Oh, absolutely. That's included under number 5.

Mr. Mason: But we could include as benchmarks people who have lower compensation. All of these are significantly – well, maybe not firefighters.

The Chair: Absolutely. Actually, Mr. Mason, just so you know, I had on the list executive directors of volunteer organizations. I read a report a little while ago that none of them makes less than \$300,000 to \$400,000 to \$500,000 a year at a national level. I didn't put that in.

Mr. Mason: Who is that?

The Chair: Executive directors of volunteer groups from the Red Cross to everything. I didn't put it in.

Mr. Mason: I just don't think these are appropriate, frankly. I think that the committee needs to determine the terms of reference. With the single exception of specifying that you approach the Judicial Council, then I think that the composition also needs to be determined by the committee.

The Chair: Okay. But please be careful. I have a real issue here. I've got it, and you do, too. If we start talking and start debating around the judiciary and Judicial Council and all this stuff here, we're getting into an area of the separation of government where you have the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch. I don't want to mention any name. The chief justices may get very angry to read that we're even discussing consulting with them about this. Basically, if I ever do, they may just slam the door in my face. That's why I'm staying away from this. That's why I'm not mentioning any name other than distinguished Canadians. But you've got to believe something.

Mr. Mason: We can request.

The Chair: Whoa. Whoa. Okay. Fair game. But you be careful. You be really, really careful about this. I mean, we're all told that nobody has any contact with the judiciary. This is the separation of the three. You've got to have some trust in this.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Well.

The Chair: If we sit here and debate all these things, we're going nowhere. We're going to just delay this process the same way it was delayed last year when the request was made of certain people to provide names for an independent, and they never came. All it is going to delay it. I'm on the boat, and I'm ready to have it sail out of the harbour on this independent review.

Mr. Rogers, Mr. Hehr, Mr. Amery, and then, Mr. Mason, if you want to get back in, we'll bring you back in.

Mr. Mason: Thank you so much.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to follow up on your comments. I, too, would agree that we not box ourselves in with any reference to the judiciary. It's implicit in the discussions that that may very well be where you end up, but I don't believe it serves us to be on the record here as requesting, as you have said, anything of the judiciary because we do not, in my humble opinion, have that right to demand anything of the judiciary because of that separation that you just reminded us of.

The idea, going back to Mr. Mason, that this committee would debate and ultimately select the members of the panel, I agree with you, is fraught with, frankly, time wasting – that's the best term I can find – because we have been down this road in terms of waiting for political input on getting names for a committee to move this forward, and here we are how many months later? I believe this motion was passed in February 2010. Here we are. I believe it's mid-November 2011.

The questions raised around benchmarks: I see these as guidelines that can help to provide context for the panel ultimately, whatever the panel looks like, and I don't see the need for us to start carving or messing with this list that you've got here. I believe the quality of individuals that you would be seeking would have the ability to reach out and find appropriate data throughout this range that's been suggested here, which would also include the private sector, I would expect, at some point because I think it would be valid that some comparisons be made to the private sector.

All of us here, before we got here, functioned at some level in the private sector. In order to attract quality individuals to sit around this table and, of course, our larger table in the Legislature, there has to be recognition of what compensation ultimately looks like, that realizes that people have to make choices and sacrifices in their lives and their businesses and careers to come and offer themselves to serve the people of this province and that they should not be penalized or be forced to have their families suffer as a result of doing this vital service to the province.

So I want to support you and the direction of the motion of Mr. Lund. Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: I'd just like to reiterate some of the comments made by Mr. Mason. I think the process, especially number 3, "the Panel would be selected by the Speaker" – I believe the Speaker brought it up the example about how it was done in Nova Scotia, and there was a chief justice or a judge put into place. I like that idea. I understand the Speaker's comments on the separation between the levels of government and the perils of us discussing that.

10:50

Nevertheless, I believe that having some understanding of the process and the direction the Speaker is going in selecting the panel would be beneficial in setting up a truly independent panel. How that might look: well, it's not referenced in this draft. I would have preferred to see that. I would like to see it just to assure myself as well as the public that we're heading in the right

direction. I would echo Mr. Mason's comments in that regard, and I'd support that as being part of this draft.

The Chair: Sorry. What would you support as being part of the draft?

Mr. Hehr: Well, I'd support that process being outlined in this draft.

The Chair: But just for my own clarification, what process?

Mr. Hehr: Well, the process which the Speaker would go down, where he would get the selection process from. I realize it's fairly broad right now, but obviously there could be some ways to select these people. I would prefer it actually being discussed around this table. Those are my preferences, and I've heard the arguments the other way, which also have valid points to them as well.

The Chair: Mr. Amery.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, I'd like to get some clarification. I heard Mr. Chase saying that he supports the motion that was introduced by Mr. Lund about suggesting three members. I did not hear Mr. Lund saying three members.

The Chair: Yeah, he did. He said between one and three.

Mr. Amery: One and three, but he did not specify three members.

The Chair: Up to three.

Mr. Amery: Up to three? Okay.

The other point that I'd like to make is that Motion 501 is very clear – very clear – in urging the government to establish this independent commission to look into our MLA salaries and benefits. We all know why. We don't have to go back to that. This commission needs a mandate, needs some terms of reference, and needs some benchmarks.

I'm really disturbed here that Mr. Mason mentioned numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 and conveniently omitted number 5, that the panel could use others as determined by the panel. The panel is not obligated to look only at provincial judges and federal judges and senior public servants. They can look at others and determine what benefits and what packages they would suggest. I think I would support and endorse the Speaker going ahead with suggesting a person to head that panel.

The Chair: Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I'll wait until the debate on Mr. Lund's motion.

The Chair: We are on the debate on this. I indicated very clearly that it's all part of it.

Mr. Mason: Oh, it's been accepted, and now it's in front of us, Mr. Lund's motion.

The Chair: Yeah. Well, I said that we would continue to hold the discussion. He just put the motion to focus it all together. Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Then, Mr. Speaker, I will move that this matter be referred to you in order to come back to the Members' Services Committee with specific terms of reference for the independent panel and a recommendation with respect to the composition of the panel and, further, recommendations to

establish more comparable benchmarks than in the current document.

I'll speak to that if I can.

The Chair: Go ahead. This would be an amendment, then.

Mr. Mason: A referral motion, yeah.

The Chair: This would be an amendment to Mr. Lund's motion.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Okay.

The Chair: You've got three parts to it.

Mr. Mason: Yes, please.

The Chair: Okay. Proceed.

Mr. Mason: All right. First of all, I believe that the terms of reference of this body lie within the jurisdiction of the Members' Services Committee as established in the standing orders of the Assembly and ought to be approved in a final form by this committee.

Secondly, I think that with the exception that I outlined before, which has been, I guess, rejected, this committee also has the responsibility to select. I think that as we proceed in this direction, we put you, Mr. Speaker, in a very difficult spot in selecting the terms of reference and the composition of this independent commission since the two issues that have created the most public concern, having led to the Assembly passing Motion 501, were the severance and RRSP package that was adopted by the Members' Services Committee in 1990 and the increase in committee pay for MLAs and cabinet members in I think it was 2008. Both of those recommendations were from you, Mr. Speaker, to the committee, so I think it places you in a difficult position to be asked to select the commission and set the terms of reference.

Finally, the last point, which I have made before, is that 2, 3, and 4 have little relevance to our work and are not appropriate and would have the impact of leading the commission to look at increasing compensation, something I think the public would clearly disagree with.

That's why I've made the motion to refer it. I would hope that it would come back, we would have some clear terms of reference that we could vote on as a committee, we would have a composition that we could approve, and we would have benchmarks that would be realistic, appropriate, and not lead the commission to think that their responsibility is to increase our compensation even further.

I think a downward direction is, if anything, what the public is looking for, and I just want to reiterate that I will not be bound by any recommendations that would have the impact of increasing our compensation further. I think we're pretty much as high as the public tolerance will go.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

On the amendment, Mr. Knight.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've been away from this table for some time, but I have to admit that it seems as though it's an old soap opera. I haven't missed a whole lot.

We have the same situation here now where it looks to me like there is at least one member, maybe more, of this committee that want to do nothing more than put on the table some delaying tactics with respect to a very, very important issue that we are responsible for, notwithstanding the fact that you don't want to be

bound. You're not bound. You're a member of a committee, and you have your opportunities to put your comments forward, and your voice is heard at the table.

Whatever political kind of mumbo-jumbo that is around "Okay, we got this on the record; I can go and wave this around and say that I'm not bound because I'm not the one that made the decision," it's obvious that what they're looking for here is the smallest hole at the bottom of the door where they might be able to sneak out.

Anybody on this committee, I think, Mr. Speaker, should have come here today prepared to make a decision and resolve this issue. I do not agree that we should be putting it off any longer and going back to get some other type of process in place or whatever it is that needs to be done. We've had an opportunity, all of us. I took the opportunity this morning to review the information that has been presented to us, and I think that something needs to be said with respect to the idea that the Speaker would be bound to look at some particular individual with respect to getting the panel started. I think, again, nothing was said that would indicate in the motion that had been made prior to Mr. Mason's amendment that it's anything other than a qualified, experienced Canadian. That could or could not be a judge, I presume.

With respect to the amendment, Mr. Chairman, I respectfully reject that amendment.

11:00

The Chair: Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, will speak against this amendment. We've been at this for some time. We've been tasked with moving this forward, not delaying it for God knows how much longer. The idea that this process is essentially a foregone conclusion, that we are anticipating a recommendation that would increase our compensation, I think is ridiculous. If, in fact, the conclusion around this table was that that were the case, I don't know why we would bother. It's a waste of time. It's a waste of everybody's time around this table and, certainly, would be a waste of time of the individual or individuals that we might bring onboard to do this, a number of resources, dollars.

If we are in fact convinced that what is required is a reduction in our compensation, then why don't we focus on that and try to deal with that? If we are truly looking at a process that's independent, as was asked for by the motion and, through subsequent process, the letter from the Premier and what you've outlined this morning, sir, to go out and get an independent recommendation that ultimately – going back through Mr. Mason's reminding us of what has been delegated to this committee and how we might choose to deal with that delegation, my recollection is that decisions are made at this committee. A final report is then issued back to the Legislature, and it's the prerogative of the Legislature then to determine what it does with the recommendations of this committee. It may be accepted in whole or in part or varied in some manner. I mean, that is the nature of how we operate here. Why would we want to short-circuit and delay this process any longer? I don't get it.

The Chair: Others? Mr. Lund.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really have difficulty with the comments that Mr. Mason made in his remarks after the amendment that he moved. If you read carefully, what it says under benchmarks is that "the Panel would make appropriate compensation and benefit comparisons to other jurisdictions including." It doesn't say that we would expect the panel to make recommendations as far as those comparisons. There would be a

comparison made. That's what it says. It doesn't say that it would necessarily be one of the recommendations to equal. I don't know how you can read into that that we're suggesting that the compensation would be upped from where it is today. I don't know how you read that into it.

As far as stalling any further, Mr. Chairman, I really have difficulty with this one because I've been around here for quite awhile. I actually went through two of these, and both times we did not accept what was recommended to us. We didn't accept it.

Now, I take it that the motion that was passed in the Legislature is suggesting that we do have a review and that it be done by an independent person or panel and that that would be accepted. I can't understand the issue with what I hear in the public: oh, you guys set your own salaries. Well, no. We want to get away from that, and that's why we're wanting an independent panel. I think we've got to get on with it.

I reject the amendment to my motion. I think that it's just a stall tactic. As far as coming back with names, no, thank you. I don't want to be a part of that.

The Chair: Mr. Elniski.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've been privy to this conversation and this rather imperfect discussion since 2008, certainly not as long as Mr. Lund. For what is really, frankly, a relatively straightforward HR activity, I can't believe how difficult it is, in fact, for all of us to keep the politics out of it. I mean, ultimately, at the end of the day no matter what the commission is, no matter who the person that we appoint is, no matter anything else about this, we are the people who have to ultimately be the ones that are accountable for this. The buck stops here.

You know, for us to go back to some other system and pick some other name or defer this back to some other point in time, frankly, is an exercise in futility. I think we have before us the most complete and comprehensive process for moving this forward, and I think we should go with it. Let the chips fall where they may. Roll the dice. Let's get it done because we're going to belabour this thing to death otherwise.

Transparency, frankly, does not mean predetermining the outcome. I do not agree that my constituents phone me and say: oh, you get paid too much. You hear those comments, too, and you hear other comments from people saying: "Well, I can't believe you're at this meeting. You guys go 24 hours a day, seven days a week." I think we make this a big issue for people. I don't believe it is a big issue for people.

We've got a process in front of us. I vote against the amendment, but I support the motion. Let's get it done.

The Chair: Mr. Chase.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. At the heart of the matter is the independence. If the correct person is chosen, whether through a series of reviews of resumés by the committee or by the Speaker, the ultimate choice of that individual is extremely important; then their independence in reviewing the salary process is equally important; and then, thirdly, that we not meddle with their recommendation, whether it's higher or lower. That's the whole point of the independence that Bridget Pastoor's Motion 501 asked for back in February 2010. I would like to get on with the independence.

History will judge us in terms of our constituents and in terms of Albertans in general. We are trying to distance ourselves from setting our own salaries. We are attempting, as Bridget Pastoor did in February 2010, to put that decision out of our hands. Hopefully, the person that's elected, whether by a smaller committee or by

the Speaker, will pick the right person, and their decision will stand, not a vote in the Legislature, not filtered through the committee system. Let's have faith in the process. I for one would like to get on with it.

The Chair: Mr. Mason, do you want to close the debate on this amendment?

Mr. Mason: I do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I just want to say, first of all, that I find it a bit rich to be accused by members of the government's side of stalling this process. This motion of Ms Pastoor's was passed in February 2010, about 21 months ago. A few weeks prior to that, at a meeting of the Members' Services Committee, I made a similar motion calling for a review, which was defeated on a vote by the government members of this committee. Then Ms Pastoor brought hers forward to the Legislative Assembly with some slightly different wording, and it was approved. Following that, even though the government made noise about implementing it, the motion was completely ignored by the government.

It is only with the selection of a new leader that we are now getting into this process. We have had this document in this binder since 8:30 this morning. People are accusing others of stalling. That's just too much to take.

The point is that the selection of the committee and its terms of reference ought to be determined by the committee as a whole. I think it's unfortunate that the committee is prepared to leave it in the hands of the Speaker given that recommendations for our current severance package and our current compensation package were recommendations that came to this committee from the Speaker. That puts the Speaker in a very difficult position.

I think we ought to pass my referral motion and get on with it. It is not a stall motion. It is about doing it correctly so that we get a fair and independent result, which I do not believe will come about if we pass this motion.

11:10

The Chair: All those in favour of the amendment as proposed by Mr. Mason, please say aye or otherwise indicate their position. I count one, two, three. Opposed? The majority are opposed. The amendment is defeated.

Shall we go now to the motion, then, by Mr. Lund? Mr. Knight, you're back on my list in terms of the next speaker to be recognized on Mr. Lund's motion.

Mr. Knight: Yes. Again, if I could, Mr. Speaker. The situation, I think, that we are dealing with here is an extremely important one, and I will admit that this has been around for some time. As a matter of fact, in the short period of time that I've been involved here as an elected member, I think this is either the second or third time that an attempt has been made to address this.

The fact of the matter is that having tried, I believe, previously to do this through what we would have, I suppose, thought were independent, outside counsel of one description or another, we've always failed simply because of something that's been brought to the table here clearly again this morning, that there is a possibility that there could be some suggestion that the compensation for members of the Legislature in Alberta is not sufficient and should be adjusted.

Now, I don't think that's any reason for us to turn away from this. I believe that after having an opportunity to hear Mr. Lund's motion, what I'm going to suggest is that it's completely reasonable. I don't see anything wrong with the benchmarks that you've laid out in the draft. In my mind, I don't think that there is any other reasonable way that we can expedite this thing other

than to have you go out and search for some independent person, an experienced and qualified Canadian, to in fact undertake this work on behalf of this panel and on behalf of the members that sit in the Legislature in Alberta.

With that, Mr. Speaker, all I have to say is that I am in support of the motion that Mr. Lund has on the table.

The Chair: No further members ask to be identified on the motion?

Mr. Mason: I'll speak to the motion, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say for the record that I am in favour of an independent review of MLA compensation. I have heard loud and clear from the public that they feel that our compensation, in some people's view, is too rich. In other people's view it's just right. But no one I've heard from is in favour of increasing the compensation that we receive in any way.

I do support an independent review, but I do not think this committee can abdicate its responsibility, which is given to it by the Legislative Assembly. I think that if we pass this motion, we are in fact not doing our duty and fulfilling our responsibility to ensure that a truly independent review is conducted.

The Chair: Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm maybe being too obsessed with the details here. I'm not sure. I mean, if I were an actual voting member of this committee, I think I could most likely vote to support Mr. Lund's motion. Perhaps we can have it read back to the meeting here. I'm not sure that the motion resolves the issues in point 6 under the process and your second assumption. I'm not sure that it commits us one way or the other to a debate in the Assembly versus pre-report acceptance of the report's recommendations. I think the committee needs to deal with that, sir.

The Chair: I indicated right at the outset that I was seeking consultation with the committee on comments with respect to this draft. Mr. Lund's motion basically says that the Speaker move towards the selection of an individual or individuals, up to three, to sit on the commission and to ensure that funding is provided for the process. The document that I have here has the word "draft" on it. I said that out of courtesy I would bring it here to basically hear the views of the members. You also note in there that under the process I have provided the suggestion that the report be debated in the Legislative Assembly. I wanted you to see both of the options.

I have heard pretty loud and clear that when this report comes to me, it should be made public and it should go to the Assembly for debate. So when we conclude this meeting today, I'm going to cross out "OR the Report could go directly to the MSC and to Government to implement the recommendations." The process, in my view, will be what I've heard here this morning, that when we select the panel, if that is the decision, then they will be advised of the terms of reference as to process. They'll say: but where's this going to go? It will be very, very clear, in my mind. It'll tell them where it will go.

Now, the second question you had.

Mr. Taylor: It was about the second assumption.

The Chair: Well, as I said before, right from the get-go, and as we've heard very, very clearly, if this goes to the Assembly, no member of the Assembly is bound to vote by virtue of any decision of this committee. You know darn well that with 83 members, this is like herding cats. No matter what one member says today, they might do something very different at that time. So

I won't even have that assumption in there. I raised it. I said it naively as well. There's nothing in Mr. Lund's motion that binds anybody to anything.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you for the clarification.

The Chair: In terms, basically, of the benchmarks we can find some other words to go along with that. But the last one, "Others as determined by the panel," is all-inclusive. I could have just read the benchmarks.

Anything you want to review, any wording in the world.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, please add me to the list for discussion.

The Chair: You're the last. We're going to the vote.

Oh, Ms Evans, too, then.

Go ahead.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: We're on the motion now.

Mr. Chase: I agree with Mr. Lund's motion, his intent, and the formation of the panel. With regard to number 6, if we accept number 6 as part of the process, then the whole independence of the individual selected is compromised, and as a result of that compromise I question the work that'll be done by the individual if they're handcuffed by the Legislature's acceptance of their recommendation. This moves away from the intent of Motion 501, back in February 2010, by Bridget Pastoor. She said: give this person the ability to make the decision independently of the Legislature. Therefore, if we get back into the process, then the intent of the motion is lost. I have trouble with number 6, as I say.

I also have trouble with all of the benchmarks because if the person is selected appropriately, that person should determine, based on their wisdom, what benchmarks they would choose to look at, and directing them in a particular direction, either taking the salary down or raising it up, puts a prejudice to the task that we're asking them to undertake.

I have trouble, as I say, with both the benchmarks and number 6. Let the independent person be selected. Have faith in the process of that selection. We have had an opportunity to state our views on the independence and the process of selection. I think it's important to get under way.

Mr. Speaker, while I may not agree with a number of your decisions in parliament, this decision will rest heavily on you. I believe your shoulders are broad enough to take the decision and the appointment of the person. Therefore, let's get on with this process, that, as Mr. Mason noted, is almost two years in the making.

The Chair: Mr. Chase, thank you very much. You cannot disagree with any of my parliamentary rulings because they're based on tradition, history, fact, knowledge, and integrity.

Mr. Mason: And they're all perfectly in order.

The Chair: And they're all perfectly in order as Mr. Mason has pointed out. This is the beauty of this kind of a discussion. You and Mr. Mason are about 180 degrees opposite on this one single issue.

Anyway, we're going to go with Ms Evans, Mr. Anderson, and Mr. Taylor.

11:20

Ms Evans: Well, it's getting awfully thick in here, Mr. Speaker.

I'd just like to mention a couple of points to my worthy colleague across the table. We have retained the intent of an independent commission. We have retained the intent of a review. Rather than just report to government and have the government act, it's broadened in this Motion 501 to be the Assembly, so we have retained the intent of the Assembly.

I think one thing has been lost in our discussion today about the independent panel. It has been charged with making recommendations on the process for future review and adjustment of members' compensation, benefits, and allowances. From my read of the people that have contacted me in the last 14 and a half years, if there's something they've been concerned about, it has been the process of establishing our own salaries, whether it's in Members' Services Committee or in any other venue. So by getting an independent view of this – and I'm sure that if the Speaker doesn't select somebody that people view as sufficiently independent, then there will be all kinds of hue and cry, but I have faith in him to do that – I think that we will achieve a result that people haven't seen. I think it'll be groundbreaking to see a future review and adjustment recommended to the Legislative Assembly.

It takes away from the Legislative Assembly providing its own compensation and being judge and jury on whether or not it's fair and equitable. We will have some opportunity to discuss it. It doesn't say: debate and come to a conclusion and change the recommendation. It says to debate it so that it's properly aired in the Assembly. It comes back to the Members' Services Committee for dispatch on implementation. So I'm in total support.

Your announced intent referencing the removal of that clause from item 6, from "OR the Report could go directly to the MSC and to Government to implement the recommendations": I dare say I would expect the opposition not to support that because, quite frankly, it would mean that the government was once again in a position of having to make a decision with the recommendations of the Legislative Assembly and not then be subject to the independence of the review that's been provided for it.

I urge that we call the question.

The Chair: First of all, we'll hear from Mr. Anderson and Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Anderson, you've joined us now.

Mr. Anderson: Yes.

The Chair: Yes, sir. Well, good morning.

Mr. Anderson: Good morning. Well, I guess I would only have three comments. The first is that this is good that we're proceeding with an independent process. I trust that you as Speaker will do a good job in making sure that that process is, indeed, independent and so forth. That's the first piece.

The second piece is that I don't think it's appropriate to in any way tie the Legislature's hands with regard to being able to lower its benefits. You know, if this independent commission comes forward with a very large increase, for example, we should have the ability as members of the Assembly to make a decision that we're going to not take that large increase because we're still in a deficit or because there's an emergency somewhere in the province, whatever, that we have the ability to say: "You know what? We know this is what the panel has said is fair, but we're going to lead by example, and we're going to go without or we're going to take a little bit less or we're not going to take anything more than we have right now or whatever." It at least puts it into our hands to leave that option on the table. We should never be able to take more than what the panel says we should be making in

benefits and salary, but certainly I think we should be able to take less than the recommendation. That's the second point.

The third point is that one of the most objectionable things since the last election – and I think everybody in the room can pretty much, I would hope, verify this, if not publicly, in their hearts – is the 34 per cent increase in salary to the Premier and the 30 per cent increase in salary to the ministers. The decision that was made was objectionable. It was done at the beginning of a recession. It was done behind closed doors. It was not a good process. I truly feel that if the Premier and this committee would like to set an example of true fiscal prudence on a go-forward basis, we should roll back those salaries to where they were prior to those massive increases, which I feel were objectionable. That should be the starting point for this committee to look at rather than looking from the standpoint: we've already received a 30 per cent raise in the last four years, so why should we get anything else more?

Those are my suggestions. Obviously, you know, I'm approving of that independent process moving forward. I like that idea. It's good, solid. It's something that a lot of us have been advocating for a while. But I cannot support anything that ties the hands of the Legislature from taking less than what that recommendation is.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Chair, I think, from my view, that everything that needs to be said about this motion has been said. I don't know if there is anybody else on the list, but I'll withdraw and let Mr. Lund close the debate.

The Chair: Mr. Lund, to close the debate.

Mr. Lund: Well, I don't think I have much more to add. I believe that the Speaker will find independence and that we should be prepared to move ahead with whatever the recommendation of the panel might be.

The Chair: Okay. We have a motion proposed by Mr. Lund. Essentially, it says:

The Speaker is to move forward in selecting an individual or a panel of up to three to sit on an independent commission and that the Members' Services Committee support the request for funds to pay for this process.

All those in favour, please say aye or otherwise indicate their support. All those opposed, please say no.

Sorry. I heard Mr. Mason say no. Who is the other one who said no?

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Hehr.

The Chair: Mr. Hehr said no as well.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Anderson also said no.

The Chair: To the motion? Mr. Anderson, you voted against the motion?

Mr. Anderson: Well, for clarification purposes does the motion include the fact that we will have to accept the salary recommendation of the panel or doesn't it?

The Chair: No. Not at all. The motion basically says that the Speaker is to move forward with selecting the panel, made up of an individual or up to three members to sit on the commission, and that funding would be supported by the LAO.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. I support that. Yes. Sorry.

The Chair: Okay. I want to make sure now because this is very important. So we have Mr. Mason opposed to the motion. Anyone else?

Mr. Hehr: Yes.

The Chair: That's right. Sorry, Kent. You're opposed to the motion, too.

Mr. Hehr: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Chase, you're in support of it?

Mr. Chase: I am.

The Chair: Okay. That's all I want to know. The other members are recorded as such.

What I will do as a result of this is to move forward with this within the time frames that have been identified. The process of selecting a person or persons will begin in the next couple of days.

You have to have some faith in me, and you have to have some trust in me. I can't debate this issue in the public front pages. If somebody says to me, "Well, have you considered judge so and so?" I'm not into that. I will not talk about that. I will not be pressured by anybody, intimidated by anybody, cajoled by anybody, or in any way attempted to be pressured by anybody in this matter. You have to have some trust. This is to be independent.

The determination. We will have to deal with the individual. We will have to do a basic contract. We'll do some wordsmithing on some of these things. Please remember that this is just a document that I'll need to go forward with.

The process I think everybody agrees on, other than the second line in item 6, is that it should go back to the Legislative Assembly. That's clear, right?

The assumptions. We'll have to cross out number 2. I can't bind anybody to that although it would be really wonderful. Milk and honey is always better than the other thing.

By whom is identified.

Nobody said a thing about the mandate. Nobody raised one question on the mandate, and the mandate has nine different items. It includes a pretty wide-ranging thing. Nothing on the mandate – amazing – which is the real meat of the whole thing. Nothing in here will deal with constituency budgets. Nothing will deal with caucus budgets, allocations for leaders or anything else.

The benchmarks. We can do some drafts of the thing in there, but it just basically says "including." It doesn't say "a basic comparative." The expectation is very, very clear.

Okay. Thank you very, very much.

11:30

Mr. Chase: For the benefit of the Members' Services Committee and, obviously, the Legislature do you have a time frame in mind for the selection of this individual or committee? Do we have a sense of when you're hoping to have this accomplished?

The Chair: This depends on who is available, who is not available, but my intent and hope would be within two to three weeks from now.

Mr. Chase: So with a little bit of luck, if the right individual happens to come forward, we could hear about the selection before the close of the legislative session.

The Chair: Absolutely, if your close date for the legislative session is the same as my close date. I'm sort of looking and

saying, "Well, December 1 is as good a date as any," but if you want to hang around here till December 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, or 20, it gives me some more flexibility. But I'll be aiming for the conclusion of this fall session.

Mr. Chase: I'm looking forward to the announcement, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Okay. Then the process will be to have the panel get this finished within the time frame that we talked about earlier. I want the boat to go. I'm on the boat. It's coming out of harbour.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry if this has been spoken about. I apologize if I came a bit late. Are the Members' Services Committee and the Legislature bound? Can we take less than what this committee comes up with?

The Chair: If you want to return part of your salary today, you can.

Mr. Anderson: No, no.

The Chair: Of course, you can take less. It's an independent commission.

Mr. Anderson: I understand that, Mr. Chair. What I'm asking is: as a Members' Services Committee and as a Legislature can we vote to take less than what the commission comes up with, or are we tied to what the panel comes back to us with?

The Chair: No, we are not tied to it. I ruled that out. I basically said earlier this morning that it was a naive assumption on my part that the members would actually want to agree with a commission's hearings. At least one member here, Mr. Mason, made it very, very clear this morning that he would never be bound by a report. He would always retain his right as a member to exercise his own conscience. So you are not bound by anything.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, just to add to my last set of comments, if we have faith in the independent person's judgment, then I think it would be rather foolhardy to circumvent the process and torpedo it given what the Legislature and Motion 501 have asked us to do.

Mr. Anderson: Well, Mr. Chase, I . . .

The Chair: Okay, fellows, we've had the motion. It's done. We're moving. We're going. You're part of the debate later.

Number 5 is new business, hon. members. Under 5 we have two items.

Mr. Anderson: I still haven't had my question answered, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Which is your question?

Mr. Anderson: You keep saying that if I choose, I can personally not accept salary. Well, clearly, that's a constitutional right that anybody has. But are you saying that when this independent commission comes back with a recommendation for salary and benefits, we as a group, as a Members' Services Committee or as the Legislative Assembly, have the opportunity as a group to vote on taking less?

The Chair: Oh, absolutely you have the right. Of course. I've said that seven times this morning. Absolutely, you have the right to take less.

Mr. Anderson: Okay.

The Chair: But you can also take less now if you want to.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah, but I'm not talking about individuals; I'm talking about the Legislature.

The Chair: Any individual member can send money back if they want to. The vote we've already dealt with seven times. Absolutely.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, could I under new business move the '12-13 Legislative Assembly budget estimates?

The Chair: Maybe I should introduce them first, though.

Ms Evans: Well, I was just trying to move the process along.

The Chair: Okay. Well, maybe we'll go to 5 in your binder. I'll give you an overview, and I'll try and be brief on it. Then I'll invite you to go and have a sandwich, bring it back in here, and we'll just continue with specifics because I wouldn't want you to become faint.

Mr. Mason: Low blood sugar.

The Chair: Well, that's my issue.

First of all, I'm going to introduce this. All right. What I've got in the binder for you is an overview of the parameters, and these parameters basically show several things. First of all, the CPI, the consumer price index, information for Alberta based on the September 2011 year-end information was 2.8 per cent. However, in terms of this budget what we have put in here for operational matters is 2 per cent, not 2.8 per cent, which is the CPI formula. We've built into this budget 2 per cent, so it's considerably less than what that is.

Secondly, we've always followed a policy of adopting what the government has put in place, adopting for the LAO and all of its affiliates one year after the fact or in the following year what the government does. We never lead; we always follow. The second thing in here is consistency with what the government has announced in the year 2011 to come into play by March 31, 2012. There will be in-range adjustments up to 3 per cent and general market adjustments up to 4 per cent. That was announced earlier this year as a result of the AUPE negotiations and then adjustments for opted-out people. So that is the formula that is used here.

For budgeting purposes, once again, because there is a cost to operate this system, we're using 80 sessional days. What has really escalated in our budget in the last couple of years is committee meetings. If you go back two years ago and three years ago, before it came up – all the caucuses invented this new process for all these committee meetings – this has been a dramatic escalation in committee meetings in the last couple of years. Where several years ago there were just a handful of them, now we're up to 70 in addition to the 80 sessional days, and depending on how many evening sessions you have, well, of course, that adds something as well.

We've added to this whatever employer premium increases we have received for the medical plans, the dental plans, the WCB. Management and nonmanagement pension plans are reflected. In terms of consistency with the public service settlement announced earlier this year, there will now be a health account of \$950 per staff person. If we count up the 433 staff associated with the LAO – that is, all the constituency staff, the caucus staff, everybody else – that's 433 times \$950, so that's basically 400 grand right there.

The formula, then: 2 per cent, basically, for CPI; 3 per cent, which is the adjustment factor for in-range adjustments; up to 4 per cent for general market assessments; and this other \$950.

For the MLA remuneration adjustments we have that formula in place. It has been frozen since April 1, 2008, but as of April 1, 2012, it would follow the average weekly earnings index number. The average weekly earnings index number from August 2010 to August 2011 is 4.4 per cent, but we built in here a 4 per cent adjustment for April 1, 2012, which is lower than what it seems to be coming out at.

The MLA RRSP allowance is \$11,485 for next fiscal year, compared to \$11,225, so there's a slight adjustment there.

The MLA benefit plans. The current and extended benefits option increases reflect the actual costs and claims history for the benefits; that is, for illness-related items of Members of the Legislative Assembly. We're about average with the normal population. There's nothing obtuse or nothing acute about the illness-related averages of Members of the Legislative Assembly. We are part of the whole profile of Albertans in terms of health and what have you.

There's a slight WCB premium increase.

Then for the members' services allowance – that's your constituency stuff, your offices – there is a 2 per cent inflationary factor for goods and services in office operations, a 4 per cent market adjustment, a 3 per cent merit adjustment to the staffing ones, an increase in the postal rate. We did not show increases the last couple of years, and now the price of a letter is 61 cents as opposed to the 54 cents that we used to have. Adjustments made to reflect increases in the provincial population and the number of electors are also included. There continue to be different population numbers that we can use. Finance puts out a population number at one time and then puts out another piece of paper at another time, and there is always a variance in the population. But we're trying to be as cautious as we can.

11:40

In terms of the caucuses and independent member budgets we took a blend of that 2 per cent for the inflationary pressures for operating expenses, a blend of up to 4 per cent for the market adjustment and in-range adjustments at 3 per cent, blended them all together, worked out what it was, and it comes out to a 5.5 per cent average. So the number we used for all of the caucuses and independent members' budgets is a 5.5 per cent adjustment upwards. You'll see that going through the whole budget.

Now, there are several funding requirements that we have to deal with simply because of the unique circumstances of the post April 1, 2012, period. The first is that we have to deal with moves, anticipated moves and changes in offices. I have no idea when an election is going to be held, but I do know this: an election has to be held before March of 2013. We're dealing with a budget that goes for the year April 1, 2012, to March 2013, so you've got to guess that there's going to be an election in there some time. That means there are going to be office moves, all kinds of telecommunication moves, so we have to anticipate something for that and build something in there. Additional expenses for election preparedness are in there as well.

There also is a situation with respect to RRSP allowances. You'll recall that earlier in the year I brought to you a motion that you agreed to that basically says that – once every four years we have this situation that possibly could develop. We would have a new budget coming in April 1, so the current group of MLAs, the 83 of them, would all be eligible on April 1 for an RRSP allocation allowance. But what happens if the election was held on May 1? Then a whole new group of MLAs would come in, and they would have only been there – we already paid the people who were there a month before, so we said there would be a three-month period. If an election is held prior to July 1 of that

particular year, only one group gets that RRSP payment. You don't have one that will double up the whammy. So we had to build into this budget an amount of money assuming that if it's after July 1, 2012, we have to include the amount of dollars for the second group.

Four additional MLAs. The decision was made by the Legislative Assembly to move from 83 to 87. Well, we have to budget for those four new MLAs. It costs approximately \$650,000 to house each and every one of us. That's how much when you count all the items. So there's \$2.6 million.

Mr. Mason: Including the salary?

The Chair: Yeah. That's everything, every conceivable thing I can think of, including prorated shoe polish.

On September 1, 2012, that building will have its 100th anniversary. It has always been anticipated that the new building would be ready by September 1, 2012. It will not be. It will be delayed. It could very well be to the first quarter of 2013. There's going to be a transition period, but one of the things we're dealing with is the 100th anniversary of the building in terms of other things. We downscaled a whole bunch of things and said that, no, we're not going to go with them now because the new building is not going to be ready, but we still have some things to do.

We've also agreed to – there will be a major conference held in Edmonton around September 1, 2012, called the Canadian Capital Cities Organization. This was to be a national show-off, kickoff for this new building. There are still going to be some events surrounding it, but we've reduced the budget for that as well.

The other thing that we have to deal with is that there will be a transition time probably in the last quarter of 2012 or the first quarter of 2013 when the move will begin from offices and caucus offices in this building to the other one. It just can't happen overnight. It takes a lot of time to deal with all the IT stuff, the transition stuff. There's going to be an overlap in expense here for maybe up to six months by the time everything gets done in terms so that when you walk out of this building and you move into your next office not only you but all the staff and everything else can function immediately and you don't have to wait three, four, five, or six months till all the equipment is installed and ready to go. That's an overview.

Now, you can see that on the next page are the variances. I indicated the formula: 2 per cent CPI, 4 per cent for salary adjustments for staff, everybody else, and up to 3 per cent for in-house market adjustments. You can see how this all breaks down in each of these various divisions.

If you go to tab 1, financial management and administrative services, there's an adjustment there of \$126,000 from the 2011-2012 estimate. That \$126,000 is broken down for exactly what is identified.

Then you go to the next one, human resource services. It's \$471,000 because of the population associated with the staff in there and a few other things.

Then for the office of the Speaker, which is always the one that you want to spend the greatest amount of time on, it's still the same thing, the market adjustments for my humongous staff of 3.5, which has been the same staff number I had 14 years ago, when I became the Speaker. We're just getting better; that's all.

The Legislature Library: you can see their request, an adjustment of \$27,000. They've been very, very responsible. The new Librarian was asked to go through with a fine-tooth comb. Val, I want to congratulate you on doing that. Good leadership in there because despite all the benefits and everything else you held it to a good number.

You can see House services, a large portion in there in terms of manpower because that's where they rest and that's where they sit. You can see those numbers again. There's a \$495,000 increase there.

Visitor services, number 8. You can see that we changed one staff. We added one staff to visitor services, which was taken away from, I think, the previous one. The overall staff component remains the same. There's no adjustment in overall staff.

You've got information technology as the next one. These 16 staff look after all of this equipment and what have you.

The Legislature committees at tab 8. Those are all these committees, an increase in number of committees and, of course, all the components that go with it. Every member that attends these committee meetings gets a stipend for it. So all of you who want to get rid of those committee stipends: just please remember that these are all the committees you sit on. If you take them away – well, you go to the meeting. That's okay.

Then MLA administration, number 9. You can see on this one pay and benefits to Members of the Legislative Assembly, members' allowances, the Fort McMurray allowance, the transition allowance liability funding. That transition allowance, by the way, is completely funded. There is no unfunded liability with respect to this. If every Member of the Legislative Assembly quit today – if every member quit today – our account would cover the payments that are in place. There's nothing unfunded about this, and I'm very proud of that.

You can go through everything else going down the list from there. Then you've got the members' allowances. The 2 per cent adjustment applied to the \$189 moves it to \$193 for the temporary residence one. Members' Services allowances: that's essentially the budget for the members' constituency offices. Those formula were applied to that.

The next tab shows you where we based the allocation for members. This year, in the current year, it's \$67,407. We added a 5.5 per cent adjustment, so the new number for April 1, 2012, is \$71,114. The government one is based on 45 private members plus the committee support of \$734,000, so the government members' budget becomes \$3,935,000.

11:50

The Official Opposition budget: there are nine members. We include funding for the leader despite the fact that the leader gets an office allowance. We base it on nine times \$71,114 plus the leader's office allowance of \$492,155 plus the Calgary caucus office plus the committee support. So the nine-member Official Opposition gets \$1,606,000 in the province of Alberta.

The Wildrose opposition is based on four members times \$71,114, plus they get committee support of \$303,323, so they get the total estimate of \$588,000. You'll remember, because of previous discussion, that it was to be the same as the ND caucus, which gets \$588,000. The formula is slightly different.

The Alberta member: one times \$71,114 plus \$99,738. He gets \$171,000 for a budget.

The following page just basically shows you those other numbers. I've already explained it. They're just located in there.

Do you want to take a break for a couple of minutes, get something to eat, and we'll come back and work on this? Would that be fine?

Mr. Hehr: How long? A five-minute break?

The Chair: You could have 10 minutes if you want to.

Mr. Hehr: All right. I'm going to run over to Co-op. I'll be right back.

The Chair: You're going to run over to the Co-op.

Mr. Hehr: You've got it.

The Chair: All right. Well, you be back by 12, then. Okay. Bye-bye.

[The committee adjourned from 11:51 a.m. to 12:01 p.m.]

The Chair: Are we back on the line, Mr. Hehr and Mr. Chase? Hello. Okay. You're still out at the Co-op.

Mr. Anderson? He actually disconnected a little while ago.
Ms Evans, please.

Ms Evans: Well, I'm not as familiar about process here on new business or this committee, but I'm enjoying it. I'd just like to simply move

the Legislative Assembly budget estimates as presented.

When you go through it with a fine-tooth comb, look at the detail, for example, you could look at our new legislative boundaries. Fort McMurray or Wood Buffalo will probably have two representatives. That allowance in there may not be sufficient to cover both as currently drafted, but within the context of your budget I'm sure you'll be able to make the proper allocation to make up for some of those inconsistencies. Under new business (a) I would move that and note that the per cent increase of the budget has been kept at a modest rate and that if you look at some of the items that this budget covers, the services are well provided.

I think you noted that the library has come under new management. This library hosts a number of items of archival interest, and I think that's a responsible expenditure as we as MLAs try to find ways to enhance our knowledge. We get a lot of service from the circulation of that. I think all of these expenditures that are currently covered in your budget are absolutely essential.

I'm hopeful that visitor services, with the new construction being more complete this year, will be able to enjoy a greater amount of traffic so that that is improved.

I think you should be congratulated on your vision of having the transition allowances accommodated given any eventuality, members leaving or other things that would change.

Your members' services allowances are the one area I would hope over the next two to three years can incur an increase because I think we could do well in supporting our public with increased dollars for the staff in those areas. I myself still can only afford a four-day work week at the competitive nature of the salaries in the communities. We're a long way from the days when good and faithful party workers used to just come in and do the constituency work for the joy of it.

Mr. Mason: We still have some.

Ms Evans: Well, there are some that do that, and they volunteer for me. They do distribution of flyers and so on. But it's still government money.

The Chair: Whoa. Whoa. Be very careful. These are nonpartisan offices.

Ms Evans: I know.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Evans: But volunteers can be of the NDP persuasion.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Evans: I have several.

The Chair: I think an audit will have to take place here.

Ms Evans: Frankly, looking forward, I think we should be putting more money into these budgets for the constituency, so I'm prepared to move the total of it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Amery, are you going to second it? Then we'll go to a whole discussion.

Mr. Amery: I have a question. Sorry.

The Chair: Okay. Do we have a seconder?

Mr. Campbell: I'll second it.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Campbell.

Go ahead, Mr. Amery.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just for the benefit of new members on this committee such as myself I wonder if you can explain the Fort McMurray allowance?

The Chair: Oh, okay. A number of years ago the government of Alberta gave a special, quote, adjustment or bonus for people who work in Fort McMurray. It was part of the AUPE and then opted-out and opted-in allocation.

The then Member for Fort McMurray, who was a member of cabinet, came to this committee and said: well, look; the government has given this to all the employees in Fort McMurray, so why shouldn't it apply to my constituency office staff as well? There was no way to basically say that the principle shouldn't be accepted. He also wanted it for himself, at which point in time we said that, no, that was a no go. But it was added in for his constituency staff. That's why it's there.

Mr. Amery: Okay. Thanks.

My other question is about the postage allowance. You mentioned earlier, Mr. Chairman, that it hasn't been increased for the last two years. We saw that postage . . .

The Chair: It went from 54 cents to 61 cents, as I recall.

Mr. Amery: Right. It increased. Each constituency right now, I think, receives about \$750. Now, how much would the increase be in terms of dollars? Any idea?

The Chair: It's not very much.

Jacqueline, what is it?

Ms Breault: For the \$750 cap?

The Chair: The postage thing.

Ms Breault: Individual mailings from a member's Legislature office, usually through the Legislature mailroom, haven't increased in a long time.

The Chair: No. When we went to show this modest increase this year – I remember seeing it yesterday or the day before – it went from \$700 and something to \$783 or something. What was the specific number?

Ms Evans: It's about 7 cents a stamp.

The Chair: Yeah, but it was based on, like, \$750 or something. So it's not very much, about \$35.

Mr. Amery: Okay.

Mr. Hehr: Could I be added to the list? Are we just discussing everything right now?

The Chair: We're discussing the budget.

Mr. Hehr: That's what I like to hear.

The Chair: Mr. Hehr, you're back.

Mr. Hehr: I'm back. I made it back from Co-op.

The Chair: Boy, you really flew. Good for you.
Mr. Rogers, then Mr. Hehr.

Mr. Rogers: I've just been.

The Chair: Okay. Then Mr. Hehr first.

Mr. Hehr: I look at the budget, and I note that given the process that we've just been through of setting an independent panel to review our pay, in my view, it would be wise for us to not put through this adjustment to MLAs' salary and compensation but, in fact, leave it frozen where it is and defer this to the independent panel that we have, with our salaries in check from when the freeze happened. That would be my suggestion.

The Chair: Well, do you want to put that in the form of a motion?

Mr. Hehr: Yes.

The Chair: You want to move it.

Mr. Hehr: I want to move that.

The Chair: So that's an amendment to Ms Evans' motion. You want to move an amendment that
the average weekly earnings index be waived once again, for the fourth year in a row.

Mr. Hehr: Yes, I would. Given that we just struck an independent commission to review MLAs' salary and remuneration, I believe that would be the wisest thing.

The Chair: Okay. I'm sure somebody will ask with the anticipation that the independent commission is going to move everything down, I guess. Anyway, go ahead.

Mr. Chase: I'll second the motion if a seconder is required.

The Chair: Mr. Chase. Okay. That's a Hehr/Chase motion. No, we don't need a seconder, but we'll be kind of formal for an event where people are distant.

Okay. We're on the amendment now. Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Speaking to the amendment, we talked earlier at great length about not trying to presuppose what may or may not come out of that independent review. I feel that what you have put forward is prudent, I guess, a smart move is the best term I can think of, in terms of anticipating what may happen in the normal course of moving this forward. We can make a decision at any time in the future should we decide to do something different, namely that looks like a freeze or not. This is a budgeting process, and the timing, I think, is vital here because all of this has to be put together to be rolled into the larger government budget.

I think it's a prudent move that you have proposed, that we look

at the 4 per cent, whether it actually comes to fruition or not, that we make provision for it in the budget moving forward, without tying this in any way to what may or may not come out of that review. So I'm not supporting the amendment at all.

12:10

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Mason, on the amendment?

Mr. Mason: Just a question. This only applies to adjustments in MLA salaries, not in LAO staff or in caucus staff. Is that correct?

Mr. Hehr: Yes.

The Chair: That's just the MLAs.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Anybody else on the amendment?

Well, then, Mr. Hehr, we've had two people participate on the amendment. Should I call the question?

Mr. Hehr: Certainly.

The Chair: All right. Would all those in favour of the amendment proposed by Mr. Hehr and seconded by Mr. Chase that there be a further freeze in MLA adjustments on April 1, 2012, please say aye? I count Mr. Hehr and Mr. Mason. Anybody else? Mr. Chase?

Mr. Chase: Kent and myself. I believe that to get Mr. Hehr's motion correct, it was: until such time as the independent committee has released its findings.

The Chair: Well, we're dealing with our budget here. We're not going to tie it into – I don't know how I can budget based on an unknown.

Mr. Chase: Well, it's MLAs' salaries and a freeze, so it's a pretty definite known.

The Chair: Well, anyway, we've dealt with it.

Did I call the question on who's opposed? Those opposed, please say aye. Okay. I heard you again, Mr. Chase. You voted twice. You can only vote once. All right. The amendment is defeated.

Mr. Chase: You're hearing imitations of my majestic voice. I'm in favour of the motion.

The Chair: Okay. So we've finished with that one. That one has been defeated.

Mr. Rogers, we're back to the main motion.

Mr. Rogers: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a question. In terms of the Members' Services order, whatever the number is that deals with our constituency budgets, it's not the case for my own situation, but I've heard from a number of our colleagues who have offices in very expensive, high-rent districts, for lack of a better term, in some of our larger centres. I'm just wondering what accommodations you've made in your proposal to deal with some of those situations.

The Chair: We have made adjustments, recognizing that this becomes for some members almost an annual thing. It's particularly true after an election when new members arrive. They then have to make a decision about retaining the office of the previous member or going someplace else. It is particularly true in the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, more than any other place,

that when a member shows up at somebody's office, the first thing is that the person looks at them and says, "Well, this is government, right?" There's an immediate belief that there's no budget parameter. As a result, we have offices that have changed.

There is approximately \$25,000 to \$27,000 built into each one of the constituencies, the MSI allocation that basically looks at the operational side, which would be the rent plus the utilities; about \$71,000 or \$72,000 for the manpower one; and a few dollars for the mailing and the promotional thing. That's basically how you get your whole number.

As the MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock I've got a huge constituency office: two bathrooms, lots of room. I pay \$800 a month. There are members in Edmonton and Calgary that have basically 400 and 500 square feet and are paying \$30,000 a year. There's no rhyme nor reason. You hear that all the time. So we constantly try and sit down and work with the member. In fact, one member in the past even went so far as to say: well, I'm going to hire a contractor to renovate my office. The person showed up, renovated the office, and then sent the bill to us. It didn't work that way. First, he had no business renovating the office, to begin with, or anything else. You get all these things as new members arrive, so there's a little bit of education that has to go in there. But there is a concern by some members in some quarters, yes, and there is quite a variance.

Well, you can all tell us. What do you pay, Mr. Campbell, for the rent in your office?

Mr. Campbell: A thousand a month.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Knight?

Mr. Knight: About \$1,550 or something like that.

Ms Evans: Just about the same as Robin. But I'd like it very much if you would clarify because candidates out there in other parties are referencing, to our great despair, the renovations in MLA offices as having been atrocious, and I can tell you that there haven't been renovations.

The Chair: There aren't any. There aren't any renovations.

Ms Evans: I know. Well, they're putting out brochures on that very item. I'd like to be really clear. I'm not somebody who has renovated the office or made any changes whatsoever.

The Chair: Other than that one person – that was about four years ago – there's nobody.

Mr. Amery: I could not find anything in my constituency, a thousand square feet, for less than \$3,000 a month.

The Chair: Excuse me. Less than?

Mr. Amery: Three thousand dollars.

The Chair: Okay. Yeah. That's way above the norm.

Mr. Amery: Absolutely.

Mr. Hehr: I'm at \$2,600.

The Chair: Mr. Chase, what are you at?

Mr. Chase: Well, it comes down to \$21 per square foot, and it's heading towards the \$3,000 mark.

The Chair: Fifteen hundred square feet?

Mr. Chase: I'm not sure right off as to the actual dimensions, but I know the increase was about \$4 to \$5 per square foot, you know, in 2008.

The Chair: That's a really hefty increase.

Mr. Chase: It is. There was very little choice in the Calgary-Varsity area.

The Chair: Okay. Does that answer your question, Mr. Amery?

Mr. Amery: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: Sorry. Mr. Rogers, does that answer your question?

Mr. Rogers: That's fine. Thank you.

The Chair: Anybody else on this matter? We've got a budget here. Nobody has any questions?

Mr. Mason: I see in the summary at the beginning of the budget that there is \$311,000 budgeted for Legislature Building centennial activities and the federal building redevelopment project, and I've been trying to find in the rest of the budget where that is. Could I get the breakdown?

The Chair: Yup. Absolutely. First of all, go to tab 15. I'm in the middle and going back to the front. Jacquie, you follow us in here.

Mr. Mason, where do you see this \$311,000, just so I can follow you?

Mr. Mason: I see that in the document at the beginning: the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, summary of budget variances. Oh, so this is a variance. So the variance is \$310,000 from before? That's not the budget amount?

The Chair: No. That's the variance.

Well, I'm still trying to find the \$310,000. Where are you? Is it \$311,000? Is that what it says, Legislature Building centennial activities?

Mr. Mason: Yeah, \$311,000.

The Chair: Okay. Then you go back to tab 15.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. I don't see a \$311,000 there. I see \$130,000 for the Legislature Building centennial activities.

The Chair: Okay. Legislature Building centennial activities and federal building redevelopment project: funding for activities to recognize and celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Legislature Building. A hundred thousand of that, basically, Mr. Clerk, should be with respect to the centennial activities, which was dramatically reduced because the new building will not be ready by September 1, 2012. However, the move that will occur from this building to the other one, which was all originally supposed to have been in the fiscal year after April 1, 2012, will not take place till the last quarter of 2012 or the first quarter of 2013.

There will be a number of duplications that will occur in there. We don't know specifically what day it is that you move from and you move into, and you cannot do all the electronic stuff and the equipment and the wiring and the placement of all of the infrastructure in one day. It'll take several months or more, in fact. What we have in here: some of these things are paid for by Alberta Infrastructure, but all of the IT costs are paid for by the LAO.

There should be a couple of hundred thousand in there that was budgeted. Is that correct, Mr. Clerk?

Dr. McNeil: Correct.

Mr. Mason: Okay. In tab 15 at the end the numbers seem different to me, and that's one of the things I'm curious about. The Legislature Building centennial activities is \$130,000. Then consulting services, which includes gift shop and planning and procurement required for the transition to the federal building, is \$439,000 . . .

The Chair: Well, that includes the section of the technology.

Mr. Mason: . . . which is \$569,000 altogether, which is a different number than the \$311,000 at the beginning of the budget.

The Chair: Jacquie, you put this all together. Explain.

12:20

Ms Breault: The \$311,000 is the variance from the previous fiscal year. We originally, last year, had \$258,000. So the total under tab 15 is indeed the total amounts whereas the variance is the difference between the two fiscal years budgeted.

Mr. Mason: Okay. So the variance is a portion of these numbers. It's the amount of the increase.

Ms Breault: Correct.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm just curious about the federal building. I can see it from my office, you know, and I can see that they still have plywood on some of the windows. Like, I'm just sort of watching it crawl along.

The Chair: What would you like to know?

Mr. Mason: What's going on with it?

The Chair: Well, you should contact the Minister of Infrastructure, who, I'm sure, would be very happy to take you on a tour.

Mr. Mason: I think that'd be a good idea.

The Chair: First of all, it's a huge building. I think 11 floors will be used. Number two, if you were to go over there today, you would find, basically, a whole gutted area with hundreds of people doing hundreds of tasks. Every window in that whole building has to be put in, replaced. It took them a year and a half to gut it because of the asbestos and other stuff that went into it. There's a lot of work being done. If you go to the outside you can see – actually some of the skeleton is now being seen. You can see the new park that'll be built in front of it, the new infrastructure with the pavilions, and everything else that will go into it.

If you saw one floor, you would basically see a whole big maze with all of the wires and the pipes all being done, and there are just thousands of miles of that stuff that has to go in there. I hope nobody screws up and makes a mistake and, you know, sets the wire here instead of the wire there because it's really, really complicated.

If you want to go and see it, I'm sure Mr. Johnson will be happy to take you on a tour.

Mr. Mason: Yeah, I actually think that would be kind of fun.

The Chair: You won't see much, but he'd be happy.

Mr. Mason: In terms of our budget . . .

The Chair: Our budget. Yes.

Mr. Mason: Our budget: is this intended to cover our move?

The Chair: It will cover part of the move because part of the move will occur in – we don't know definitively, but we've budgeted for part of the move to occur in the fiscal year April 1, 2012-13, and then in the next year we'll have to have another budget to complete the move. Again, you could be out a couple of . . .

Mr. Mason: We're not even going to think about moving until about a year from now. Is that correct?

The Chair: I don't think that it's possible. Originally, the plan was to have it in September 2012. Quite frankly, after the tour that I took last week, I don't think we're looking into – okay, maybe December, January, but who knows? A month or two here.

Mr. Mason: Thank you.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, could you add me to the list, please?

The Chair: Sure. You want to go on the tour, or you just want to be added to the list?

Mr. Chase: Both would be nice.

The Chair: Okay. I'll have to try and remember.
Anything else, Mr. Mason?

Mr. Mason: No. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Chase, you're on.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Yes. Mr. Speaker, you committed to all LAO employees that they will receive a one-time payment of \$1,750 in August and again a one-time payment of \$1,250 in December. The August payment was made from funds left over from last year's budget and, therefore, had no impact on this year's budget. However, the December payment of \$1,250 will have to come from our current budget, which amounts to a loss of \$18,750.

Going back to the minutes of October 13, the Auditor General successfully argued for a supplementary supply to cover just such an expense incurred by his office, and I'm hoping that Members' Services will consider the same dispensation be made for caucuses and constituency offices.

The Chair: Well, we're not going to have a special warrant application. I refuse to do that. We'll find the dollars appropriately.

Mr. Clerk, can you answer the question?

Dr. McNeil: Yeah. The intention was that those funds would come from the members' individual budgets.

Mr. Taylor: For constituency staff, right?

Dr. McNeil: Yes.

The Chair: They were budgeted in the first place, weren't they? What are we talking about here? Cheryl, what are we talking about?

Mrs. Scarlett: When the freeze was removed effective April 1 and again consistent with the awards provided to the opted-out excluded group of the public service, merit increases again were allowed. In addition, in lieu of, if you will, the cost-of-living adjustment, there was an economic adjustment of \$1,750 and an additional economic adjustment of \$1,250 awarded to all

employees. The \$1,750 was paid to employees who were an employee as of March 31, and funds for that were accrued from last year's budget because it is a last-year expenditure. Anybody who is an employee as of December 31 in a constituency and the LAO will receive the \$1,250. However, from a budget perspective last year there were no adjustments made for cost-of-living or merit adjustments in the current budget.

Mr. Chase: That's why I make the request. Given the precedent of the Auditor General's department I would suggest that our caucus members and employees are equally valuable and their contributions should be recognized, but not at the current expense because it wasn't budgeted for. That's why I'm asking for the same treatment afforded the Auditor General's department to be afforded to caucuses and constituency offices.

The Chair: Do you mean to tell me that the Auditor General went before the Legislative Offices Committee and pleaded for a small amount of dollars that would come out of a special warrant?

Mr. Chase: If you look at the minutes of the Legislative Offices meeting on October 13, the Auditor General successfully argues for a supplementary supply to cover such an expense incurred by his office. It was granted on October 13, according to the minutes.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. Leg. Offices is going to put a submission in for one of these supplementary warrants, special warrants, requests, whatever you want to call them, in a couple of weeks for a handful of dollars.

Mr. Chase: If that's the current procedure, I would. . .

The Chair: Yeah. Okay. I got it.

What does this entail, Cheryl? How much money?

Mrs. Scarlett: The initial intent on the memo that went out to all LAO members and staff when the announcement was made that the freeze had been removed indicated that, as was mentioned, the \$1,750 was going to come out of last year's; however, it was intended that the \$1,250 for every employee would come out of the appropriate budgets that you have right now.

The Chair: What would that total?

Mr. Chase: Well, for our caucus, Mr. Speaker, I indicated \$18,750 is our expense if it does not come out of supplementary budget.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mrs. Scarlett: At a rough calculation \$450,000.

The Chair: Yeah. About the same thing as the \$950.

That's a valid point, Mr. Chase. What you're saying is that your caucus can't afford it or doesn't want to find it – is that what's happening? – or you don't want to pay your employees. Which one?

Mr. Chase: Obviously, our employees deserve the recognition for the outstanding work they do.

The Chair: Yeah. Okay. I'm teasing you. I know that.

Okay, well, any thoughts or comments on this? I mean, Mr. Campbell, you'll have the biggest amount because of the numbers, I think.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Chairman, I don't know how I would pay my constituency people out of the PC caucus fund.

The Chair: You can't. There's no PC caucus fund; there's a government caucus fund.

Mr. Campbell: Well, the government caucus fund. I mean, the constituency employees are on a year-to-year contract. That's a little different than what we do around here. I mean, I've got the money within my constituency budget to give my staff the increase. I would suggest that there might be a few members that would be hard-pressed to come up with \$1,850, seeing some of the rents being paid, especially in Calgary and Edmonton. Also, at this late date I would suggest to you that a number of members have already budgeted their money for Christmas mail-outs and newsletters. You know, I mean, we're only at – what? – three months, maybe four months left of our term before we're renewed again.

12:30

The Chair: Well, do you want us to take a look at this matter internally and see what we can conclude?

Mr. Hehr: That would be great.

The Chair: Nobody here wants to take the responsibility to take care of it by themselves?

Mr. Campbell: Well, myself, as I say, Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared to pay it out of my constituency budget. I mean, I'll look after my employee.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Campbell: To just all of a sudden decide that we're going to spend \$495,000 today, you know, I've got a little bit of an issue with making that decision so quickly, but I'm only one member.

The Chair: Well, no. The point was that we follow after the government. The government has made this thing. We don't lead; we follow. So we'll have to figure out something.

Clerk, you will look after it and come and talk to me next week? Okay. We'll review it.

Mr. Mason: You know, it's a bit of a struggle for some of us to do it, so anything you can do would be appreciated.

The Chair: Okay. Anybody else? Do you want to raise something else on this budget? We've got a budget here. We've got a motion. Who has something else to raise?

Ms Evans, you basically have moved the approval of this budget. Is this correct?

Mr. Hehr: Can I ask one more question? Sorry.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Hehr: I noticed we have a change. We have a new health account. If we could get an explanation: is this in lieu of the former learning and wellness account?

The Chair: Well, I think it arrived out of the last negotiations of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and others. It has a different name. It may have a few different objective changes.

Cheryl, maybe you can just tell me what the difference is. I don't think there is very much, as I recall.

Mrs. Scarlett: The public service parameters are still being developed, but the intent would be that this would be an eligibility of \$950 per year starting next year, that employees could take and direct expenditures that are not presently covered by any other

plan against those. Again, I am sorry; I do not have the parameters from the public service yet. We would be paralleling those.

The Chair: Well, we're not buying computers anymore. Is this correct?

Mrs. Scarlett: No. These would be things that normally are a list of additional allowable medical expenses pursuant to the Income Tax Act, as an example.

The Chair: Health, medical, et cetera.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you for the explanation.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mason: So is this in lieu of or in addition to?

The Chair: It's in lieu of. The other one was cancelled.

Mr. Mason: I didn't get my computer yet.

The Chair: You've probably got six computers anyway.

Okay. Should I call the question? All those in favour of the budget as presented, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. Well, that was unanimous. Thank you very, very much. I do appreciate that.

Okay. The next item on the agenda has to do with the constituency services order in tab 5(b). We have such a variety of constituencies in the province of Alberta and such a variety of ways that people get to Edmonton from various places, but we have this situation. I have the memo in there from Mr. Jacobs, who basically says that he has to come up from where he lives, which is approximately over 100 kilometres away from the Lethbridge airport. Because the airplane from Lethbridge to Edmonton usually goes at 5 a.m. or 6:45 a.m., he invariably, because of weather or other things, has to go to Lethbridge, overnight in Lethbridge, get up at 3 o'clock or something to grab this plane to come up to Edmonton.

We have a situation in Alberta where we allow members to basically have overnights X number of days throughout the province. In his case this would be beyond it. We did deal with a situation a number of years ago where we modified our little rules to basically say that members could live at a hotel within their constituency. In this case this would be for someone that would be outside of their constituency but close to an airport. I do believe that it would be a very reasonable request.

The recommendation that I make to you is that under the constituency services order, that is under the constituency budget, a provision be allowed to provide for reasonable living expenses incurred by a member in connection with travel within the member's electoral division or departure or arrival at the airport closest to the member's constituency requiring an overnight stay at a location 60 kilometres or more from the member's permanent residence. This might apply to more than a couple, but it would probably only be maybe – I would doubt there would be a dozen overnights in a year for all the members, but it would provide that extra little degree of flexibility. I'd strongly recommend that you would endorse that, and if you would, I would really appreciate a motion to that effect.

Mr. Mason: I'll move that.

The Chair: Mr. Mason moves such a motion.

Mr. Amery: I'll second it.

The Chair: Mr. Amery seconds it. We would have a constituency services amendment order that I can circulate for you to take a look at right now on that matter, first, and I'd ask you to vote on it. The one I'm circulating for you now would be that the constituency service order is amended by this order.

In section 3, clause (d.1) is struck out and the following is substituted:

- (d.1) reasonable living expenses incurred by a Member in connection with
 - (i) travel within the Member's electoral division, or
 - (ii) departure or arrival at the airport closest to the Member's constituency, requiring an overnight stay at a location 60 kilometres or more from the Member's permanent residence.

It would come into force on this particular day.

Mr. Amery: A question.

The Chair: Yes, sir.

Mr. Amery: Can you explain for me "reasonable living expenses"? What's reasonable?

The Chair: Well, that's currently what's in play as defined by the overnight stay plus the mileage number, that we know what it is. Plus we would not allow you to pay for alcohol at any meals that you would buy. Plus you can only entertain your constituents. Plus I would never approve your going out and spending \$700 on a meal for yourself.

Mr. Amery: My question, Mr. Chairman: would, say, 20 days be reasonable? Would 10 days be reasonable? How do we define and set "reasonable"? How many days a year?

The Chair: I'm not going to define it because I don't know how many days it will be, but it would only apply to half a dozen people, so it's very easy to monitor. It wouldn't apply to you, but it would apply to somebody who would have to use that access.

Mr. Knight, you might be one of them. How far are you from your home to Grande Prairie?

Mr. Knight: A hundred miles.

The Chair: Yeah. And if you have a weather condition and the plane leaves – yeah, you might have to go in the night before, but it's not going to be every night.

Okay. Would you kindly agree to the approval of that order? Is it MSC X/11?

Mr. Reynolds: We don't have a number until it's passed.

The Chair: Okay. All in favour? Opposed? Okay. It's done.

Now, we have two more that we need to have done because of what we did today as well. The first one that's going to be circulated is a temporary residence order. Members currently can claim \$189 per night. This would mean that April 1, 2012, this would move by 2 per cent to \$193 for that overnight accommodation. So we would need an order to go with that again.

All those in favour, please say aye. Those opposed, please say no. Okay. That's covered as well. Thank you very much.

The third one. This, again, is for the time frame of April 1, 2012. This has to do with our constituency office allowances. The current constituency office allowance is made up of a formula to arrive at the number that each person gets, and this order would come into force on April 1, 2012. I indicated earlier when that question was raised about the rental side of the constituency allocation, which seems to average about \$120,000 per MLA in

Alberta, that \$26,031 of the current thing is essentially – it's just a model; these things are not firm in the sense that we don't hold you to them – for rent and utilities. That would move from \$26,031 to \$26,552 because that would be the 2 per cent adjustment to it.

Striking out \$72,513 and substituting \$77,589: that would be the manpower base for your constituency office allocation. So that is not based on 2 per cent. That one is based on 7. Okay? The 3 in-house. That's given the maximum thing even though it won't apply maximally. There's an increase there to \$77,589.

12:40

The next one is the mail one. Mr. Amery, you asked the question. Currently, this year, it's \$1.08. It provides for two mailings per year, and that will go to \$1.22.

The next one is \$2,809 to \$2,865. That's a 2 per cent adjustment. That's essentially for the so-called promotional thing.

But when we administer these things, we don't look at these numbers. These are traditional things that have been around for a long time and just based on building the budget. When we do a review in the future, we'll probably eliminate all of that and just go to one number somehow. But it helps to just provide some guidance.

Then things basically have to do – the current constituency allocations continue to have these so-called matrix formulas in them, and every one of them has been adjusted by 2 per cent.

So there is the order that would be available for April 1, 2012. Is there a motion, please? Mr. Campbell. Seconder, Mr. Rogers. Discussion?

Ms Evans: Could I just point out one thing? I know that this hasn't been done; it may not be workable for MLAs for Grande Cache, for example, or where people like Mel have to make a selection based on their residency for a permanent office. But there are many things that have been done over the years to acquire properties, as we have in Sherwood Park, at a very good deal for government. It seems to me that at some point – and maybe it's too late to do it before the next election – there should be some assessment done either through the Leg. Assembly or your office, Mr. Speaker, or in conjunction with Infrastructure so that when new MLAs come on, they may choose to recommend so that, you know, they won't just be able to go out and willy-nilly pick a place.

I can tell you right now that most of the places in Sherwood Park would cost a lot more than mine. Yes, they'll get a bathroom inside their office, and there may be other amenities, but what I selected 15 years ago was a place that people that were handicapped could drive up to, park fairly easily. It's in a pretty old strip mall, but it works.

I've heard rumours about what other office space might be selected in future, and it seems to me the government could do a good job of looking at whether or not some of these places are appropriate, a best value for money, give an assessment so that when people come in, they aren't given sort of a carte blanche: well, find what you can. I mean, 15 years ago I had the person that had helped me with my campaign go out and source an office for me, and that doesn't seem to me to be a very businesslike way for government to do business in constituencies.

The Chair: This is not government. This is the Legislative Assembly, which has nothing to do with government.

Ms Evans: Okay.

The Chair: And the members repeatedly have said they want the independence to do this. They don't want government's nose in

their constituency. There was one point in time when there was a review that was made of whether or not MLA offices should be in government buildings, and the conclusion was unanimously no, that this had to be seen to be a Member of the Legislative Assembly, not a member of the government of Alberta.

We will provide advice through the LAO to members who are searching for property because we do assessments, but it's not anything more than assisting the members if they ask for it.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, may I add my two cents' worth to the discussion?

The Chair: Well, certainly. If we're finished with Ms Evans, we'll recognize you.

Ms Evans?

Ms Evans: No. I'll hold now. I just wanted to raise a point.

Mr. Chase: When I was elected in 2004 and took over the constituency office of former member Murray Smith, the electoral boundaries had changed; therefore, his office was out of the boundary. I was very anxious to find something within the boundary, and because there was nothing available, I was operating my constituency office off the kitchen table for a period of almost four months. Obviously, the accessibility wasn't there. It is a very difficult circumstance, particularly for someone coming into a situation like the big city of Calgary or the big city of Edmonton. Space is limited, and prices are premium. It's just a difficult situation.

The Chair: And I accept that. In some parts that's absolutely correct. Yes.

But we've heard what you said, Ms Evans, in the sense that in some places this is a difficulty. My experience, our experience in the past is that new members, particularly, who've been elected for the first time feel very overwhelmed by this and tend to pay a greater amount than they might ordinarily pay. When the person who's dealing with them sees, "Well, it's the government coming," somehow the attitude is changed.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to put on the record that I'm extremely appreciative of the efforts of Dan Dunlop in terms of helping out with acquiring offices.

The Chair: Yeah. There's a good knowledge base here. Thank you for recognizing Mr. Dunlop's efforts.

Okay. Would there be anything else that somebody would like to raise?

Mr. Campbell: On this?

The Chair: On any subject.

Mr. Rogers: Do we need a vote for that, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: For what?

Mr. Campbell: We have to vote on this first, right?

The Chair: I thought we did. Okay. All those in favour of that last order, that had to do with the MS constituency office allocation? Those opposed?

Mr. Campbell: For next meeting, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to put on the agenda that we have a discussion about helping out former MLAs when they leave office, to be able to offer some sort of psychological counselling or financial counselling. I think that all

of us know MLAs that have left and found themselves sort of lost and no place to turn to. I'd like to have that discussion to see if we could do something to offer the services to people. Also from a financial end of things, too, because, again, in my experience in private industry we've done that. We've offered financial services and also psychological counselling to people leaving their occupation. I would suggest that even currently sitting MLAs sometimes run into issues and really don't know where to turn. I would think we should be looking at providing some sort of service to help them out.

The Chair: Okay. We might have part of that discussion. Well, the psychological one I think I would rather not have outside of an in camera discussion if there are names with the other one.

I'd point out to you that "a former MLA should have access to retiring or career counselling services to a maximum value of seven thousand five hundred dollars." This is from the independent judge who reported to the Nova Scotia MLA pension review on November 3, 2011. If that's what you're talking about, the financial thing. [interjection] Well, that's what they're going to do in Nova Scotia as a result. You ought to read this report. As a matter of fact, if you haven't accessed it, I'll give you a copy of it.

Just out of interest, in Nova Scotia the recommendation as of November 3, 2011, is that they should go to a defined benefit pension plan based on 3 and a half per cent per year for 20 years – that means you get 70 per cent – starting at age 55, a minimum of two years of service, plus a transition allowance. That's in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Rogers: If I may, Mr. Speaker, was this report debated in their Legislature?

The Chair: This is the independent commissioner's report.

Mr. Rogers: Do you know how it was dealt with by any chance?

The Chair: They just got it on November 3, I understand.

Mr. Rogers: Okay. So they haven't dealt with it.

The Chair: Mr. Amery, you were there last week.

Mr. Amery: Yes, I was.

Mr. Hehr: Could I be put on the list?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Hehr.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. One other thing for consideration for the next meeting is that I've had occasion twice now of having my office constituency budget cover costs for a person with a hearing impairment to come into my office to deal with certain issues that he was facing around the community and also to assist him on some other matters. Now, of course, I was happy to pay for that and consider it part of my duty.

12:50

That said, at times I can envision a situation arising with a person with a special need or special translation or some other necessity that may become a more significant cost than what it cost my office at the time. If you look at some of the legislation or some of the verbiage coming out of our courts, our governments have a duty to be able to provide reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities. I can just foresee sometime in the future where expenses for this type of accommodation may actually impinge possible budgets. Possible situations may arise. I

wouldn't like to see the cost of that service be impinged by budgets. Of course, it's all subject to reasonableness.

I'd like us to look at something where if those extraordinary accommodation situations came in, it wouldn't impact constituency offices but, in fact, would maybe be covered by a special fund. I'm not sure what that would look like. It just came to mind, actually, when I was reviewing some of the business we had done in this office.

The Chair: Okay. We'll do that in a future discussion. In the meantime, we'll look at some of these things as well to see how they play out and what we would have to do here internally.

We certainly dealt with the wheelchair accessibility with one of your predecessors, Mr. Wickman. We utilized his knowledge base in terms of that to assist us in ensuring what we had to do in the Legislature precincts and in constituency offices throughout the province.

Whatever further information you can provide, we would be happy to deal with it. I'm going to ask Ms Scarlett, as well, to do some work on this before we come back to this matter in the future. All right?

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mason: I wanted to raise a question about telephones. Maybe it's a little bit late in the day given where we sit in terms of the term and the fact that they're building the new building. You know, we have a phone system that is antiquated. It is the same phone I had when I got elected to city council in the first place, 22 years ago. The same phone. There is a very limited ability to use it flexibly to communicate around the office and so on. I'm just wondering: is that anything to do with the LAO, or do we have to go to government services?

The Chair: No. It should have to do with the LAO. But what kind of phone would you have for 22 years?

Mr. Mason: It's the same as the one I had 22 years ago.

The Chair: Well, you should have access to all the latest equipment that you require or need.

Mr. Mason: Okay. That's good to know.

The Chair: Yeah. Well, what's missing? I'm sorry. I don't understand.

Mr. Mason: Well, it rings, and I can pick it up, but, you know, it's gone a little beyond that, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: I appreciate that.

Mr. Taylor: He can't get Netflix on it.

Mr. Mason: I don't want to make light of it. It's a serious thing. You know, for example, I have a direct line, but nobody else can pick it up if I don't answer it. I mean, there's just a whole bunch of – it's just really old.

The Chair: But does it work?

Mr. Mason: It rings, and I pick it up, and there's usually someone there, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: All right.

Scott, can you send somebody around to visit Mr. Mason to see what the state-of-the-art situation is there?

Mr. Ellis: Most certainly we can. We do piggyback onto the overall system, but there are programming options within the system. We've had regular upgrades in terms of the software inherent in a telephone, so we should be able to access those services. It may just be that we haven't sort of explored that to accommodate your specific needs.

Mr. Mason: Well, I understand that for some of the newer models you don't have to do this anymore.

The Chair: Well, you don't have to with a 22-year-old phone either. You tell me you don't have an iPod or an iPad.

Mr. Mason: No, I don't.

The Chair: How come? Every one of your staff does.

Mr. Mason: This is not a question of my level of technical competency, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how it got turned around.

The Chair: You got rid of the baskets for the pigeons. Is that what you're saying? Okay. Good.

Scott, you follow up with him, please. Go visit. Go have a coffee. All right? And don't tell me you don't have money for coffee.

Does anybody have something else? All right.

Thank you very, very much. We will be proceeding with this. The next meeting will probably be held around February 1, if required. Would that be fine?

Does somebody want to adjourn? We'll adjourn anyway. Everybody is gone, so why do we need a motion?

[The committee adjourned at 12:55 p.m.]

