[Chairman: Mr. Hyland] [9:11 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let's call the meeting to order.

We have in front of us a proposed agenda outlining and putting into words the discussion we had for -- what? -- two or three minutes after the last meeting to kind of outline what direction we thought we might go. We thought we would get at least this identified -- and additional information is coming and has been asked for -- and that we would at least be able to give some sort of report to the next Members' Services meeting, because if we decide anything major, or actually anything minor as well, it's going to have budget implications. We should at least know our direction by the time we hit Members' Services so that some numbers can be put to whatever we propose, and then from there the whole committee can decide if we go ahead with it or not.

So are there any additions that anyone thinks should be added to this agenda?

MS BARRETT: Yeah. The mileage allowance issue is of particular concern to me obviously. I'd sure like to get that straightened out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You mean straightened out as to the way we understand it rather than the way the book reads.

MS BARRETT: I don't know, and I don't even care how it gets straightened out, but I do want it straightened out. I think this is the committee to do it, the committee that would end up making the recommendation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any more? You had one you talked briefly about, Pam. Do you want it on about Whip and/or House leader remuneration?

MS BARRETT: Well, yeah. That was Gordon who wanted to talk about that. I'd be in a conflict of interest if I raise it because I am our House leader. So that makes it awkward. Perhaps what we could do sometime, if anybody wants to discuss it, we could agree to change the players from our caucus so that Gordon sat on the committee. I would be reluctant to do that, as I have always been.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. CAMPBELL: I agree, because I'm in the same position as Whip.

MS BARRETT: There you go.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Should we say that we want information on it so that if we get to that stage and the committee decides, then the two players can be interchanged and . . .

MS BARRETT: Yeah. That would be fine; sure. The committee can take a look, let's put it that way, or start to consider the matter. Then if any decision is to be made or discussion to be held, at that time I'd move that Jack and I be replaced by two other members of the Members' Services Committee on this subcommittee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. So we can at least get the information or get a spreadsheet or something on it.

MS BARRETT: Sure. Yeah.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Because obviously in the parliamentary system those two positions are part of the system, not part of the party.

MS BARRETT: Oh, yeah; they are.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any more? Nick, does it cover everything that . . .

MR. TAYLOR: I think so.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The stuff is coming from the States.

MR. TAYLOR: It's coming from the States.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. You asked for California and New York, just as a comparison.

MR. TAYLOR: Kansas, I think, too. I wanted Kansas. It's as flat as we are.

MS BARRETT: Of course. New York's only got half the size of Canada in it.

MR. TAYLOR: It has Hutterites and Mennonites so it's just like us.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Jack.

MR. CAMPBELL: Well, actually, looking at the agenda, Mr. Chairman, I think that with the exception of probably the request from Mr. Taylor -- the fact is that that addition pretty well covers the things we want to deal with at this particular time. I guess referring back to the mandate, if I can remember correctly -- and I should have maybe looked at the minutes -- probably this committee could look at some other things. Is that correct? That's the understanding I had. I guess those would probably be brought up when and if they arose and if they wanted this committee to deal with them. Do I understand that correctly, Pam?

MS BARRETT: I believe you do. I think really what we were meant to be is a committee to toss around ideas and make recommendations to the Members' Services Committee, basically to speed things up. The notion is that it's pretty well all-party, and that way you can get through the system faster.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I can't comment on that, because I was out at the back trying to solve a legal problem with Gordon and Michael, and I'm not sure I did that well.

MS BARRETT: You certainly were. The Parliamentary Counsel, that's right. You did a fine job, Al, yeah.

MR. CAMPBELL: So, you know, the fact of the mandate of the subcommittee, I guess . . . We're meeting on these particular issues to try and get some information on them, and we'll deal with topics as they are brought up from the total committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. David, have you got any comments?

DR. McNEIL: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Cheryl?
Okay. Well, we'll go to 2(a), Existing MLA Retirement Benefits. Those are on the spreadsheet, aren't they?

MISS KVIST: No, actually I have . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, they're not. You have them?

MS BARRETT: Somebody did a lot of work.

DR. McNEIL: Cheryl and Monica did a lot of work.

MISS KVIST: This is just a brief summary of what MLAs are now entitled to when they retire. It addresses the pension they're eligible for and basically the fact that there's not much else at this time in terms of special benefits. The Alberta health care: there is no present retirement benefit; however, when you hit 65, then the provincial health care plan for senior citizens kicks in, which includes dental coverage. Our dental coverage through Mutual Life ceases upon termination or retirement. Through Great-West Life, your life insurance, there is a $3,000 retirement benefit. Extended health: there is no continuation after retirement at this time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It seems to me I might have started too soon. I'll have to stay here forever to get to be 65 and retire.

MR. TAYLOR: I was going to ask about the $3,000 retirement benefit payable on death. The employee can choose to continue life insurance; is that upon reaching 65 or on just losing the election or not running, retirement as an MLA?

MISS KVIST: Upon retirement as an MLA or not running, yes.

MR. TAYLOR: Then you can continue it. And that's at the rate that's going at the . . . Oh, I see; no change.

MISS KVIST: If an employee chooses to continue life insurance, they have the advantage that they don't have to prove insurability or take a medical, but you would be paying your own premiums. It wouldn't be based on the group rates anymore, so it's considerably higher.

MS BARRETT: I have a question. Alberta health care kicks in at age 65. That covers dental. Does it also cover basically the stuff that we now pay for under our extended health insurance policies? It does, doesn't it?

MISS KVIST: I don't know. I'd have to check that out for you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Not at 100 percent; at 80 percent.

MS BARRETT: Eighty percent. That's what we've got right now, anyway.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah.

MR. CAMPBELL: What were you thinking of, Pam?

MS BARRETT: I looked under extended health care, and it says, "costs for a variety of medical services." Right now that includes drug prescription filling and . . .

MR. CAMPBELL: What about dental? Well, dental's covered. But vision care: that's not even included now.

MS BARRETT: Yeah, health care covers that at age 65.

DR. McNEIL: My guess would be that in some instances the Alberta health care wouldn't provide the same kind of coverage after age 65 that the extended health care plan does.

MS BARRETT: You think not, eh?

DR. McNEIL: That's a guess, I'd say.

MR. CHAIRMAN: In rough terms, yeah.

MISS KVIST: We can obtain a brochure. There's a special brochure out which identifies clearly what coverage there is under the seniors' benefits package. So I'll follow up on that.

MS BARRETT: Okay, thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There is also that book that most seniors know off by heart.

MS BARRETT: I have a gazillion of them in the constituency office.

MR. TAYLOR: I have another question. It's on when the pension has to kick in: a minimum of five years; Saskatchewan, right away, I guess; Ontario, five years; and Manitoba, eight years. I put in a pension a couple of years ago in a corporation, and I was given the impression that it was illegal to try to vest them two years, three years, one year, six months, that the Charter of Rights had been invoked somewhere so that if you're taking money from somebody, you have to give them a pension; you can't give them their money back. In other words, you may sit two or three years in a corporation before you're allowed to join a pension plan, but you can't take money from somebody contributing . . .

MR. CAMPBELL: Until such time as . . .

MR. TAYLOR: . . . and then say three years or five years or eight years, because all us employers would like to get, you know, five, 10, 20 years, or something like that before you do it. But apparently it had been tested, and you can't take money from somebody and then tell them that they can't get a pension. At least I was told that; maybe it was a salesman. Once you take money from them, it has to be as it is in Saskatchewan, a percentage. It can be a percentage of what you contributed, of course, and it may be next to nothing. But we were told that you could hold employees off for, say, six or eight months or a year before they join, but then once they join, every month that they put in qualifies for a pension of some amount. It might be miniscule. So I was just wondering if anybody has double-checked that. That's supposed to come in under the Charter of Rights.

MR. CAMPBELL: I guess really that everybody that gets here in this particular instance thinks they're going to stay here forever.

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah, although it was just the logic of taking . . .

MR. CAMPBELL: However, if there's logic, is right.

MR. TAYLOR: It seems sensible to me that you could keep a pension plan away from somebody till they've had so much service, but you can't have them join a pension plan and then say, "You're not going to get any of it; we'll just give you your money back three years, five years, eight years, or whatever."

MR. CAMPBELL: We should maybe check into that and just find out what the situation is.

MR. TAYLOR: Do you know anything about that in personnel?

MISS KVIST: I've never heard of that before. No.

MS BARRETT: I recall a case that overturned a 10-year vesting program. I can't remember the name of the company.

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah, something like that. The whole idea of vesting is supposed to have gone out if you're taking money from somebody. You can hold them off a pension plan for a while, but once you've started taking it, you can't . . .

MR. CAMPBELL: That's a good point.

DR. McNEIL: There haven't been any changes to the Alberta plan, as far as I know, with respect to the vesting periods that that case affected anyway.

MR. CHAIRMAN: But then ours is set by legislation, in the Legislative Assembly Act, not by anything else, isn't it? It's not under a pension plan Act or anything. It's separate.

MS BARRETT: It's under the legislation.

MR. TAYLOR: So we don't vest it, do we? Do we have a fund set aside? I thought we just paid pensions out of general revenue.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, it must go into . . .

MR. TAYLOR: We don't set aside a pension fund, do we? We just pay as a . . .

DR. McNEIL: As far as I know, we don't. No.

MR. TAYLOR: So I don't think the question of vesting is here; it's just a question of the rights of the individual, for you to take money from him or her, and three years, five years, 10 years from now hand it back to him and say, "Here's your money and interest."

MS BARRETT: That's right. It all started with RRSPs.

MR. TAYLOR: Pardon?

MS BARRETT: RRSPs. That's the nature of the case, because the person argued that if they had to lose their money, they had the right to sell control if they weren't guaranteed a pension fund out of it. That's absolutely right. Good for you, Nick.

MR. TAYLOR: I think we ought to look into it.

MISS KVIST: In addition to the benefits here, you also have the benefits of re-establishment upon leaving. Although I didn't get an opportunity to check on it, when the provincial government employees had the early retirement program, there was provision under the tax Act, too, for a rollover into an RRSP so that the severance pay or the retiring allowance wouldn't then be taxable at that time of the payout, and I would assume, but I will confirm, that that provision would also apply to . . .

MS BARRETT: I don't think we ever talked about it expressly, but I can't see that there's anything in the new regulation we made that would prohibit it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Didn't somebody tell us at that time that the federal one was nontaxable, and we assumed ours would be in that instance?

MS BARRETT: No. The nontaxable portion of our income would remain nontaxable. Yeah.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm talking about that re-establishment credit.

MS BARRETT: I don't recall that, Al.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Or was it only a portion of it that was nontaxable?

MS BARRETT: Right. It's only the portion that in our daily jobs would go nontaxable, I'm pretty sure.

MR. CAMPBELL: Just a question. How is that re-establishment allowance paid? Is it paid by the month or is it paid in a lump sum or how is it paid?

DR. McNEIL: It's paid in a lump sum.

MR. CAMPBELL: A lump sum?

DR. McNEIL: Yeah. The question of its taxability would depend on whether or not it's allowed to be rolled into an RRSP.

MS BARRETT: Oh.

DR. McNEIL: So if they allow it to be rolled into an RRSP, then you escape the tax.

MS BARRETT: But I would assume, David, that if it was not allowed to be rolled into an RRSP, the portion which we call tax exempt personal allowance, or whatever the heck we call it, is still part of that severance package, and I assume that that portion would remain nontaxable. Would it or no?

DR. McNEIL: I don't know the answer to that question, so someone will have to check on that.
MS BARRETT: Yeah. Okay.

MR. CAMPBELL: What would we be looking at, say, on an MLA retiring? What would be the lump sum? Has anybody ever figured that one out?

MR. TAYLOR: It's one-twelfth, isn't it?

DR. McNEIL: Well, let's say if you were here for 12 years, it would be the total of the indemnity and the expense allowance, which is right now $44,000.

MISS KVIST: It's one month's salary times your years of service; a minimum of six months, a maximum of 12 months.

MR. CAMPBELL: That's significant if you ever got that one dropped on you at the right time.

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah. But even if you roll it forward and you're at that 65-year level, you'll have so much rolled forward by then that it would come back in the income anyhow.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And you've got to take it out by 75, 71?

DR. McNEIL: Seventy-one, I think. But you put it in a RRIF or a . . .

MR. TAYLOR: Well, I think Pam's point is a good one, that you call it an expense, but I don't think you'd get away with that. I think it's very much as Cheryl says. I remember going and putting one of my companies in receivership. I gave the employees a lump sum, and they were able to roll them all into RRSPs, as long as the money was in lieu of foregone future income. But if the money was a reward for having stayed with you that long, then they didn't like it. But if it's to recompense you for going out -- and the establishment credit obviously is, just by the very name -- you're okay. As long as it's not a bonus for the past, you can roll it into RRSPs. But I remember one guy who was already 65, and he didn't think that was such a . . .

MR. CAMPBELL: Great idea.

MR. TAYLOR: Well, he could spread it out, though.

MR. CAMPBELL: Yeah.

MISS KVIST: For your information, I can get the guidelines which specify what qualifies, what doesn't, and the definitions.

MS BARRETT: That would be useful.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And how Ottawa breaks theirs down, their re-establishment? Because they get a re-establishment credit.

MISS KVIST: Okay.

MR. CAMPBELL: Cheryl, we don't have that information on the early retirement incentive program from the provincial government?

MISS KVIST: Yes, we do.

MR. CAMPBELL: Do we?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think what we should do with this other: now that we've got it all laid out and if we get the answers next time on that re-establishment credit, we can look at these and go through them individually. And if we have any additions we want to clarify or change, we should suggest them by the next meeting. Does that sound agreeable? Pam?

MS BARRETT: Sorry.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Does that sound agreeable?

MS BARRETT: Will the teacher repeat the question, please?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now that we've got it all on the spreadsheet, if we can individually go through the existing benefits and if there's any more clarification or any changing we want to do, we should bring it forward at the next meeting.

MS BARRETT: Yes. Sure.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think the purpose of this is to get it laid out so we can think about it, and then we'll bring forward the changes at the next meeting.

MS BARRETT: Okay. Yes.

MR. CAMPBELL: Cheryl, did you say you had some information on that?

MISS KVIST: Just a brief summary on what happened with the provincial government.

MR. CAMPBELL: Yeah, okay. I think it would be useful if we could have a look at these and then take them and study them and proceed from there. Don't you agree, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah. And if there are any more questions, Cheryl can get the information for us.

MISS KVIST: Under the provincial government early retirement incentive program employees had to be at least 55 years of age and have five years' pensionable service to qualify. In addition to an incentive payment for early retirement, there was a benefits option which allowed them to continue receiving benefits for up to a maximum of five years or age 65, whichever came first. The benefits that they were eligible to continue with were the Alberta health care; the Blue Cross, if they had chosen that option previously as an employee; the group life insurance at whatever coverage they were already receiving; and the dental. The premiums continued to be the same. The dental, the government was paying the full share, except for the bargaining people; the Alberta health care, 50-50 percent: all that continued the same. If the employees were responsible for paying premiums, that deduction came out of their monthly pension cheque before they received it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So theirs wasn't a lump sum payment; it was spun out over a period of . . .

MISS KVIST: No. The incentive payment they received for early retiring was a lump sum right up front, and then there was the option to continue receiving the benefits just as long as they continued paying their appropriate portion of the premiums.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And you had to be 55?

MISS KVIST: You had to be 55, yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So really all their coverage remained the same as if they were employed.

MR. CAMPBELL: For an additional five years.

MISS KVIST: They had that option.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, for an additional five years.

MR. CAMPBELL: However, there's a rider in this in the fact that they have to be 55-plus. Is that correct, Cheryl?

MISS KVIST: They had to be at least 55 years of age, plus they had to have five years' pensionable service in order to qualify for the early retirement incentive program.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So the magic number thing -- well, not totally -- was almost in effect if you had 30 years' service, for example.

MISS KVIST: In terms of their pension they would still get the pension as per the normal calculations. So in some cases it was to an employee's benefit to take a reduced pension because the lump sum payment they were getting was counterbalancing what they would get. For instance, if somebody retired at age 55, their lump sum incentive payment was 12 months' salary. For some of our managers or other employees that was a considerable amount.

MR. CAMPBELL: Well, this is great, you know, to have this information, Mr. Chairman. The fact is that we can take a look at it certainly as far as MLAs and their benefits, and the MLAs' position. We can use this as a guideline. The fact is that this is not the way it has to be.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any more questions on that?

Just quickly going back to the first item, (a), there are about six sheets in the book, not just the first two sheets, that we have to go over. I think part of our duty was to look at all the allowances and look at any suggestions.

MR. CAMPBELL: We're talking about retirement. I guess that really the mandate -- we can't look at the pension because that's under legislation. Is that correct? I'm assuming that's correct.

MR. TAYLOR: What's that again? I'm sorry.

MR. CAMPBELL: The pension is under legislation. We'd have to open up the Act in order to make any changes. So I guess with that, I think it will probably have to ride. I don't suggest that anybody would want to open that Act up again.

MR. TAYLOR: If we recommend it, I don't see any reason why.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It was just opened up this year.

MS BARRETT: Was it this year?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Wasn't it? Yeah, we changed the figures to match years of service plus age to hit 55.

MS BARRETT: You're right; we did do that this year. That's right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The one thing that Jack and I talked about that we want to share with you is that even if there's something we think maybe can't be acted on right away, we should leave a list for the next committee, after the next election, so that we're not all starting from scratch again. This one, I think, is the first time that . . . There was -- what? -- Ken and I from the former committee.

MS BARRETT: Right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, just Ken and I.

MR. CAMPBELL: I guess, Mr. Chairman, it's really beneficial to have that continuity.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Some of it we remember, but there's other stuff that I think -- you know, when we started, we had nothing given to us. We started from scratch, and it takes you a while to get organized. It would probably be wise if at some point in time we left a list of recommendations or things that should be looked at.

MS BARRETT: I agree.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Overview of Retirement Benefits in Other Provinces.

MISS KVIST: Based on the provinces that we've addressed there so far, Saskatchewan has no retirement benefits package. Manitoba: the information I was able to get seemed to indicate that there was none, but I'm trying to confirm that with the pension board there and couldn't get through. Ontario does have a package, and although in the spreadsheets you have listed in bits and pieces what their different benefits are, what I did was take part of their members' guide that addresses the different benefits and highlight the areas where it refers to if they're receiving what they call a retirement allowance, which is their pension, which benefits continue to be maintained.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any questions of Cheryl?

Here's an interesting one -- I just opened it up -- on spouse allowance on page 27. In Ontario the spouse continues to get the allowance upon the death of a member. I guess our spouse continues to get pension but not necessarily any other allowance.

MISS KVIST: On page 27 I believe that is referring to the pension plan. Their Legislative Assembly Retirement Allowances Act is the pension plan Act.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So it would be the same as ours then. In Ontario their system isn't a lot different than ours except that they have the Board of Internal Economy, which is, I think . . .

MS BARRETT: It's Members' Services by another name.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, but I think we're better to the extent that, with the exception of one, the majority of our members of Members' Services are ordinary members of all parties. Whereas in Ontario, if memory serves me right, out of the whole committee I think there are the Whips of the opposition parties and one government member. The rest are cabinet ministers.

MS BARRETT: Oh, really. I didn't know that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: At one time the Treasurer, I think, used to sit on it, plus the Speaker, and they have their -- I don't know what they call them. Their motions are not unlike ours either, in that they're signed by the Speaker but they have to be passed and accepted by the committee.

DR. McNEIL: Mr. Chairman, what Cheryl has highlighted in this brochure is that there are pretty significant benefits that are continued, some at the cost to the Assembly in Ontario and some at the member's cost, when the individual is retired and is receiving a pension, in terms of the life insurance, the supplementary life insurance, dependants' life, supplementary health and hospital, dental coverage, vision care, and OHIP. There is opportunity in Ontario for coverage during that period between the time the individual retires and age 65, which doesn't exist here in Alberta at the present time.

I don't know whether you want to go through these individually and just talk about them or leave it that they've been highlighted.

MR. CAMPBELL: I think this would be an excellent way to take a look at this following this meeting and just for the members of the committee to go through this and come back, so that we understand it better and have a better idea. Because we could probably spend all day going through all of these things, and we probably wouldn't be any further ahead. We could go back to our individual caucuses and maybe our people and say, "Do some workups for us." What do you feel about that, Pam?

MS BARRETT: Sure. I agree, I think.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's a lot of material to absorb in a short while.

MS BARRETT: Well, it's also hard to walk into a meeting not knowing precisely what it is you're going to be looking at or the comparisons you're going to be making and then make a decision on behalf of a whole bunch of people without even telling them. I prefer not to.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, yeah.

MS BARRETT: I mean, if we know roughly what we're dealing with in advance, that's fine, but this is pretty tough stuff.

MR. CHAIRMAN: From now on we will, but initially we have to start and see where it takes us.

Okay; is there a separate thing, beyond retired government employees, for retired deputy ministers?

MISS KVIST: There is no special provision or package. The deputy ministers and senior officials are eligible for pension under the management pension plan. Again, if they had chosen life insurance, they would have the $3,000 retiring allowance. Other than that, there is nothing.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. So all that's negotiable upon departure, I suppose, if there is any.

MS BARRETT: Can I ask why it was that we wanted to look at that in the first place? Because we don't control deputy minister packages.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. I think we were asking for it just as a guideline.

MS BARRETT: Oh, okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just as a comparison to see if there was something or if there wasn't. And that's for the same reason as the other, because the retirement was -- what? A year ago? Two years ago, I guess, it was started, the retirement for civil servants, eh?

MS BARRETT: Yeah, that's right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It was just the most up-to-date stuff we had here.

Sorry, Nick.

MR. TAYLOR: Oh, no, no. It was just that there's one cute thing here on page 28. In calculating your time of pension for an MLA in Ontario, if you happened to serve in the House of Commons, you're entitled to take that as time, too, in figuring the time of service.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's the same here.

MS BARRETT: Oh, is that right? I didn't know that.

MR. TAYLOR: It opens up a whole field. That means if you . . .

MS BARRETT: You going to run federally?

MR. TAYLOR: No, no. School trustee or alderman, or something like that. In other words, in effect what they're saying is that if you've been in the public service as an elected MP, then the Ontario Legislature will honour it in calculating the years.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Aren't we like that? Or is there a cutoff? I thought our pensions were transferable.

MR. CAMPBELL: For armed services and . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: For armed services and teachers it is. I don't know if the House of Commons is or not.

MISS KVIST: There are some specific definitions as to what is and what isn't. I can check to see if that qualifies.

MR. TAYLOR: It just opens up a whole new field. Say you've been an alderman or a school trustee . . .

MR. CAMPBELL: I think that's possible now, Nick, if I remember correctly. I sat as an improvement district councillor for nine years. The only difference was that we were paid on a per diem, and you know, we didn't have that built into the system.

MR. TAYLOR: Well, let me make one thing clear. This is not a transfer of pension from the House of Commons; this just says if you want to count that time. You have to pay the premium.

But if you have five or 10 years, say, as an MP and you want to get a little bigger pension, you could dig into your pocket, pay the contributions, plus 6 percent.

MS BARRETT: That is true with teachers for sure.

MR. TAYLOR: So I am just thinking that's a possibility we might want to introduce here, because in a way you could make quite a selling point of it. You could say that's a reward for public service, if you've been a councillor or a trustee anywhere in Alberta, and that if you wish, you can count that in, make the contribution for those times as if you were in the pension. I think it might have some sales type of thing. It might go over out there with a lot of the public who are sitting serving on different councils and that, without too much pay.

[Ms Barrett in the Chair]

MR. CAMPBELL: We should look at that, because actually, you know, this is probably the mandate of the committee: to take a look at all these things. If it doesn't work out, fine, but at least we've taken a look at them. Undoubtedly somebody will come up with that particular suggestion at some time, and we can certainly respond, saying that it has been reviewed and for this reason or that reason it was either done or not done.

MS BARRETT: Cheryl had basically said that she would look into that, right?

MISS KVIST: Yes.

MS BARRETT: You're going to be busy, really busy.

I'm going to take over chairing for a moment while Al is away. Is there any more discussion on that item?

Okay, the next one to me looks like -- am I correct in looking at number 3, then, Identification of Further Retirement Benefit Options, formally opening that one up?

MR. CAMPBELL: Okay.

MS BARRETT: Now, I take it that the further retirement benefit options, if they exist anywhere, would be in this spreadsheet here. I didn't see any.

MR. CAMPBELL: I think, Madam Chairperson, you have to look at this with the early retirement incentive program of the employees and take a look at the benefits like Alberta health care, Blue Cross, life insurance, and dental. I think that goes a fair way, probably, into looking at the things we'd wish to have a look at.

MR. TAYLOR: I have maybe a bit of a question -- it's probably covered anyhow -- with these services like extended health care. What's the portability nature of it? If some old fellow is now living with a third wife in southern California, does he still come under the health care things that they say are . . .

MR. CAMPBELL: If he has three wives, he needs it.

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah. I wasn't thinking so much of the wives; I was just thinking of living outside the province. Alberta health care, Ontario health care, and some of these other areas: apparently health care carries on, or you can pay the premium. I mean, we're considering possibly two or three things: whether to carry health care premiums through till 65 in Alberta or 10 years after the thing or that. But what I'm getting at: if the individual then no longer lives in Alberta -- and quite often a retired person will -- can you still contribute to Alberta health care and have the plan?

MR. CAMPBELL: Yeah, that's a good point, because in a number of . . .

MR. TAYLOR: It might be a fairly hollow privilege if you . . . Mind you, I don't mind living in Alberta; I like cross-country skiing.

MR. CAMPBELL: Well, I guess it stems from the person that, say, reaches retirement age and spends six months in the United States, down in the sunny south. I don't know how it works with that, whether your health care or the rest of it -- I guess it would cover up to a percentage, would it not? It wouldn't cover the total, I don't think.

[Mr. Hyland in the Chair]

MR. TAYLOR: I think you're either on it and can reapply for funds or you're off it. But I don't know when you go off Alberta health care. I know that with my kids, if you're out of the country for six months or a year, they start getting bitchy, even if you pay the premium.

DR. McNEIL: I guess it would be that if you still qualify as a resident of Alberta for taxation purposes . . .

MR. TAYLOR: That's the way it works, eh?

DR. McNEIL: I'm just hypothesizing here. We'll check that out.

MR. TAYLOR: I just thought it could occur, because many retired people may well spend some time . . . So if we give them an Alberta health care benefit, it might be a pretty hollow benefit indeed if you have to sit here and shovel snow in order to get it.

MR. CAMPBELL: This is true. Well, the thing is, I guess, if we have reciprocal arrangements with, say, British Columbia -- a lot of members that I know have retired to British Columbia.

MISS KVIST: I know that in the plan there are formal ways of dealing with those situations. I'm not familiar with the details.

MR. CAMPBELL: Yeah, that would be a great one to look at, Nick, really.

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah, I'm going to get out of shoveling snow somehow.

MR. CAMPBELL: I'm with you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Most of the ones that go down to the States take on extra insurance.

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah, do they? Well, I think that for six months or going back and forth each year, it's all right. But I'm just thinking of somebody who might move . . .

MR. CAMPBELL: Yeah, for somebody who moves to a different province or to a different country: what happens in that case?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, that's a good point. That's where your extra benefits may be pretty important.

Some members -- maybe you talked about it while I was out -- had talked about . . . We're on 4 or 3?

MR. CAMPBELL: We're on 3.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. My comments better wait till 4 then.

MR. CAMPBELL: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I wasn't sure if Pam had three fingers or four fingers up when she said where we were. Any more comments on 3?

MR. CAMPBELL: Probably we've addressed it. However, I'll tell you: in the meantime when we're taking a look through, and probably looking at these spreadsheets, if there's something a member can tick, he could bring it up at the next meeting.

DR. McNEIL: Just for clarification. My reading of what's been said is that there is an interest in looking at continuation of certain benefits after retirement, say, before age 65, similar to what Ontario provides for. The committee would like more information on those things. We could look at our existing programs to see if some of those could be extended.

MR. CAMPBELL: Yeah. The thing it's about, as I understand it, is the fact that upon retirement you'd be able to enjoy the same benefits you have now.

Then the second thing is the fact that if you move to some other jurisdiction, whether that particular program would still be useful. What happens, say, if when you retired, you moved to British Columbia? What happens in that case? As Nick has mentioned, maybe we're saying the thing and it's a very hollow thing; you know, it doesn't apply.

DR. McNEIL: Yeah, I think you can differentiate between what the province provides as a benefit and what the Assembly could provide as a benefit that's funded by the Assembly itself. Because I would think there would be a lot more portability of that kind of benefit than the Alberta health care and so on. So I think we can look at those two types of benefits, I guess those provided by the province and those kinds of benefits provided by the Assembly itself.

MR. CAMPBELL: I think it would be very useful to have that information.

MR. TAYLOR: It might even be that the Assembly would have to subsidize Alberta health care to cover somebody, and that's something we should know, yeah.

I remember I had occasion years ago to deal with a number of foreign companies. It's not unusual at all for some employees in a country not to get the pension if they move out of the country. Germany was the first one, I remember, in west Europe that would pay any of their nationals who left a pension. Because the old taxpayers' idea is: we give you your pension; you're damn well going to spend it here. That was around for a long time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So if you're 60, you don't move when you're that close to pension.

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah. Well, I guess Europe is out. I think the continent would probably upset because everybody would go to the Riviera.

MR. CAMPBELL: That seems where they're hunting them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Did anybody bring up travel? Bob Bogle has talked about it, former members coming to the capital for special occasions. I think the 75th is an example that was used this year, among others.

MR. CAMPBELL: This would be item 4.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, okay. I guess there's a fine line between 3 and 4, part of it. We're done with 3, aren't we?

MR. CAMPBELL: Yeah.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; 4.

MR. CAMPBELL: I guess in the discussions we had with Bob Bogle, the fact is probably, from the point of view of former members, to have them have the opportunity to take two trips to the capital on a mileage basis, on a per kilometre basis, and with those two trips probably enjoying the temporary housing of $75 a day for a maximum of five days that the MLA now . . . Is that correct? Am I correct in that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: In the period of a year.

MR. CAMPBELL: Yeah, per year. The fact that it came up was that some of the members travel back, and it's for -- I guess we could go through it and designate which functions, or we could just leave it for official functions or whatever.

MR. TAYLOR: You wouldn't want to come back to the Legislature when it's solid Liberal anyhow, would you?

MR. CAMPBELL: I'll tell you what, I could come back and give them the raspberry.

MR. CHAIRMAN: From the gallery, eh?

It was the 75th that brought the suggestion forward.

MR. CAMPBELL: I could reiterate what was said to me: what are you doing now?

DR. McNEIL: Mr. Chairman, we could probably cost that out for you and give you a rough idea of what that might cost per year, making assumptions about how many members utilized it and so on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any more?

MR. TAYLOR: There is one, but I don't know. I almost hesitate to bring it up; I don't know if it would work. It's such an old one. But there again it's very European, and it's travel privileges: one trip a year, 10,000 miles or whatever it is. But it's very much hooked into the idea that when you get older and get a little bit peripatetic, you want to move around. But it's a perk. I don't know; it'd probably cause a lot more trouble than it would . . .

MR. CAMPBELL: Depending on which country you go to, it would probably be the last trip you'd want to make.

MR. TAYLOR: That's right. If we all decide to go to Cuba or something like that, then it may all help. But it's very much of a corporate -- remember the CPR used it, the railroad pass. Alitalia and the German airline, SAS, still recognize each other. In the European network there's quite an exchange of travel in the off season. But, I don't know; it's a perk, really.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, I think it goes with most airline employees too. I know my uncle worked for PW, and he gets a certain amount of free travel still.

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah. Aw, we'll let it go. I think I'd just as soon leave that one.

MR. CAMPBELL: That could be a tough sell.

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah, that could bother a lot of people.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; any more?

The one that Pam brought up was the mileage allowance. She isn't here right now. She said she was coming back. I thought that thing was solved.

MR. TAYLOR: I did too. I didn't know we had a problem.

DR. McNEIL: I think her question relates to a particular administrative issue relating to how her allowance was administered last year. Here she is.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We just got to your item, Pam, regarding mileage allowance.

MS BARRETT: Oh, did you?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do you want to . . .

MS BARRETT: Yeah. Well, I think this committee needs to talk about it somehow or other. It must be a year ago or more, after we last changed the global amount that each MLA is entitled to, which came to 45,000 total rural and 25,000 total urban -- at that time my secretary, Dianna, called over to administration. We didn't have a Clerk at the time, and this could be the source of the problem. When she read the new form that came out, she added it up and said, "Does that come to 35,000 for you?" I said, "I don't know; phone admin." So she phoned admin, and somebody over here -- and she can't remember who -- said, "Yep, that's right." So it turns out that on that basis, I've been submitting claims that come to a total of 35,000 kilometres a year.

Now, in one sense, technically speaking, it's not a problem, because I can always return the money. I am the only person who has been overpaid in this context. So I can do one of two things. I can return the money, but I can also demonstrate that I've actually driven that amount. In fact, I can demonstrate that I've driven nearly twice that amount on an annual basis, on the basis of receipts that I have. So I have a problem. It's evidently only me who has this problem. It's funny that it would only happen to one person, but it did. So I would like to get this committee to decide what they want me to do about it, and then I will take the appropriate action.

MR. CAMPBELL: What are we looking at as far as dollars are concerned, Pam?

MS BARRETT: I don't know.

MR. TAYLOR: Between 25 and 35, is it?

MS BARRETT: Yeah.

MR. CAMPBELL: Ten thousand clicks at . . .

DR. McNEIL: Twenty-one hundred dollars.

MS BARRETT: About $2,100.

DR. McNEIL: I've researched this and received a legal opinion on it, and as far as I'm concerned, it was an administrative error. You were misinformed. When the claims were submitted, they were approved.

MS BARRETT: Uh huh.

DR. McNEIL: Therefore, the error is ours, not yours. On that basis, our interpretation is that you should not be required to refund that.

MS BARRETT: You can see that I don't feel comfortable with that, though. I absolutely do not feel comfortable with it. If I'm the only one that was claiming that amount, whether or not it was approved -- well, it was approved. I think this is a joint responsibility. After all, I'm a legislator, for heaven's sake; I should have been able to interpret the legalese here.

So I think that either this committee should decide if you want me to repay it -- and I will; I can pay it today, in fact. If you want to recommend a change in the rules that allows for in excess of 25,000 subject to receipts, you might consider that. I don't fly, so I have not cost the administration or the Legislative Assembly any money in aircraft bills. So you could do that as well. But I really would like to sort it out today and in a way that doesn't simply say that administration is at fault and administration will absorb it. I'm a politician; we can't do it that way. We've got to be squeaky clean about it.

MR. CAMPBELL: I'm not aware if anyone else . . .

MS BARRETT: No. David checked. I couldn't believe it. I am the only one.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You must be the only one of the -- what have we got? -- 13 in Edmonton in all three parties who is traveling those kinds of miles.

MS BARRETT: Oh, I'm sure, but I'm pretty sure that that has to do with being the House leader, being basically Ray's stand-in. I mean, I'm invited all over the province for public speaking engagements constantly. Every week I'm somewhere. Some-times several times a week I'm all over the map, so that'll be why. But I don't want any special status assigned just because of that, if you understand my point.

MR. CHAIRMAN: David, did you have your hand up?

DR. McNEIL: If that mileage is related to her role as House leader, there might be some possibility of suggesting that that Members' Services order be changed to accommodate different circumstances of House leaders. That's just an idea; I don't know whether that's viable or not.

MR. TAYLOR: Is there any possibility, along the lines that you are are talking, of at this date transferring 10,000 kilometres over to the leader's travel thing, which is pretty well unlimited anyhow? That way it covers everything. You were doing it as stand-in for the leader, and actually it could easily have been claimed that way during the year anyhow. You maybe should be claiming it that way if you're traveling more than 25,000. You're traveling on Ray's . . .

DR. McNEIL: Yeah, I see; it's a caucus cost rather than an individual MLA cost.

MR. TAYLOR: Well, he gets 25,000, too, doesn't he? But then he gets unlimited air travel.

MS BARRETT: That's right, yep.

MR. TAYLOR: But he gets a car. I should say, he has got a car, so he is not claiming his 25,000. Doesn't he have a rental allowance, as a leader, to rent cars? So in effect he could have rented your car or . . .

MS BARRETT: My turn? Thanks. No. If we're going to come up with a recommendation that would not require me to refund the $2,100, if we're going to do that, then I think it needs to be: for those who don't fly, X number of kilometres may be charged. Because right now all MLAs are entitled to five flights per year. I don't know what that costs. I mean, I don't know what round trip air fare between here and McMurray costs, for instance. So if we have a policy that says that if you don't use any of those flights or if you use a portion of those flights, you may claim up to an additional so-and-so for auto mileage -- I think it has to be that sort of thing. Because, quite frankly, I would have to vote against doing anything that looked like it was fiddling the books. I don't want to fiddle the books.

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah, but you have to do something.

MS BARRETT: No, but you see the honest way to do that . . . I don't fly. I've never cost the Alberta taxpayers a penny in terms of flying, you see. So I mean, technically speaking, should I be expected to absorb the costs of my travel beyond the 25,000 kilometres that I'm entitled to just because I don't fly? I think that is an honest question. I think that's a fairly put question. You see what I'm getting at, Nick. Otherwise, I'd like a directive to repay the Assembly.

MR. CAMPBELL: Well, with your permission, how about if we just take a look at this in our next meeting? We'll come back and just take a look at it and see if there's some way we can work around it, fully realizing your constraints, particularly when you're representing the leader or whatever, and also to deal with the $2,100. The fact is that you did it quite honestly. No, we're not sitting around this table blaming anyone. The fact is that we just want to try and rectify it in a satisfactory manner so that, certainly, nobody's honesty is questioned.

MS BARRETT: Hear, hear.

MR. CAMPBELL: So how about if we just kind of take a look at this and see if we can work through it, probably with you, David, and see if we can come out with a suitable formula that could address some of the concerns you've raised?

MS BARRETT: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Because we've got the past and then the future.

MR. TAYLOR: Refresh my memory. What is the flying thing? Isn't it the five flights just to your home constituency?

DR. McNEIL: Five flights anywhere in the province.

MR. TAYLOR: I see.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The one I think you're getting mixed up with, Nick, is the spouse's travel, the spouse and/or guest: four trips a year from the closest airport to the capital.

Any more?

MS BARRETT: No. The sooner the better, though. I don't like being in this position. So, you know, as soon as we can meet again and come up with a recommendation . . .

MR. TAYLOR: Are you trying to tell us you're grounded now until we come up with something?

MS BARRETT: Well, I'm trying to tell you that that's all I've got in my savings account, and I want to know if I have to hand it back or if I can spend it.

MR. TAYLOR: No, I'm just saying that if you're actually grounded, I'm going to take another year to make up my mind.

MS BARRETT: Golly, already I'm absorbing about 40,000 kilometres on my own. Nothing grounds me.

MR. CAMPBELL: Nick, just remember there'll be no Christmas present for you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now you know what it was like before we got paid mileage. You ate the 40,000 or 50,000 a year.

MR. TAYLOR: And everybody wondered why they didn't see you every week: "Where have you been?"

MR. CHAIRMAN: I wore out five vehicles before we got paid mileage.

MS BARRETT: I've been through quite a few tires.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, you've got to keep your foot off the gas.

MS BARRETT: Yeah, right.
Are we planning our next meeting already?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, that's the last thing we have: scheduling the next meeting. We have a Members' Services meeting starting at 1 o'clock on the 5th.

MR. CAMPBELL: Would you like to meet as a subcommittee in the morning?

MS BARRETT: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yeah, we could do it in the morning.

MR. TAYLOR: I've booked myself off, although we could try it about 11 o'clock. Is that . . . For an hour.

MS BARRETT: We start Members' Services at 1 o'clock, don't we?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Right; yeah. But we've got to eat.

MR. TAYLOR: Would an hour do it, or an hour and a half?

MS BARRETT: Well, we can brown bag it, though.

MR. TAYLOR: We could eat here. We only spent two hours now, anyway. Would that do?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Eleven o'clock?

MS BARRETT: Where? Here?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Probably.

MR. TAYLOR: It's a good job, Cheryl and the Clerk, whoever all did it.

DR. McNEIL: The credit goes to Cheryl.

MR. TAYLOR: She takes a bow.

MS BARRETT: I see the menu unfolding in front of her eyes, knowing what sort of work needs to be done between now and the 5th.

MR. CAMPBELL: You'd better take all the accolades you can now, Cheryl, because I'll tell you, they're very fast fleeting.

MS BARRETT: Can we hold on to our Members' Services binders with all this stuff? Oh, good. So we can hold on to these; good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Does anybody want to make a motion?

MR. CAMPBELL: I so move.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. All in favour? Carried.

[The committee adjourned at 10:15 a.m.]