

[Chairman: Dr. Carter]

[1:37 p.m.]

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome back. According to the secretary, what we have to do here -- and I don't know if you'll want to deal with them in this order -- is section 2, MLA Administration, page 5, Rental of Property, Equipment, and Goods.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

My understanding is that all of section 2, then, has been agreed to. All right; motion to adopt all of section 2?

MS BARRETT: Sure. Why not?

MS BARRETT: So moved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Does that figure reflect what you're happy with? No revised sheets? All those in favour of page 5 then?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Edmonton-Highlands. All those in favour, please say aye or wave an arm.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Agreed. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Opposed? Thank you.

I also had a note on page 6, but I also have that sheet as checked off.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Chairman, could that be recorded?

Page 8 in section 2, a blue insert sheet.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Surely. The Member for Westlock-Sturgeon is opposed.

DR. McNEIL: Yes, a blue sheet there reflecting the change in the constituency office allowance from \$26,000 to \$34,500.

All right. Do you want to deal with the budgetary sheet updates for section 5, Government Members' Office? There's a new blue sheet on that one. I see 5, 6, 8, 10.

MS BARRETT: That's page 8?

MS BARRETT: Where are we?

DR. McNEIL: That's on page 8 under MLA Admin.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, the tidy-up operation is interesting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yellow tab 2, page 8. There should be a new blue page.

With apologies to the committee, how about if perhaps we go on to section 10, the interns? This also has some new blue sheets.

DR. ELLIOTT: What was the number you were talking about?

DR. McNEIL: Changes in section 10, page 2 of the blue sheets, inserts: an increase in salary of 3 percent, to \$19,249 per annum, so there's \$2,244 added as a result of the 3 percent salary adjustment there; and on page 3 the reflected increase in the employer contributions as a result of that salary increase, as directed by the committee. On page 4 there was \$1,500 added for applicants' travel, so at about the fifth or sixth item there it's \$3,040 instead of \$1,540, to reflect the committee's decision to increase the travel by \$1,500.

DR. McNEIL: Right at the top, the 83 constituency offices at \$34,500 per office now, rather than \$26,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. With that page what is your pleasure or your pain? The blue page with 8 on the bottom and prepared February 8.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you agreed?

MS BARRETT: I have one question. What is the MLA Accounts Payable System, Public Works, Supply and Services, Software Maintenance budget item? I see it says "new system." Is that to accommodate the computerization?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's down about 10 lines.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, that's the update. That gives us, then, approval for all of section 10. All those in favour?

MS BARRETT: Fourteen thousand for this year.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

DR. McNEIL: Yes. That's the new accounts payable system that will be implemented April 1.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

MS BARRETT: Oh, it's an accounts payable system?

Section 12: while we're at the back of the hymnbook -- or 'herbook' -- we had approved all of this section, and this now gives you everything updated.

DR. McNEIL: Yes. That's the software maintenance that's payable on the custom designed software for that system.

DR. McNEIL: Yes. It reflects the approval of the B budget proposal 1, the microfilming of Alberta weekly newspapers, and the deletion of the indexing of *Alberta Report*, the B budget proposal for the indexing of the *Alberta Report*.

MS BARRETT: Oh, okay. Looks good to me.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Agreement with page 8?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. That was approved, so that carries it.

MS BARRETT: Agreed.

It's our understanding, then, that the sections outstanding are 5 -- now, again, section 5 is an updated version; is that correct?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Other voices, page 8?

DR. McNEIL: That's correct; it affects the increase in the caucus formula of \$36,000 per member, from \$32,000. That's page 1 under section 5.

MR. KOWALSKI: So moved.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It makes it easy; it's the only page under section 5. Moved by the Member for Barrhead for approval. Those in favour... [interjection] Question, Westlock-Sturgeon?

MR. TAYLOR: Yes. Are you asking anybody to speak to it?

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's already been approved last day.

All those in favour of the motion? Opposed? Do you wish it recorded?

MR. TAYLOR: Yes, please.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Westlock-Sturgeon, recorded. Thank you. Section 5.

Section 6, Official Opposition. This new sheet also reflects what was passed at the last meeting.

MR. BOGLE: Agreed.

MS BARRETT: I don't... Oh, I've got it; it's okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, it shows the leader's allowance and the caucus formula. Okay. It was approved, but we'll give it formal approval. Moved by Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour, please signify. Opposed, if any?

MR. TAYLOR: Would you record it again, Mr. Chairman, to go down for posterity?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. It's so done.

So that's updated sheets section 5, section 6. That takes us back to section 7, the Liberal opposition.

MR. TAYLOR: My approach is no different than it was last year. I think on February 9th I said that the budget as submitted by all parties seemed reasonable. It's in line and actually a little better than in line. So I feel that we've learned to cut our cloth to fit what's there. In view of the fact that we've increased the constituency allowances by a little over 30 percent, we've doubled our pensions, we've increased our salaries by between 8 percent and 10 percent, we've got a severance allowance, a re-establishment allowance -- you're looking puzzled -- a resettlement or whatever it is: all these things have been voted in. So the life of an MLA or its support system has not been bad. So, Mr. Chairman, I just see no need whatsoever for any increase. We've got to stop somewhere, and this is where I'd want to stop.

MS BARRETT: Yeah, with staff. Keep underpaying those women, Nick.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Chair was just shaking its head at a

statement about pensions which I didn't think was accurate. Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. WRIGHT: So then why do you want to deny your staff increases?

MR. TAYLOR: It's not a question of staffing. We pay our staff the same as you do. As a matter of fact, I've heard a rumble or a complaint from you people that we were overpaying our staff. We're just getting more economy than you are, apparently. Apparently, you go in for quantity; we go in for quality. Everybody has a choice.

MR. WRIGHT: So you won't be increasing the pay of your staff.

MR. TAYLOR: We can increase some, yeah. By cutting here and there, we can get them their 3 percent.

MR. WRIGHT: If in spite of your opposition the Assembly votes the increase to your caucus, will you use the increase?

MR. TAYLOR: We would refuse the increase, yeah.

MR. WRIGHT: You wouldn't use it then?

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah. What we'd do is turn it back to you each month, appropriately hand the cheque back in front of the proper media and so on and so forth. [interjection] You wouldn't want us to operate in the dark would you?

MR. BOGLE: Like Grant Mitchell did after making his speech, right?

MR. TAYLOR: I might remind members here -- that's why I don't mind Mr. Wright asking -- that it was Mr. Wright and I who put our things on the line when our own caucuses deserted us last time when there was a move in front of the House. I think we've already established that we stand on principle. I don't think we have to apologize at all in any way, shape, or form. That's why I appreciate Mr. Wright's question. For the rest of you fellows, I think you operate like a bunch of sheep, and I don't see any particular worth...

MS BARRETT: Dianne, object to "fellows," will you?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's hardly a necessary comment.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Chairman, I just wonder. In keeping with that principle, then, and given that Nick has voted against the increase to constituency offices, is he saying that he's going to do the same thing with the constituency office increases, turn that back as well? Or is he going to vote no and take the money?

MR. TAYLOR: You must remember that a constituency office is something that's under each one of the constituents, and I don't see any sense in turning that down. As you know, that's the way the democratic process works. I've made my fight on that and couldn't get anywhere. So as far as constituency offices go, I don't think we have much choice. As a matter of fact, if there's going to be an election, I'm not even sure I'll be the one who's allotting the constituency office. Maybe you

won't either, as a matter of fact, so maybe you shouldn't puzzle about it.

MS BARRETT: Well, smart remarks aside, I do puzzle about it, because I think if a principle is being established here, it should be consistent. I find it difficult, you know, that you say no to bringing up especially constituency office staff level wages and then say that you'll take it, but you won't do that for caucus.

MR. TAYLOR: I can operate the constituency staff and also the caucus with the opposition budget and pay salaries that are certainly commensurate with the rest of the departments. Actually, I think that's my business rather than yours, as far as that's concerned. But if it is a concern, it is.

As far as the allowance for an MLA for the future years, that's up to each one. Now, my own personal, Westlock-Sturgeon: I don't think I would have any problem getting by with the old and giving it back if that is what the people want. If you want to make a move that I have to turn mine back because I voted against it, that's fine.

MS BARRETT: No, no. I'm just looking for consistency because of what you answered in response to Gordon's question.

MR. TAYLOR: Well, that's what I am being, consistent. But I can't go vote down other people's caucus allowance. They do what they want, the same as you people in your party. You could use all your caucus allowance or part of it. After all, it's a ceiling; it isn't a must that you've got to get to them. As a matter of fact -- I know Mr. Chairman could probably enlighten me -- did anybody last year use less than their caucus allowance, out of the 83 MLAs?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Read the printout.

MR. TAYLOR: I think I did but not much.

MS BARRETT: In the constituency or caucus?

MR. TAYLOR: Constituency, not caucus.

MRS. MIROSH: Oh, several never use it.

MR. TAYLOR: So this is what I'm saying. I mean, it's up to the one how much he uses. I didn't use all I had last time; I doubt if I will this time.

MRS. MIROSH: Not all of us do.

MR. TAYLOR: No? That's good. That's nice.

MR. BOGLE: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. First I'll need a motion, I assume moved by Westlock-Sturgeon:
that the proposed budget for the Liberal Party stay as is.
Or be approved?

MR. TAYLOR: Well, not stay as is. I'd like to move its acceptance.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, I think there was a motion from the last day, was there not?

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah. That was tabled, wasn't it?

MS BARRETT: Yeah. So it's the same motion.

MR. BOGLE: The same motion.

MS BARRETT: Yeah. Well, that's what David said though. He said, "Moved by." So it's the same thing.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the motion, please signify.

MR. WRIGHT: I did have my hand up for discussion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, I'm sorry. Thank you. Hold the vote.

MR. WRIGHT: Well, apropos your remarks about increases, you will agree that in the aggregate, even with the increases the position of the caucuses and the constituencies together is still less than it was the year before last.

MR. TAYLOR: Oh, yes, I'm not arguing that at all but just saying that we took a big cut. We learned to live with it. I'm not positive; I'd have to check. Ours is less, but I'm not positive yours is.

MS BARRETT: Oh, yes, substantially, by 10.8 percent. Go ahead.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Call for the question. All those in favour of the motion by Westlock-Sturgeon, please signify. Opposed? Carried.

MR. TAYLOR: Could I record the ones that refused the vote, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. No, sir. You can only deal with your own.

MR. TAYLOR: I see.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Are you about to go to item 8?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, I'm sitting here expectantly.

MS BARRETT: Yeah, well, I can see it's sort of a logical following of numbers here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It's the only one left.

MS BARRETT: Yes. Mr. Chairman, I understand that Ray Speaker is unavailable to us today and tomorrow -- he's being nominated tonight -- and that he wouldn't be able to come in until Thursday. It might be Wednesday. Someone told me

Wednesday; then somebody else told me Thursday.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I had Rod phone, and the conversation was that he wasn't available today or tomorrow. That's my understanding. So I don't know about any other situation. Carry on.

MS BARRETT: Well, what I'd like to do is: I see that the caucus formula has been changed; that's consistent with the vote we made last week, and that's fair enough. But I wonder, aside from that going in as, basically, an update of information, if we can put this number 8 on hold one more time till we can get to talk to Ray. I mean, if he's nominated tonight, he may have a different view of things. I really would like to see us wait, maybe convene a brief meeting on Wednesday or Thursday, according to his calendar.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm not available Wednesday, but you could meet without me.

MR. TAYLOR: Pardon me, Mr. Chairman. Let me catch up on this. Is the leader of the Reps not available for tomorrow either?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No.

MR. TAYLOR: Or today?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No.

MR. TAYLOR: So we'd have to have a special . . .

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, with the House reconvening on Friday, am I correct in assuming that all members of this committee will be in on Thursday?

MS BARRETT: I will be.

MR. TAYLOR: No, I won't.

MR. BOGLE: You won't be here Thursday? I see.

MS BARRETT: We could meet briefly Friday maybe?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, no.

MS BARRETT: No? You don't have enough to do on Friday already, I see? Okay. Well, Wednesday, and have Bob chair the meeting.

MR. BOGLE: I'm not back until late on Wednesday.

MS BARRETT: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let's talk about Friday for a minute then, 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

MR. TAYLOR: It seems to me the problem is fairly straightforward.

MS BARRETT: Well, Nick, can you change things so you can come in on Thursday?

MR. TAYLOR: No; I'm committed.

MS BARRETT: Not a chance, eh?

MR. TAYLOR: I'm way out in the boonies there, undermining the hon. member in charge of lotteries.

MS BARRETT: Well, if it's only going to take a few minutes -- I mean, if it's the last item -- surely you can find some way, David, on Friday. God forbid, she'll even agree to come in, like, 7:30 in the morning.

MR. CHAIRMAN: How about 3 o'clock?

MS BARRETT: Yeah, right on. Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Why don't members have a coffee break and see if their schedules can be shared?

MR. WRIGHT: We're kind of ignoring the electronic processes here. A telephone conference would be possible.

MS BARRETT: Well, there's an idea.

MR. WRIGHT: With a missing member, even if it's Speaker himself . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: You can only get . . . from different locations.

MS BARRETT: No, but I think what Gordon was suggesting is that if we meet tomorrow or whenever, maybe we could just phone Ray on a speaker phone.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Well, let's adjourn for a few minutes here and see what we can deal with.

[The committee recessed from 1:59 p.m. to 2:02 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Over the weekend I had Mr. Clegg look at this matter of inviting the member and this kind of thing. So do you just want to make a comment about the status of the committee and the member in case we get into some other kind of scenario, please?

MR. M. CLEGG: Mr. Chairman, it's my respectful view that any consideration of what the Member for Little Bow's position might be in the future is something which this committee should not concern itself with, for two reasons. One is that the committee has already, in its previous meeting, agreed that it would be wrong to speculate on the possibility of an election, and it is on the outcome of a future election, if and when it comes during this year -- or it may not come in this year -- that any change might occur. Therefore, to raise this possibility, which is obviously being planned in the political arena but is not a present fact in the Assembly, would not be consistent with what the committee has decided with the rest of its estimates.

The other matter really is this. Where members sit in the Assembly and where their voting allegiances are are matters of agreement between the members. The member chooses where he sits, and the group with whom he wishes to sit has to accept him. That remains the situation until the member advises the Speaker or the House, either by crossing the floor literally during a sitting -- which doesn't normally happen in Canadian Legislatures because the seats are assigned, although it used to hap-

pen in Westminster and still does because the seats are not reserved there -- or by advising the Speaker that he wishes to be seated in future with a different bloc. That has not occurred. I understand that the Member for Little Bow has indicated that he will continue until the next election, whenever that may be, to fulfill the position of Member for Little Bow and sit as a Representative. The comments that are attributed to him in the press have referred to future developments, some of which are being planned and steps being taken for now, but I believe that the committee would be correct in recognizing the present situation in the House and planning fiscally on that basis until a real change happens.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Edmonton-Highlands and then Edmonton-Strathcona.

MS BARRETT: Thanks. Yeah, I think that was sort of hashed out last week, but thanks for the clarification. My perspective was that I want to clear up whether or not Ray will continue to perceive himself or act as an opposition leader. That's really the essence of my question with respect to the budget for his office. I don't think that, I guess, walks on the jurisdiction that Parliamentary Counsel was just talking about.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. WRIGHT: Well, it's rare indeed that I differ in opinion with Mr. Clegg, but it does seem to me that he has neglected an important element, which is that the extra that's voted to the Representatives is that they are a functioning party that has a separate point of view. On both scores there is doubt: (a) that there is a functioning party there, and (b) that the leader, anyway, displays a separate point of view. In other words, to characterize it as a party would be not true, so we would be propping up something that doesn't really exist.

That he has every right to sit as a private member, irrespective of his views and so on, and to enjoy all the privileges of a private member is what really, I think, Parliamentary Counsel is talking about. We shouldn't impinge on that and question his desire, but it's purely as a real leader of a real party that we want to satisfy ourselves.

MR. TAYLOR: Well, my point is not in conflict with the counsel. I quite agree that anybody can sit wherever they want in the House, provided they can stand the sideways looks of those they're sitting next to and all the sorts of moral pressure that might be put on them.

But here as a committee we vote taxpayers' money, and in particular for the Representative Party, the Official Opposition, and the Liberal Party we get what is a formula set up with a caucus allowance, two times the number of members. Well, if they want to sit there, two times is fine, but then we have a leader's allowance here that amounts to \$117,696. That goes to these other parties; it does not go to the government caucus because, rightfully speaking, cabinet and so on are presented research and supplying the muscle, if you want to put it that way, behind the Bills they present to the Legislature. Opposition parties get a grant, as I say, made up of two items: one, the number of members and, the other, the leader's allowance. My contention is that when a party's leader says that they will no longer oppose, will not take his turn at question period, is in fact going to run for the government, then the leader's allowance is taking taxpayers' money under -- I wouldn't say false pretenses, but

it's up to the committee here to deny it to him. I think it's the committee's . . . We just voted on the Liberal budget, which I didn't want increased, but it never occurred to anybody in the committee to vote us down to nothing because we are in opposition.

Now, here we have another group. The leader will not be taking any active part in opposing the government or doing any [inaudible]. So, therefore, it seems to me that their allowance should be based the same as the government members, who are not taking an active part in opposing but they do have an allowance to do their work, which is fine. I'm quite willing for the members to have an allowance to do their work but not the allowance that goes to oppose the government.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, there's a fine line developing here, and we'll have to see if it gets raised at another point in terms of the House. To hear the comment of Edmonton-Highlands with regard to the role of that functioning: that was useful comment.

MS BARRETT: So are we agreed, then, that we put this decision on hold until Thursday morning?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I would assume we'll take a tabling motion in a moment. We will attempt to have a meeting on Thursday morning, and if that fails, then we will go on from there. Any other comment before we find a tabling motion?

MR. WRIGHT: Well, on a point of information, as it were, but relative to this. Many of the things we've dealt with would change in the budget if there were an election within the next year or so, obviously. How does that work in practice? Suppose that following the election one of the parties has been much reduced and another increased and other parties have arrived. Would the budget just go back for sort of rehashing, as it were? Because what we're talking about, we mustn't forget, is this budget for the next year, not for the rest of this financial year.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, there would be a new committee struck, obviously, and the new committee would have to deal basically with the rearrangement according to the new configuration of the House. But the basic element of the budget for next -- if we're dealing in terms of the next fiscal year, the total envelope would stay the same. We'd just be reapportioning what goes according to the election.

MR. WRIGHT: I was trying to ask another point, too, but that's the same sort of thing. One of the things we voted was X dollars for the enumeration that by statute would occur in September in the absence of an election. If there is an election before that time, then that disappears. What happens to the money in the budget? Are we free to allocate it to other areas?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We don't have money in here for that; that comes under Chief Electoral Officer.

MS BARRETT: No. It happens every two years, and it's already happened. It happened last September.

MR. WRIGHT: No. It's every year thereafter.

MS BARRETT: Oh. It's every year thereafter.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. There's another thing kicks into place after the next election. The money you're talking about has nothing to do with Members' Services Committee whatsoever. But after two elections what does come into place this next time will be a boundary commission, and if, say, there was an election next December or whatever, then it kicks in that there won't be an enumeration, and we have to go through setting up yet another special committee of the Legislature to go out there and examine every boundary in the whole province to see whether they want to have more seats, fewer seats, or change the boundaries. And in a year following an election there is no enumeration.

MR. WRIGHT: I thought there was an item that we voted last time on training enumerators.

DR. McNEIL: No, not in this budget. It may have been Legislative Offices.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you on the Legislative Offices Committee?

MR. WRIGHT: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No?

MR. M. CLEGG: There's one point that Mr. Wright raised and that was where the money could be transferred. Because the money for the Chief Electoral Officer is under a different vote, it cannot be transferred to Legislative Assembly vote 1; it cannot be transferred from vote 2 to vote 1.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's for the training of the enumerators, yes.

MR. M. CLEGG: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Right; sorry.

MR. M. CLEGG: It would have to be returned to the GRF, and if any vote required more money, it would have to be funded by special warrant. It's the same with departments; they can't transfer from vote 2 to vote 3.

MR. WRIGHT: But within votes they can.

MR. M. CLEGG: Within votes, with a Treasury Board minute, yes.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Chairman, I move that we table further consideration of item 8 until Thursday morning at 9:30 a.m.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Or until the next meeting, just in case.

MS BARRETT: Okay. Until the next meeting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Motion to table. Those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Another item, Westlock-Sturgeon?

MR. TAYLOR: Yes. It's not a new item. I thought the committee might be interested, and I want to toss it out on the table and hope we don't move a motion too quickly on it. But it has

to do with Senate reform, Mr. Chairman.

Two thoughts occur -- be patient with me; I'll try to get to the point here. But I think this committee can do . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you going to announce you're running?

MR. TAYLOR: Pardon?

MS BARRETT: Are you announcing you're running?

MR. TAYLOR: Sure. Okay.

MS BARRETT: Oh! He's on the record now. [interjections]

MR. TAYLOR: Now, what I wanted to get at: as you know, Senate reform has, of course, been very dear to my heart for some time. But a couple of things -- and I'd just be interested in the committee members' opinions on this -- I can see staring me in the face as far as Senate reform is concerned: the possibility that whoever is elected as Senator from Alberta, if we go ahead with an elected Senate type of thing, may not be able to take his or her seat in Ottawa for some time. And I would think it might be a good idea if somehow or another -- I think the whole House would probably agree on it. The elected nominee for Senate should be paid -- and this is where it comes under Members' Services -- the salary a Senator would get, until the federal government makes the appointment. You'd have to be a fairly rich person, indeed, if they stalled around for two or three years before they did it. I think it would put muscle behind the idea of Senate reform, saying, "Look, that period of time between when the Senator is elected and when they take their seat, they will get paid."

Now, we may argue that we can't pay a Senator's salary; all we can do is an MLA-equivalent salary. But what I'm getting at is that we do that with everyone else that we elect. We Albertans elect MLAs; now Albertans are going to elect a nominee for Senator. So I think Members' Services decides what those services are that the MLAs should get and what the salary is we vote on. So that's one . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order please, hon. member. With due respect, it's beyond the ambit of this committee. It's a member of another House. We could argue, then, that we should be paying the federal MPs. I'm sorry; the discussion is out of order.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Chairman, I take difference. I don't think it's beyond this committee, because when we decide anything to do . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, order. It's a matter of discussion. When such a Bill gets introduced to the House, that would be an appropriate place to argue, but not in this committee.

MR. TAYLOR: Yeah, but I think Members' Services could have.

Okay, then, let's go on to the second part, if you say that part's out of order.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What is the second part?

MR. TAYLOR: If that one's out of order, then . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, I'm glad you agree, hon. member.

MR. TAYLOR: Well, no, there's one other thing, Mr. Chairman. If the Senator is appointed from Alberta under electoral process, under federal laws now no Senator gets an allowance for an office. There are no allowances for offices here in Alberta. Yet I would think we want our Senator, whoever that may be, to have at least the facilities to be able to work in the province. So I would think something in the nature of the same grant that goes to MLAs for office administration would be an idea that we, too, as Members' Services, could look at. All I'm putting out is to put some teeth and felt into the idea of a Senator from Alberta.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Chairman, it's rare that I agree with you. But in this case I think it's clear that . . . [interjection] Well, I shouldn't say it that way. Mr. Speaker, I rarely agree with you; Mr. Chairman, I agree with you a lot, and in this instance it's one more case of agreeing with you.

But what I would suggest to Nick is that what you can do . . . The current realm is that we only look after the financial means of MLAs in the context of their work, and by statute we have 83 of them. What you could do is look at amending the Bill, if it comes before us for debate, so that those provisions could be worked into the Bill. In other words, look to amend it to allow for a provincial support for the elected nominee's office, et cetera. I mean, technically we can't deal with it here, but it's something that you can do with the Bill itself. In other words, the Bill can change the nature of the way this committee works, but we can't.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, I move that we adjourn.

MR. TAYLOR: No, I have another item that I'd better . . . I know new discussion frightens the members a great deal, but may I move on to another then?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, it's just that it was out of order, so that's a different comment, okay? Your next item?

MR. TAYLOR: I've got your answer: it's out of order. I'd thrown it out for discussion.

The next item is that I believe we all have an open letter to all members of the Legislature from the Alberta Retired Public Employees Society. I checked into a rather reasonable request that the MLAs' pensions, which do come under us, be removed from the envelope of all the pensions. There are six pension plans together. They're arguing that pension funds that should be going to retired civil servants and retired MLAs are now being used to fund the MLA pension plan, which was short, according to last year, by \$600,000. Now, if their members are not ready to discuss it and don't have it, I would suggest they go back to their desk or wherever it is, because I've checked it out and it's a very valid point. I think our MLA pensions are being subsidized by many of the civil servants working on the other five plans that are in the six-plan envelope, because we're not coming anywhere close to funding it when deductions come off it. Mr. Chairman, I know maybe you don't read everything, but it's the Alberta Retired Public Employees Society, an open letter to all members dated October 31, 1988, which isn't very long ago. I think they have a very valid point, and I think it's something that -- I know this is very short order to put it on there, but I would like to see it put on there.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Could we just pause for a moment for the legal counsel's comment with regard to this, please?

MR. M. CLEGG: Mr. Chairman, the jurisdiction of this committee is derived from sections 19 and 45 of the Legislative Assembly Act, which deals with the things that it can do. It can provide benefits for members and former members, but where those benefits have already been provided by legislation, it removes them from the jurisdiction of this committee. So the only thing that can be done is that members can propose amendments to existing legislation of the House. But the matter of the amount of members' pensions is not before this committee, and this committee cannot deal with funding of members' pensions because it's a matter of existing legislation. It's a matter which has been governed by legislation of the House.

MS BARRETT: Are we allowed to make recommendations for changes as a committee? Because what I think might be interesting is if we asked David to look at the implications of separating our pension plan and asked for a report. That wouldn't be without our jurisdictional rights, and if we find as a committee that it's much more reasonable to separate, even though we don't have the power to do it perhaps we could as a committee recommend that changes be made to the legislation.

MR. TAYLOR: If I may, Mr. Chairman, to the legal counsel read the point.

It is noted that the yearly deficiencies in the MLA Pension . . . have been rising dramatically during the last few years.

For example, the MLA pension was \$641,000 short of funding itself in '86; it was \$1.1 million short of funding itself in '87.

Because all benefits are paid from accumulated contributions of the six pension plans, the contributions of participants in the five other plans are in effect subsidizing the benefits being paid retired members of the legislature.

So what I'm saying is that -- and I think we touched on it in sub-committee. The hon. Member for Cypress-Redcliff isn't here, but maybe the Clerk can remember that we have touched pensions as very much a part since I've been on this committee. I would like to see us really put this thing to bed, because it's abhorrent to me to think that MLAs have to get pensions out of pension funds provided for the other members who are retired.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Member for Barrhead, followed by Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, this committee is governed, of course, by the Legislative Assembly Act in terms of what the committee can deal with and the committee cannot deal with. Annually in the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta one member of Executive Council files for the benefit of the Assembly all of the annual reports dealing with the various pensions plans that do exist in the province of Alberta.

In the case of the tabling of the pension reports, it's very clear that each one of the various pension plans is a separate plan unto itself, and it's my understanding that there's no cross-subsidization, no cross-referencing of dollars that go into each of these individual plans. They're all there. The documents are tabled annually in the Legislative Assembly, I believe it is by the Provincial Treasurer. They're very, very interesting reading. Perhaps it might be of interest if all members were, in fact, to spend some time looking at those documents that do govern all of the various pension plans.

As well, members should also be alerted to the fact that there currently is before the national government in Canada a major document dealing with pension reform. That document is something that might be of interest to all members of this committee. But it's not my understanding, Mr. Chairman, subject, of course, to correction by the law clerk, that that particular matter could fall within the jurisdiction of this committee. It most certainly falls within the jurisdiction of the Legislative Assembly, and that's a larger committee, which all members here are members of, and perhaps most appropriately that is the entity in which this discussion should take place rather than this committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Edmonton-Highlands, Edmonton-Strathcona, and then perhaps we can vote on it.

MS BARRETT: Sure. Well, Ken might know some details that we don't know.

Mr. Chairman, I move that we refer the matter to the Clerk for, first of all, the legal clarification but, secondly, an analysis of a distinct pension fund for MLAs, for a report as soon as he could, which is not to say necessarily for Thursday, because that's a big apple to chew on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We have a motion.
Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. WRIGHT: Yes, I was going to make some kind of a suggestion similar to the one put forward by Ms Barrett. I just wanted to add that it's a sober and responsible letter and deserves a reply by all MLAs, and although we are the committee that has the decision of it, we should make sure that a sufficient answer is given. If that answer is that there's a mistake on the facts, so be it. If the person is basically right on the facts, then we should look into that. We should be making sure that we correct what it does look into it, correct an injustice.

I was going to propose that we leave it to you, Mr. Chairman, to make sure that that power is given, so that the Clerk is ...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let's leave it with the Clerk. That's how it works.

MR. BOGLE: Mr. Chairman, we have an item that's currently on the table that came up under New Business; I presume that was the general heading. We have a motion on the floor, but I think we should not forget the comments just made prior to the motion of the Member for Barrhead, when he spoke of what in fact happens. I think it would be premature to move on a motion. I think the next step that we as members have is to follow the advice we were given. There are documents which were tabled by the Provincial Treasurer. It contains full information on all of the various pension plans, and I believe the hon. member is correct when he said there is not cross-subsidization from one plan to another.

I think you'll find there is some degree of underfunding in all of the plans, and that is a concern that our Provincial Treasurer has publicly acknowledged, as did his predecessor. That is one of the reasons that some years ago this government put \$1 billion into the pension plans to help correct that inequity. But for our committee now to move off in a particular direction without having more facts when those facts are readily at hand in our

library I think would be an error. So I think it's a matter that we should, yes, reflect upon. We may wish to come back with some recommendation in the future, but I don't think this is the point in time to do it, in light of the answers, that we can certainly get for the various questions, contained in the reports in our library.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Can any of you believe legally that there was no cross-subsidization?

MR. M. CLEGG: I believe that to be the case.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Westlock-Sturgeon, then, the motion.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Chairman, I think the motion as put forward by Edmonton-Highlands is a good one, because although the Member for Taber-Warner may be able to take apart the financial statements and see clearly what it is, it's not an easy job to do. I've been monkeying away with it; that's why I introduced it. I think there is some cross-subsidization, in spite of a sort of broad statement by the hon. Member for Barrhead, although the member is correct when he says there may be a number of the plans being subsidized. But there is a question of whether some of the plans aren't being subsidized more than others are. Therefore, I think the Clerk's study or report to show whether or not there is any cross-subsidization; secondly, what the degree is -- and thirdly, one must remember that the retired civil servants association has been told that one of the reasons the Alberta government does not wish to index pensions is that the total package looks fairly rough. And, just as the hon. Member for Taber-Warner said, a billion dollars was put into this fund the other day. Obviously there's a fund there. Obviously somebody is putting a billion dollars in it. The question is: who's getting the fair share? Who's milking the cow faster than the other?

MS BARRETT: Question.

MR. KOWALSKI: Just a statement of fact, Mr. Chairman. Overall inflation in the province of Alberta in 1988 was just a fraction of a point less than 2 percentage points. This government did adjust public service pensions effective January 1, 1989, above the rate of inflation.

MR. TAYLOR: A point of order. Statement of fact: they didn't. It was down, 1.5 percent less than the adjustment.

MR. KOWALSKI: But that letter was dated October 31, 1988. We're talking about the inflation rate of Alberta in 1988 by statistics made public by Statistics Canada and duly published, as is the announcement made by the government with respect to pension adjustments as of January 1, 1989. Those are facts, Mr. Chairman.

We've got a motion to adjourn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have a motion with regard to this study.

MR. TAYLOR: They're all running for cover. I've got them by the ...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh, I don't see a whole bunch of people disappearing.

All those in favour of the motion referring the matter to the Clerk for some study. Thank you. Opposed?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's defeated.
I have a motion from Taber-Warner.

MR. TAYLOR: You're going to sweep that one under the rug in the election, fellows.

[The committee adjourned at 2:32 p.m.]

