

## Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

11:44 a.m.

[Chairman: Dr. Carter]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, we have a quorum, and I think we should proceed. We can certainly deal with some items. If there's anything that of necessity relates to the caucus who are absent at the moment, then we can put that on temporary hold, but I know there are some things we can deal with, so we're called to order.

First, I would point out that if any of you are around later this afternoon, there is open house in the Annex from 3 to 4 o'clock on the ninth floor. We're going to have cake, coffee, and tea to mark the 20th anniversary of *Alberta Hansard*, so if you want to drop by, that's great.

MR. BOGLE: It should be noted, Mr. Chairman, that it was an initiative by the government 20 years ago that brought in *Hansard*.

AN HON. MEMBER: Freedom of information.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And in the last five years we were able to get *Hansard* published within 24 hours to make sure everybody had freedom of information. I've always regarded as a plus, except in the Chair, that I get to hear about it so quickly, as to what really was in *Hansard*.

All right, with respect to business left over from yesterday, are we ready to move to a motion with respect to freight and postage expenditures for caucus offices?

MR. BOGLE: I would request that that matter be held. I think Pam has an amendment that she wishes to make.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I believe where we could go and make some progress, then, would be with respect to the budget of the Legislative Assembly, but there again we can't pass an omnibus motion until we've dealt with this particular motion about postage.

MR. WICKMAN: We could deal with the health care, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there a motion on that? Do you have a motion to carry it forward?

MR. WICKMAN: I'll move that we bring forward the item on the MLA extended health care program.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay; we'll go from there. Let's just take that as a general notice. Is that agreed? All right.

Do you have a motion?

MR. WICKMAN: I'll move the three-part motion as presented to us.

Speaking to it, Mr. Chairman, very briefly, I think, considering the increase in costs of health care and that, that this is the way to go. I particularly like portion 3, where there will be a subcommittee struck to review the MLA extended health care plan so we can make sure that what we're getting is fair to us in terms of utilizing taxpayers' dollars, that we have a plan that represents fairness and looks at certain unique factors of a group of us which consists of less than 100.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Edmonton-Whitemud.

I think all members have this series of three motions before them. We would be dealing with motion one, please. Anyone speaking to motion one? Taber-Warner or any others? We'll pause for another moment or two to allow people to catch their breath from their other exciting activities of the day.

MS BARRETT: Nation-building, you know.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good.

MR. McINNIS: We've got a report.

MS BARRETT: Got a report.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good.

The item before us, again, is the MLA extended health care program review, and motion 1 is moved by Edmonton-Whitemud. Any discussion, or is there the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the motion, please signify? Opposed, if any? Carried unanimously.

Motion 2, Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: I actually moved all three. My motion was to take all three.

MR. CHAIRMAN: From the viewpoint of the Chair they have to go one at a time, but thank you. I'll recognize you as moving that one.

Any further discussion with respect to motion 2?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There's a call for the question. All those in favour, please signify. Opposed, if any? Carried. Thank you.

Motion 3 is moved by Edmonton-Whitemud. Is there any discussion here?

Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: The motion makes reference to the establishment of a subcommittee "consisting of the following members," but it doesn't list the members. I'd like to move an amendment to the motion that

the members on the subcommittee be Alan, John, and Percy.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Cypress-Redcliff, Edmonton-Jasper Place, and Edmonton-Whitemud. Cypress-Redcliff has been volunteered to be the chairman, is what I'm picking up.

All right. Speaking to the amendment. Question on the amendment? All those in favour of the amendment to make this subcommittee be under the chairmanship of Cypress-Redcliff, Edmonton-Jasper Place, and Edmonton-Whitemud. All those in favour, please signify. Opposed, if any? Carried unanimously. Thank you.

Any discussion now on the main motion as amended?

MS BARRETT: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Call for the question. All those in favour, please signify. Opposed, if any? Carried unanimously. Excellent example of dialogue and co-operation.

I wonder, then, if we might move to the matter of freight and postage. I'm given to understand that Edmonton-Highlands has what is probably an amendment to the motion we had.

MS BARRETT: Yes, I do. I believe it was Bob's motion:

Legislative Assembly Freight and Postage expenditures paid from the MLA Administration budget to cover the cost of individual mailings between MLAs and their constituents from the caucus offices and from constituency offices are to be capped as follows.

The original figures I will not read. I'm going to read my figures which would amend:

Government members' caucus for this fiscal year, \$48,000; Official Opposition caucus, \$40,000; Liberal opposition caucus, \$20,000.

The formulation is that government members enjoy 25 percent greater dollars for mailings, because in meetings they have acknowledged that they benefit also from the mailings that go from cabinet offices. The Liberal figure would be 50 percent of the Official Opposition's. Now, this configuration is that which I support in principle as well because that caucus office is half the size of ours. In fact, currently it's a little less than that, but for now I would suggest we go with this figure, and if there's a by-election in the riding of Calgary-Buffalo before the next general election, we could revisit the matter if any change were necessary.

Anyway, I spoke in favour of the principle of this yesterday. I was able to convince some other members on the committee to go a little bit higher than was originally proposed, and I certainly feel comfortable with this. If we're going to use formulae for everything else in the Assembly when it comes to caucus offices, I think we have to use formulae when it comes to the amount of public dollars used for mailings.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Could I just double-check the figures again: \$48,000 for government members' caucus, and what were the next?

MS BARRETT: For the Official Opposition, \$40,000, and \$20,000 for the Liberal opposition.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

What we have here, then, are amendments to the motion of Taber-Warner, and the amendments are in the size of the amounts.

Edmonton-Whitemud, please.

11:54

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, speaking to the amendment, let me say I'm shocked. I'm stunned at the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, who I thought was a member of a party that at least made noises like they believed in information, they believed in democracy. Of all members of this committee to be making that type of amendment -- I can't comprehend it. I listened here as her colleague yesterday spoke on principle, the principles of freedom of information, flow of information, and then we have this type of restrictive capping. And it is restrictive; there is no other way of describing it. It'll be interesting when we come to the constituency budgets and the member realizes she's only going to be able to send out about 220 pieces a month on the average unless she has some other amendment there as well. Talk in terms of priorities mixed up, talk in terms of priorities wrong. We talk in terms of \$60,000 there, \$60,000 here, and here in an instant -- one of the most vital components of a democracy, one of the most vital components, is flow of information, freedom of information. To restrict it to this degree is beyond principle.

Secondly, if you looked at a formula at all, the very least that should have been looked at is that there are global mailings that all three caucuses will do. The government caucus will do a lot of those

through cabinet minister offices. I would suggest that if we have a global mailing on municipal affairs, it could be just as large as the New Democrat caucus. How many members we have in this Assembly does not affect that mail-out; that mail-out is still going to be the same size.

I'm angry about this, and I think it's ridiculous. For the Tory caucus to do it is one thing, but for the New Democrat caucus to restrict . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order please. Thank you, hon. member.

Other members wishing to speak to this amendment? Edmonton-Jasper Place, then Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman, listening to the speech of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, I wonder what he's speaking to. My colleague has just moved an amendment to try to get some more funds for the Liberal caucus to do more mailings. You'd think she had taken all his money away from the indignation we've heard.

I guess, hon. member, the difficulty here is the data, which unfortunately shows that the eight members of the Liberal caucus spend as much money in mailing as the remaining members of the Legislative Assembly, I suppose aside from those who are members of cabinet. I would think he's probably made the wrong speech on the wrong motion, because I shudder to think what kind of speech we'd get if there was an amendment to reduce the amount of dollars. Then, presumably, world war three would break out. I'm supporting my . . .

MR. WICKMAN: Principle, John. I'm talking principle.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. This is not question period. [interjection] Order.

MR. McINNIS: I know what it feels like to be on this side of the House now. Hey, it's kind of fun, you know.

On this matter, I think the generosity of my colleague's gesture should be supported by the members of the committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, in listening to the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, I'm surprised. I don't know what would have happened if we'd given him more than \$3,000. There's an additional \$3,000 in it. We heard the long story, but let's talk about caucus services just to put it in perspective. If we divide out like we did yesterday, because of an extra member in the Conservative caucus and the loss of one in the Liberal caucus, a rough amount of \$45,100 that the services are per member -- you divide that out in the ND caucus or the Liberal caucus and see what's left for the leader's allowance. We have in the ND caucus \$295,000, which, if memory serves me, was based on the average ministerial office, which was fair.

But we have in another caucus, the Liberal caucus -- it's half the size -- \$212,000; better than three-quarters of that. Why can't that be drawn from, Mr. Chairman? If we talk about fairness, the percentage is all askew in that. The one that is being treated far better, obviously, is the Liberal caucus or the Liberal leader's office, and the one that is treated -- I guess this isn't the right word, but for want of a better word -- more poorly is the ND caucus, because they have twice the members. I don't know what more the member could ask for. I mean, if they run out of mailing, they can come out of here. They've probably got an extra hundred thousand dollars in their caucus, percentage terms, than what members would suggest.

MS BARRETT: Yeah; that's why I'd like to adjust it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Speaking to the amendment.

MS BARRETT: I have no comment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm afraid, technically speaking, under Standing Orders you don't have a chance to speak to the amendment in summation. Unfortunately, I've been doing an awful lot of parliamentary reading again lately, so it comes out here. But thank you.

MS BARRETT: Do I get to speak to the amended motion though?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The amended motion, indeed.  
Is there a call for the question on the amendment?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the amendment as moved by Edmonton-Highlands, please signify. Opposed?

MR. WICKMAN: I'm voting against it on the principle.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Does that mean you wish to have a recorded vote?

MR. WICKMAN: If you want to, you can record it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, it's not up to the Chair to decide that.

MR. WICKMAN: I didn't ask for it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You didn't ask for it. Okay. Well, it carries. Thank you.

Now, on the amended motion, the Chair is only too happy to recognize Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Thank you very much. I'd like to clarify this. I want this on the record. If I was allowed to ask *Hansard* to put it in bold, I'd ask for it to be in bold and at about 16 or 18 points, okay?

Let me be really clear here, folks. This is about mailings between MLAs and their constituents. The way I've got it figured, there isn't that much of a variation. I mean, there's sometimes a big variation. Plus or minus 25 percent is pretty common, but plus or minus 25 percent does not compute to a difference between one caucus of eight spending more in mailings to their constituents than the combined caucuses of -- what? -- 74 MLAs. This is very clear. This is for mailing between the MLA and the constituents.

I do two MLA reports a year and two -- what do you call it? -- town hall meetings. I do unofficial town hall meetings at all my seniors' centres twice a year, and I'm available all the time. I do two specifically mailed legislative updates that I have from a mailing list, and I send out to my constituents matters related to my shadow portfolio. Even still, I have never once, not ever, had a complaint that I'm not communicating with my constituents. They hear from me -- I don't know -- six, eight times a year. Probably if they heard from me any more than that, they'd consider it junk mail.

We're not talking about party mailings that go to your entire membership list across the province. We're not talking about massive propaganda campaigns. This privilege given to members of this Assembly is related to our role as MLAs and our ability to

communicate with our constituents. I don't have my calculator here, but I'll tell you I'd be very interested to take \$76,000 that the Liberal caucus spent last year -- or was it more? -- and divide that by eight and then divide that again to see how many letters were mailed out. My guess is that if I were in one of the ridings represented by one of Liberals, I would be receiving probably two or three mailings a week from my MLA. I do consider that excessive. Quite frankly, I do. I don't think that's an appropriate use of the taxpayers' dollars. If you've got party propaganda to bring out -- like we're going to be doing tomorrow morning, okay? I mean, we're going to do a blitz. The New Democrats are going to do a blitz, right? When we want to go blitzing and knocking on doors, we do it ourselves.

End of sermon. Please type it in big typeface. This is between MLAs and their constituents.

12:04

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, either the Member for Edmonton-Highlands has to go back and do a bit of homework, find out what the rules of the House are, or else I do. Very clearly, there are two portions to a budget. There is a constituency budget, and the constituency budget allows a certain amount of postage for MLAs to deal with their constituents. The people in Edmonton-Whitemud: that's through my constituency budget.

This is not a constituency budget matter. This is a caucus budget, and as a caucus we communicate with a great deal more than the seven constituencies we currently represent. When we mail out 25,000 copies of A Single Great Nation or we mail out 25,000 copies of a document on health care or the environment or whatever, we're not restricting that to our constituents, Mr. Chairman. I don't think the intention of caucus budgets is to do that. The intention of caucus budgets is to allow us to communicate with all Albertans that want to communicate with us, because those that are not in one of our ridings at the present time may want to know: what do we represent? What do the New Democrats represent as a caucus -- not as a party, as a caucus? What is their position on health care in that caucus? If the Member for Edmonton-Highlands does not understand the basics of this type of budgeting and communication, I suggest she's got to go back to square A and get a bit of retraining and find out what life in the big House is all about.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Other additional comments with respect to the motion as amended?

Taber-Warner. This, then, is the summation, now that I've finally gone back a crack here.

MR. BOGLE: It's important to recognize, Mr. Chairman, that we are referring to costs of individual mailings between MLAs and their constituents -- their constituents. Now, that's in addition to the dollars provided under our constituency allocation. So I believe that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is misunderstanding the intent of this allocation. If, indeed, they're using the funds for purposes other than contained in the motion, then they should reassess their priorities. This order isn't something that we've just dreamt up. What the motion and the amendment to the motion are doing is refining what we've been doing all along. It's clearly to deal with mailings between the members and their constituents. I believe the member should sit down and discuss this matter further with officials in Leg. Assembly and get a clearer understanding of the purpose.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The motion before us . . .

MR. WICKMAN: Well, I do have a . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry, hon. member. You are out of order. As the Chair had mentioned before, the comments of Taber-Warner were the summation of the main motion as amended.

The motion before the committee is:

Legislative Assembly Freight and Postage expenditures paid from the MLA Administration budget to cover the cost of individual mailings between MLAs and their constituents from the caucus offices and from constituency offices are to be capped as follows: government members' caucus, \$48,000; Official Opposition caucus, \$40,000; Liberal opposition caucus, \$20,000.

To read into the record for clarification:

These amounts are calculated on projected expenditures for 1992-93 using the 1991 calendar year as a base . . . and the basis for calculations.

The two tables are attached to the original document.

If any caucus exceeds their designated amount they will have to pay for additional mailings out of caucus funds.

The Legislative Assembly Office will be required to monitor expenditures on a monthly basis and provide a status report to the chiefs of staff.

That's the motion about to be voted on. Those in favour, please signify. Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

Yesterday there was a second aspect to this with respect to constituency offices. I think most of you have the handout there moved by Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: I'll read it into the record, Mr. Chairman.

The constituency office portion of the freight and postage expenditures paid from the MLA administration budget is to be capped at \$100,200. This amount is to be divided by the number of constituencies, 83, which will provide each MLA with \$1,207 per year for postage for individual mailings out of the constituency offices.

The addition we put on is:

The Legislative Assembly Office will be required to monitor expenditures on a monthly basis and provide a status report to the Chiefs of Staff.

The intent of the motion, Mr. Chairman, is that the monitoring of the expenditures by the Leg. Assembly Office will keep the chiefs of staff and the respective caucuses briefed so that, for instance, in the ND caucus, where there are 16 members, the dollars in essence are pooled. We're not breaking them out on a constituency-by-constituency basis, but the calculation is based on each member, and therefore there's some flexibility in each caucus as to how the funds are used. The only role we're asking the Leg. Assembly Office to do is to keep our chiefs of staff informed of the outflow of dollars so that they can monitor, based on the percentage of the year left, the amount of funds which have been used.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Jasper Place, followed by Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. McINNIS: I recognize this as a consequential amendment to the motion just passed. As a true democrat I have to respect the will of the majority. I'd like to suggest an amendment that I think is a friendly one and that would perhaps just tighten up the wording a little. Basically, start with the word "constituencies," the number 83, strike out the rest of the sentence, and substitute:

and allocated to a global budget for each caucus on a per-member basis.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is that a friendly amendment in the eyes of the mover? The answer is yes, so that is now subsumed into any discussion.

MS BARRETT: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I have a call for the question. However, I did recognize Edmonton-Whitemud as wishing to participate.

MR. WICKMAN: Well, you cut off the mailings, Pam; you might as well try to cut off the free speech too, eh?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, that's totally out of order. Do you wish to retract your remarks, apologize, or something like that?

MR. WICKMAN: No, I don't, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, then I have to allow the member at least the right to respond.

MS BARRETT: That's right. On a point of order. I called "question" while I was looking down, and not hearing anybody else, I assumed that that meant that there was no controversy. I don't feel I have an obligation to turn my head all the way around the room to see if someone may or may not have stuck their hand up while I was or was not looking. I couldn't know. If you'd put your hand up 60 seconds before that, I wouldn't have noticed. So please, member, don't be rude about this.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you about to apologize or what?

MR. WICKMAN: No, Mr. Chairman, I have no . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you, hon. member.

We have a motion before us. Any other discussion on the motion? Is there a call for the question on the motion? All those in favour of the motion? Opposed? Carried. Thank you.

I'm sure you'll have opportunity to dialogue elsewhere than in the committee.

Other items of business. I think now we've picked up everything that's going to reflect on the budget, Clerk?

DR. McNEIL: Just in order to implement the last two motions. We estimated the amount of funds for postage originally at \$300,000. As a result of these changes, we now estimate that the postage budget will be \$260,000. That's the number that we put in the budget here, so we'll need an approval of the MLA Administration budget figure which includes that reduction. It was listed as \$300,000 yesterday; it's now at \$260,000 today.

12:14

MR. CHAIRMAN: On that, with respect to the procedure, having taken into account these motions of the last two days, the Chair requests some direction from the members. Do we wish to then go back and approve each section of the budget all the way through? Or we'll take one omnibus motion to deal with it? Omnibus is what I'm seeing. Thank you; in a moment.

Cypress-Redcliff, on another matter.

MR. HYLAND: Accept as amended, MLA Administration budget. Right?

DR. McNEIL: We've reflected that in here now.

MR. HYLAND: Or should I say, "as presented," not "as amended"?

MS BARRETT: No. The best thing to do is just a motion to authorize that these recalculations be deemed accurate and give them the authority.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. We have a motion to that effect, bearing in mind the recalculations.

MS BARRETT: Is that okay now?

MR. HYLAND: Yeah.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That everything would be approved as decided by the committee. Is there a call for the question on that?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour, please signify. Opposed? Carried. I'll take that as being our omnibus motion for the whole issue. Thank you.

All right. Red Deer-North with respect to another item of business.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just for information purposes for each of us here and for members to take this information to various caucuses should they wish to do so, the government caucus has been looking at the question of pensions, and we'll be proposing legislation in the spring session that will affect pensions, specifically in two areas. One would be the area of total contributions by current MLAs to be increasing by 33 and a third percent. MLAs would pay 9 percent of salary and contributions and an additional 1 percent surcharge.

The other area that has received some study and some decision from our caucus is the area of the so-called double-dipping practice of paying pensions from the MLA pension plan to sitting MLAs and government employees in respect of their previous positions. That was something that was brought in in 1969 by a previous government. The legislation will propose that that practice will cease, and it would be subject to three conditions. Ex-MLAs who are currently employed by the government would continue to receive their pension but only for the duration of their current job and then that would cease. Also, current MLAs who would be receiving ministerial pension under the same principle will cease receiving that benefit at the next election if they are to be re-elected. That benefit would then cease. Current ministers who leave cabinet before the next election, again, may draw the ministerial pension under the present provision, but only until the next election. At that point, that would cease.

That's provided by way of information, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, this little consultation here is about the fact -- because I need to put the question to the committee: do the members feel, given the jurisdictional authority of this committee, that we should have one or two motions coming out of this that the committee endorses, or is it your wish with respect to your own responsibilities and authority to have the government just go ahead and present a Bill? That's the reason I'm having some difficulty here in the Chair.

Edmonton-Jasper Place, Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman, this is a matter, as I understand it, which does require legislation regardless of what happens in this committee, because we're operating under transitional provisions which expire August 31 this year. To say that there will be legislation is just a plain fact of life.

If this committee were to attempt to block legislation, it would put us in a difficult if not impossible situation. If we were to have motions on the matter in this committee, they might not be the motions that some people expect. Given that this matter will be debated in the Assembly, therefore it is in the Assembly's court because the Assembly did pass legislation with a sunset clause. I don't think they do that unless they anticipate dealing with it before the sun shall set. So I think the information is received and noted.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Highlands, and then Edmonton-Whitemud.

MS BARRETT: No; John said what I was going to say.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I believe this is a good opportunity for this committee to discuss the implications of pension reform. I think it's long overdue. I see the electorate out there that are demanding pension reform, and I mean pension reform that puts our pensions more in line with what's happening out there in the real world. It should be dealt with in public; no need to deal with that in camera. To have this committee make recommendations, particularly if all three caucuses could agree to it, for good constructive change to our whole pension plan I think would be enlightening. It would demonstrate to Albertans out there that we are concerned, all three caucuses are concerned, that we want to be fair about this.

It's easy, I think, for us and the New Democrats in opposition to sit back and take a role where we're not going to be responsible, where we're going to say that we'll let government bring that forward during the Legislative Assembly because we know we're going to oppose the thing in all likelihood anyhow and government members are going to boot it through, so we're going to get the cake and we're going to get to eat it too. I think here, though, gives us a more detailed, a more meaningful opportunity for discussion, where the same rules don't apply, where some member can't call closure for debate and so on and so forth.

I commend the Member for Red Deer-North for bringing forward some preliminary initiatives. I don't believe they go nearly far enough, but at least it's a start. At least he's addressing it, and I say let's take that and build upon it, and let's do something good here that we can recommend to our entire Legislative Assembly that all three caucuses support and all three caucuses in the Legislative Assembly can report and show all Albertans that all MLAs are truly concerned about this issue.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Red Deer-North, and then Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. DAY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud appreciating this initiative. I think, however, he's misread maybe the intentions and remarks of Edmonton-Jasper Place and possibly my own as it related to this being a piece of information. As the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place said, this will be coming to the Legislature for a very full, open discussion and debate, even more full than we are having here today, although I think the member was mistaken. I think he thought we were in camera today, and we are not. So for those reasons and because his caucus may well have other information or suggestions that they may want to add, the full Assembly is legitimately the place for these discussions. That's why this has come out as information only today.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Thank you. Well, I speak against the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud's comments, that we should be dealing with this today in this committee. I think this is the same sort of territory that should go to an independent committee and should not be dealt with by people whose lives are directly affected by the outcome; in other words, it's a conflict of interest issue, as far as I'm concerned, for MLAs to be dealing with their pensions. I don't think it is appropriate for this committee to be dealing with that. I also don't think it's appropriate for the Legislature itself to be dealing with it, unless it is in the form of accepting a recommendation from an independent committee, one that operates at arm's length from us.

I don't know; did Percy make a motion for us to deal with this? Because if he did, I'm going to move that we send this matter to an independent committee comprised of a judge, the president of the chamber of commerce, the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour, and one person who's living on a fixed income, just like I did before. I just do not want this matter to come to this committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think, hon. members, that perhaps we could have a five-minute adjournment here and reconvene at 12:30, please.

[The committee adjourned from 12:24 p.m. to 12:34 p.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, hon. members. Prior to the break there was some exchange of dialogue between a couple of members, so the Chair doesn't know whether there's a motion on the table or not. Are there some motions to come from Red Deer-North or somewhere?

MS BARRETT: What do you want to do? I mean, I'm prepared to proceed with mine. Do you have a separate motion?

MR. DAY: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Well, now that I understand that you have some motions, since you brought the matter up, then I really feel we should deal with those motions or motion first. Okay? Then we can go from there. First off, from Red Deer-North.

MR. DAY: Well, given the discussion we've had to this point on the information which I previously brought forward as information, I would make two motions, then, that would deal with this information, the first being

that the committee would agree, in terms of contribution rates, to total contributions by current MLAs to be increased by 33 and one-third percent, MLAs paying 9 percent of salary in contributions and an additional 1 percent surcharge matched by the Legislative Assembly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That was number one. Thank you.

On the motion, Edmonton-Highlands, followed by Edmonton-Whitemud.

MS BARRETT: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I need clarification of a voting matter here. My motion would say that we're not dealing with this subject matter at all, that an independent commission would. So in that case, am I allowed to absent myself from a vote on this?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You could do what would be normal practice: if you wish to go make a phone call before I call the vote or when I call the vote.

MS BARRETT: But I can't officially say I refuse to vote on this?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, because it's as in the Chamber: you have to vote. But you can take a brief walk, if you wish.

MS BARRETT: Yeah, okay. Well, I'd like to be on the record, then, as commenting and saying that I really do not believe MLAs should be dealing with this issue. I understand that what Stock is saying is that we're going to pay a great deal more in our pension contributions. Generally speaking, I think that's probably really appropriate, but the minute you start saying what is appropriate and what is inappropriate, you're into a big, substantive issue which I believe puts us all into an inherent conflict of interest, because we're voting on things that pertain to ourselves.

I object to this motion. Because I can't officially, you know, abstain, I'll have to leave when the question is called.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's in accord with Standing Orders. Thank you.

Edmonton-Whitemud, Taber-Warner.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to make an amendment to the motion. The amendment would read:

... as an interim measure, to be followed by the establishment of an independent commission to review and recommend on all aspects of the MLA pension.

Speaking to the amendment, I think what the member has done as an interim step is good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I now have another difficulty. Because I've had previous notice from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands that that would be the substance of a motion which she would proceed to offer to this group after disposition of the motions by the government, therefore I have to rule your amendment out of order.

MR. WICKMAN: But the difficulty, Mr. Chairman, if you'll allow me, is that an amendment normally is dealt with first to give oneself direction as to whether you can then agree with the overall philosophy of that main motion. That's the purpose of an amendment, to adjust the main motion so it becomes compatible with one's philosophy.

The motion as presented, without some assurances that the amendment is going to be part of it, is not acceptable to me because that's only an interim gap. We've got to go beyond that. I want to see if we can first nail that down, and then we can get to the main motion with the meat on it. From a parliamentary point of view, normally that is the way it's done.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your comments speaking to the purported point of order, but the Chair still rules that your amendment is out of order.

Now, with respect to the motion by Red Deer-North.

MR. WICKMAN: Yeah, but can I still speak on it though?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, if you keep your remarks to the motion, please.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, as an interim measure, as one measure of what I would hope would be many, many measures in terms of pension reform, yes, I can support this, because it is one step in that direction towards pension reform that I think does send out a proper message to Albertans. What it means is that we as MLAs recognize that our contribution in the past has not been up to par, that our contribution has led to an unfunded liability within our

plan of somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$30 million. And when we're asking other people or when government is asking other people to pay a surcharge when our plan is so blatantly underfunded, it makes it difficult for people to see any seriousness behind any intent of dealing with the unfunded portion of the pension. So I think that this is an interim step. It's one good interim step, but there are many more steps that have to be taken to ensure overall pension reform.

So on that basis, yes, I will support this one aspect.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Edmonton-Jasper Place, Taber-Warner.

MR. HYLAND: I think Taber-Warner was first.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry. That's correct. Wrong piece of paper here.

MR. BOGLE: Well, I wanted to begin by reminding members of the committee that the matter was brought to our attention by Stockwell as a report in his capacity as Whip of government caucus. The matters which he reported to us on are matters which have already come before government caucus and have been decided upon, so he was letting the committee know. We are strengthening that now in terms of a motion so that the matter can be debated in this full committee.

I think it's important that members of the committee reflect on previous decisions made regarding the pension contributions. Percy, you might wish to do a bit of research. You'll find that indeed our contributions were increased when Lou Hyndman was Provincial Treasurer. We added to the amounts being paid by members of the Assembly towards their pension plan.

I'm fully in support of the motion which has been made by Stockwell. Members will realize, when comparing the proposed new premium rates here with those of the federal government, the two territories, and the nine provinces in Canada, that that will bring us to the top range. Many other jurisdictions are doing far less in terms of contributions being made toward their pension plans.

So I think the matter has been outlined properly by Stockwell, and I support the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman, I want to make it clear that my position is that every element of an MLA's pay and benefits should be set by an independent tribunal -- and my colleague has outlined the structure and form of such a tribunal -- if there's any opportunity at all to make such a referral, which seems to me is a typical way that this committee deals with motions that are put before it. From time to time we refer matters to subcommittees; we refer matters elsewhere; for example, to the minister of public works, who is a member of this committee. So I don't think it's at all out of scope for this committee to refer this matter to a committee or at least to make such a recommendation. In fact, I'm not certain whether we could actually do it.

I just would like to respond to my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. His position, as I understand it, is that he wants to deal, himself, with every element of the package that he thinks is politically popular -- i.e., an increase in premiums -- and to refer every matter that he thinks is unpopular, perhaps an adjustment in benefits or qualification or something along those lines. I would say, with all respect, that you just can't cherry pick on a matter such as this. If your position is that the matter should be set independently, then that should be your position. You shouldn't say,

"The things that I think I can defend in my constituency I'll vote on and speak on, but the things that I have trouble with I want to have somebody else refer to."

I also take very great exception to his comment to the effect that there's a cake-and-eat-it-too position here, because there's not. There's a clear position, and it's not one that we're likely to deviate from.

I think that I'm just asking for clarification here. Is the ruling that this matter can't be referred from this committee?

12:44

MR. CHAIRMAN: What the Chair has said is that the intent of that amendment I will not accept as an amendment here, having made the commitment prior to Edmonton-Highlands that after dealing with the two government motions, her motion -- and then depending on the wording of her motion as to the route of referral -- would then be dealt with. So at that time we would then deal with it, when we get what the exact wording is of that particular motion.

MR. McINNIS: Thank you for the clarification. It just seems to me that it's difficult to structure a motion to refer without having a motion to set up the tribunal. My preference would be to table all of these motions until the motion with the tribunal is set up, and then we can decide whether or not to refer these matters or deal with them or what to do with them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: In that case, hon. member, the Chair cannot advise you what you should do, but you have mentioned one recourse of action that you could take under advisement. You could act upon it with respect to the one motion that's before us at the moment.

Motion to table. No discussion? Those in favour of tabling this motion, please signify. Opposed? Motion to table fails. Thank you.

Additional speakers with regard to this motion? Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, just briefly. Even the acceptance of this motion that outlines what will be in the Bill doesn't stop any debate when that Bill is introduced, because it's a separate Bill of the Legislature. It can be amended by anyone or any caucus in the House. We can change it. It doesn't mean to say that it goes out of the House like it comes into it. It can be in whatever form we so desire, because in reality this is just the first kick at it, in comparison to what it may look like when it leaves here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Additional speakers? Call for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The motion before us is with respect to a 33 and a third percent increase, and this gives the percentage plus 1 percent surcharge. For the record let it be noted that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands has absented herself from the voting.

Those in favour of the motion?

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman, I think because of the way this thing's gotten moved around, I have to join my colleague.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. For the record let it be noted that Edmonton-Jasper Place has absented himself.

All those in favour of the motion, please signify.

Now, what's this? Is this summation?

MR. DAY: Yes, summation. Just briefly, reiterating what was said by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands: all this comes before the Legislature. Any number of variations or amendments can be added, and with deference to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, it should be noted clearly and . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Excuse me half a moment.

Edmonton-Jasper Place and Edmonton-Highlands, please come in, because I will record that you left when the vote took place. It was not my understanding that there was to be summation, so out of courtesy you should indeed be here to hear this, and then we'll do it.

Please continue.

MR. DAY: Just in deference to some comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, these are sensitive issues, and it should not be construed from her remarks that she is voting against this in principle but because another motion is coming forward. I just wanted to make that point and also to say that this is coming before the Legislature for any amount of amendment, discussion, or debate.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Now the motion. Those in favour, please signify. Opposed? Let the record show it's carried unanimously. Thank you.

All right. Second motion, Red Deer-North, please.

MR. DAY: The motion, Mr. Chairman, would read:

The practice of paying pensions from the MLA pension plan to sitting MLAs and government employees in respect of their previous positions will cease subject to the following conditions:

- (1) that ex-MLAs now employed by the government would continue to receive the pensions only for the duration of their current job, and then they would cease;
- (2) that current MLAs receiving ministerial pensions will also cease receiving that benefit at the next election if they are elected; and
- (3) that current ministers who leave cabinet before the next election may draw the ministerial pension but only until the next election if re-elected.

Having said that, if I can get some clarification on the definition of part-time just before I close, I'd add that in there. I wonder if that could be clarified for us.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Clerk, who is going to do this.

DR. McNEIL: It's my understanding that at least under the public service management pension plan there is a provision that if the period of employment exceeds four months or 84 working days during a calendar year, then the payment of pensions is suspended until the termination of employment, and there's a provision, upon written application by both the employer and the pensioner, to extend the period of re-employment to eight months or 168 working days per year without affecting the pension.

MR. DAY: Then the part-time provisions will apply in respect to this motion. That's just to cover the fact that if a retired MLA is asked to sit on a board a couple of times a year, it's not going to cost him or her their pension.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. We have those elements within this motion.

Taber-Warner.

MR. BOGLE: As was the case in our caucus discussion, I would excuse myself for the discussion and any vote.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. The Member for Taber-Warner, for the record, has now left the room because elements of this proposal relate to himself. He'll be absent for the discussion as well as for the vote. Thank you.

I always wondered about the provisions in Standing Orders for that, and it's nice to see the dust come off them.

Edmonton-Highlands, please.

MS BARRETT: I speak in favour of the principle of this motion but against some of the details. As members of this committee will know, it's the New Democrat caucus that has sponsored legislation dealing with this issue before. It is our view that the minute the legislation is passed is the minute it should become effective for sitting MLAs. However, I don't think I'll be in contradiction if I say that I'm going in favour of the principle of this motion. We'll deal with the subject matter when legislation comes in front of us, because we will certainly be sponsoring amendments with respect to the legislation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Other comments? Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, again my comments are very similar to my comments on the previous motion in that it is a step in the right direction. It is a positive measure; however, again it doesn't go far enough. It talks in terms of no double-dipping with some exceptions; in other words, a member is allowed to double-dip for the remainder of a term in the sense that they may be part of a cabinet when they're shuffled down. If they're shuffled down as a private member, they're still allowed, in my interpretation of the member's motion, to draw a pension based on the difference for a period of time.

Under no circumstances should double-dipping be allowed. We have situations, Mr. Chairman, where we have triple-dipping, where we have people that will leave this particular government or the federal government and run for another level of government, meanwhile drawing a pension. They go on to receive pay as an elected representative in some other office. After that, there's another pension they're eligible for, and sometimes we see political appointments made to those same people. On top of all that triple-dipping, they leave this House with up to 12 months' pay. So there is no question that it is very, very lucrative for those individuals that choose to follow that particular manner.

I think that should all be stopped. I don't think there are any excuses whatsoever for any matters that involve double-dipping. The office of elected representative, of Member of the Legislative Assembly is very sacred. It should be held in the highest of trust. The taxpayer out there should feel comfortable that MLAs are there to benefit the community, to benefit Alberta, not to see how they can enhance their pensions and draw from political appointments and do by themselves very, very well. I think it's wrong. I think it's time it stopped, and we have an opportunity to stop it.

12:54

MR. CHAIRMAN: Additional comments?

MR. DAY: The provision for the practice of paying pensions to sitting MLAs and government employees is something that was in place I believe in 1969, before this government. Our caucus and, as I recognize, other caucuses also are agreeing that it's not appropriate. That's why it's being dealt with at this time.

The other principle involved is that since this has been in place since 1969, people made career decisions and financial decisions based on what was already in place and offered in contracts. So that



principle is also being acknowledged. It is going to stop; the practice will be over. As you know, an election has to be called within five years of the last one, which would be 1994, so we're talking that because of prior contractual agreement, some few cases may continue for another year or year and a half at the most. But the practice has, in fact, and will cease.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the motion, please signify. Opposed? Carried unanimously. Perhaps you can invite Taber-Warner back in.

As chairman and as Speaker, I'd like to make just a brief comment, because part of my role and responsibility is to try to adjudicate fairness on behalf of all members. I want to share with you a little concern about the word "dipping"; that in the public eye a number of people see that as getting something you're not entitled to or that you perform no service to entitle you to get it. I think a number of people see it as being some very seamy activity, that you're accessing funds in a secretive manner. That, of course, is not the case, as you all know. I think that's the difficulty I have when I hear the word "dipping," when in actual fact the people that are receiving these various pensions -- one or two or whatever -- in their present employment are having what they're legally entitled to. My only concern in raising this is the fact, hon. members, that no doubt you're more creative than I and we could find some other phrase for this thing which creates less of a feeling that something nefarious is going on. I applaud the fact that the whole matter is headed towards a resolution.

Thank you, hon. members.

Now we have the motion from Edmonton-Highlands. Let's hear what the wording is, please.

MS BARRETT: Thank you. I think the wording is very similar to that which I proposed a couple of years ago when deliberating our level of pay. I can't undo the motions that just passed, but what I now propose is

that all matters related to setting MLA pensions, pay, and benefits be referred to an independent committee comprised of a Provincial Court judge, the president of the Alberta Chamber of Commerce, the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour, a member of a rural municipal district, and a person living on a fixed income, for determination.

I wrote that out, Louise, if you want it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Chair must ask two parts to this for clarification. First, it's the understanding that this committee cannot strike such a committee legally. So the first line would have to be something along the line of "would urge the government" to do so.

MS BARRETT: Yeah, okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That would look after one.

MS BARRETT: "That this committee recommend to the Assembly that all matters . . ."

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry; it has to be "the government."

Mr. Ritter, would you like to speak to that so they can hear you.

MR. RITTER: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Either the Members' Services Committee or the Assembly only has the right to strike a committee or a subcommittee comprised solely of their own members. Only government can create a commission which involves outsiders of the House.

MS BARRETT: That's not true. The Leg. Assembly created the commission for electoral boundaries.

MR. RITTER: Mr. Chairman, that was in fact a creation of statute, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act.

MS BARRETT: Oh, I see what you're saying. Okay, sorry. Yeah, you're right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. So this, then, would be amended to: "urge the government" to do so.

MS BARRETT: To: "urge the government . . ."

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

I need to ask another question here. I understand that flowing from these recommendations, the item of pensions is indeed within it.

MS BARRETT: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The matter of pay has not been at issue here. As chairman I don't hear any vibrations to say that we want to go out and have our pay schedules re-examined or new pay stuff or the benefits. That's my concern here. I'm quite willing to have a little break to talk about the wording, if that's needed, but if not, carry on.

MR. McINNIS: Don't forget that this is a motion that's not necessarily related to the other. You see, when we decided to break them apart and deal with the other motions first, clearly it's our position that pensions are a part of the compensation package. What we're not saying is that one part has to go to arbitration and the others don't. So that's why it's worded in that way.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Again from the Chair, I just don't want us to raise any false . . .

MS BARRETT: No, I understand. If I can clarify. This is very similar to a motion I sponsored a couple of years ago, and I used pay and benefits. I hadn't had in mind anything about pensions, so now I'm just saying pensions, pay, and benefits. I meant at the time of moving the last motion for it to be a catchall for that, for the compensation package, so that is the general intent.

MR. McINNIS: On a point of order. There's no anticipation on anybody's part here that the pay issue is on the table at the present time. This is for future reference.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. So to borrow a phrase from Edmonton-Highlands earlier, this then would be in *Hansard* underlined, bold-faced, 38 point, and so forth -- neon lights. The issue here is to try to come to grips with the pension matter solely. Thank you.

All right, that is the motion before us. Do you wish to speak to that, Edmonton-Highlands, or to do it in summation? Any additional points? Thank you.

Edmonton-Whitemud, then Red Deer-North.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to be able to support the motion as brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. It's very, very close, in fact identical, with the exception of the last component, the last person on the commission, to the public affairs program I did on CBC some time ago which referred

specifically to a member from the seniors community. The member here is referring to a person on a fixed income, which is fair enough because most seniors are persons who are on fixed incomes. So whether one uses the terminology "seniors" or the terminology "fixed income," I think it's good because it represents that fifth component that I think is so vital. It's very interesting. Again the wording from my script there was very specific: from a municipal district. So it does cover those components.

I commend the member for keeping an eye on public affairs and when she sees a good idea, to latch onto that idea and try and promote it. I thank you for doing that, to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. There's no shame in being a follower occasionally.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Red Deer-North.

1:04

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, it's not so much a matter of a problem with the principle of the motion, just as Edmonton-Highlands had no problem with the principle of the motion I a few minutes ago proposed, but there are some elements of practice here that have just raised questions in my mind so that I'd have to oppose the motion in terms of practicality at this particular point.

First of all, there is agreement on the two items that have already been mentioned in terms of raising the rates by 33 and a third percent and ending the practice of paying pensions from the plan to sitting MLAs. We already said that there could well be other amendments that come forward, and at that particular time in the Legislature this one, I'm sure, will come forward and all members will have an opportunity to discuss. There is a sense from our own caucus that at least on the two items that we've already voted on, we've already heard from a committee, and it's the committee of all the taxpayers in the province. They have told us directly without the need of an independent committee: deal with these items. We'd like to show and demonstrate that, that we are listening to the taxpayers, listening to these concerns, and in fact without an independent committee, we are suggesting at least these two particular concerns.

So for those particular areas and also because I'm not quite sure in my own mind about our area of jurisdiction in this particular area in terms of the independent committee, and although I do appreciate the explanations I've been offered, those are the reasons that I would be voting against this.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Further discussion on this motion? Question?

MR. HYLAND: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Highlands, I just wanted to check. Your colleague seemed to be on a flight of something here.

Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: I simply want to praise my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands for her consistency on this issue over the years.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There we are. It's always nice to compliment each other. There's not much encouragement sometimes in this business.

All right. Edmonton-Highlands in summation.

MS BARRETT: In summation, first I should acknowledge the work of my predecessors in the research office where I now work, because a long time ago they made these recommendations to the late Grant Notley, who also sponsored such motions in committee and in the Legislature. So I'm sorry to tell the Member for Edmonton-

Whitemud that what he said on *Provincial Affairs* a few weeks or months ago is not by his hand. I know that this is on record from the late Leader of the Official Opposition as early as 1975, Mr. Chairman. So if anything at all, one would have to congratulate the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for finally coming onside. I recall twice, in August and September of 1989, when he opposed me on this motion, so I'm very pleased that he's come onside.

Also, I would like to say that I understand the position that the Member for Red Deer-North made with respect to his concerns, and I'm glad that he is in principle supportive of the concept of this. I agree he is right in one respect: he has heard from the taxpayers. But I still maintain that even if you're not hearing from the committee of the taxpayers, you should have this stuff dealt with independently. You never have to put yourself in a conflict of interest situation again.

With that I thank all the members who are supporting this motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the motion, please signify. Opposed? The matter is defeated. Recorded vote: 5-3.

[For the motion: Ms Barrett, Mr. McInnis, Mr. Wickman]

[Against the motion: Mr. Day, Dr. Elliott, Mr. Hyland, Mr. Kowalski, Mrs. Mirosh]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. members. The Chair believes that we've come to the end of our agenda.

Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Chairman, I would move that we adjourn and that the next meeting is at the call of the Chair.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Those in favour of the motion, please signify. Opposed, if any? Carried unanimously. Thank you all.

[The committee adjourned at 1:08 p.m.]