

# Alberta

## Veteran MLAs face golden retirement

Trynchy, Kowalski will get the biggest combination of pension and severance pay under new plan

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Several MLAs will collect the now defunct gold-plated pension while also taking home the new severance allowance when they leave office.

They include Speaker Ken Kowalski, the driving force behind recent hikes in MLA pay and severance, as well as other Conservatives and the leaders of the two opposition parties.

MLAs voted this week to double the money they collect upon leaving office to a maximum of two years' pay, or about \$115,000.

Kowalski chairs the three-party MLA committee that oversees pay and perks. It approved the allowance along with a five-per-cent salary hike and provisions tying further adjustments to annual changes in the average weekly earnings of Albertans.

Alberta Treasury spokesperson Shannon Taylor wouldn't divulge exactly how much Kowalski or other MLAs will collect from the pension plan killed by Premier Ralph Klein's government about five years ago.

That kind of private information can't be released until after an MLA

### Going-Away Presents

**Pension:** Pensions can be collected when the MLA's age plus years of service totals 55 or more.

**Severance:** Under the old system MLAs could leave office with one month's pay per year of service to a maximum of one year's salary. Now, they can collect two months pay for every year of service to a maximum of 24 months. The new rate is based on the number of years an MLA serves, starting in 1989. The pay is calculated on the base salaries of MLAs which rose to \$57,502.50 from \$54,630 as of Oct. 1. Allowances paid to cabinet ministers and the premier are not factored into the severance.



Kowalski

Other MLAs who can collect pension and the new severance: The Conservatives are: Health Minister Halvar Jonson, Wainwright MLA Butch Fischer, Dunvegan MLA Glen Clegg, Treasurer Stockwell Day, Energy Minister Steve West and Community Development Minister Shirley McClellan. Liberal Leader Nancy MacBeth. New Democrat Leader Pam Barrett.

begins to collect the benefits.

However, a *Journal* estimate based on the formula used shows Kowalski will receive about \$54,000 annually.

Whitecourt-St. Anne MLA Peter Trynchy, a former cabinet minister first elected in 1971, is eligible for a pension in the \$80,000 range as well as the new allowance.

Health Minister Halvar Jonson and Wainwright MLA Butch Fischer, both

elected in 1982, are each eligible for annual pensions in the \$40,000 range.

Three other Conservatives elected in 1986 — Energy Minister Steve West, Treasurer Stockwell Day, and Dunvegan MLA Glen Clegg — can collect small pensions. Their annual benefits will be less than half of Kowalski's.

Community Development Minister Shirley McClellan, elected in a 1987 byelection, can also collect a small pen-

sion.

In addition to their pensions, they will all be eligible for the maximum severance under the new formula if they remain in office for three more years.

New Democrat Leader Pam Barrett, who supported the pay increase, will also be eligible for both the pension and the new severance package. She said the inequity between MLAs who get pensions and those who don't didn't occur to her at the time of the meeting. However, she defended Kowalski's motives.

"I can see how it might look bad but I've known Ken Kowalski for years and I must say, he's tried to look out for all MLAs."

Barrett is eligible for an annual pension of \$18,621 based on her years as an MLA between 1986 and 1993. She has not been drawing on the pension since returning to the legislature in 1997.

She will be able to collect severance under the new formula when she leaves office. It will be calculated from her re-election in '97.

Liberal MLA Percy Wickman said letting MLAs collect pensions and the full severance allowance "is a form of double dipping" but he also defended

Kowalski.

"I think he takes his role as the Speaker seriously. I think he saw this as an attempt to act as a bridge between the three parties. I'm going to give this one to Ken."

Wickman voted for the package.

The only Liberal currently in the house who can receive a pension is Leader Nancy MacBeth who was receiving an annual pension of \$34,680 based on her years as a Conservative MLA. She hasn't been drawing the pension since she was elected for the Liberals in the Edmonton-McClung byelection earlier this year.

She will also collect the new severance. Like Barrett, her years of service will be calculated from the date of her most recent election victory.

The six government MLAs on the committee who supported the increased pay and severance were: Tory Whip Rob Renner (Medicine Hat), David Coutts (Livingstone-Macleod), Victor Doerksen (Red Deer-South), Heather Forsyth (Calgary-Fish Creek), Denis Herard (Calgary Egmont) and Wayne Jacques (Grande Prairie Wapiti).

Liberals Sue Olsen and Linda Sloan voted against the package.



## Reform shrugs off ballot spoilers

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A senior Senate campaign organizer for the Reform party is shrugging off efforts by disgruntled Albertans to spoil their ballots in the upcoming election.

"People are free to choose what they want to do with their ballot in a democratic election,"

to pick two senators-in-waiting "a joke." He has vowed to ignore the winners.

The Liberals, NDP and Tories refused to enter candidates. Of the four men in the race, three are card-carrying Reformers.

"People spoil ballots all the time in municipal, provincial and federal elections. They're allowed to," Anders said. "I guess we'll judge by the results."

had greater popular support, 3.1 per cent of the ballots were spoiled. That was 10 times greater than the number typically spoiled in a provincial election.

Anders expects a minuscule number of Albertans will take such a negative step. "Most people who go to cast a ballot are doing so to vote for some kind of positive change. Most people