

FORTY-THIRD ANNUAL MEETING

of the

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Swampscott, Massachusetts, June, 1921

SESSIONS OF THE COUNCIL

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AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION COUNCIL.

FIRST SESSION.

New Ocean House, Swampscott, Mass.

Tuesday, June 21, 1921, 8.30 p. m.

Miss ALICE S. TYLER, President, Presiding:

Those of you who were at the mid-winter meeting in Chicago will recall that we made a beginning in the discussion of this very important subject of library revenues. We had two papers that seemed to throw a good deal of light on this vexed question, but we simply made a beginning.

There are a good many of us who feel that when we discuss this subject we are dealing with a really fundamental difficulty of the whole situation, and that we ought to approach it from as many angles as possible. You recall the paper presented by Mr. Ranck at that meeting. We want to pursue this subject further. The chairman of the A. L. A. Committee on Legislation has been gathering information through the year in connection with his committee work, and it seemed to us that at this time we would profit greatly by hearing from him, so that we have asked Mr. Yust to open this discussion, which we hope will be very free and informal, on the subject of recent legislation and its effect on library revenues.

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The PRESIDENT. For the best of reasons Mr. Hicks asked to be excused from his topic on the program this evening, and we will

pass to the immediate discussion of the question raised in Mr. Yust's paper: Shall public library boards have the power to levy the library tax?

This question has been discussed with more or less thoroughness in the past, but a good many of us had our attention brought to it in a renewed manner by a communication in one of our library periodicals a few months ago quite definitely taking a negative point of view.

We have asked Mr. William J. Hamilton, the secretary of the Commission Indiana Library, to present the question from his point of view.

Mr. WILLIAM J. HAMILTON.

It seems rather unnecessary for me to answer this question, should the library boards have the power to levy the library tax, when Mr. Yust has presented practically all the arguments I had to add. Nevertheless, this is a perfectly good paper I am going to read to you, notwithstanding that I am going to waste my thunder. My answer to the question under discussion is, yes, indeed.

(Insert manuscript of Mr. William J. Hamilton.)

The PRESIDENT. I would like to ask if Mr. Carson is in the room. (Mr. Carson rising.) We will next hear regarding the Ontario tax law, in which I know many of us are interested, and that will be given by Mr. W. O. Carson who has done so much to advance the library work in the Province of Ontario. (Applause.)

Mr. W. O. CARSON.

Madam President and fellow members of the Council, and visitors: I do not think Mr. Hamilton has the slightest idea

how he has aroused my righteous indignation. You do not know how I feel toward him after what he says about members of councils. In the days of my youth and innocency I was an alderman, ladies and gentlemen, and I hardly know just how to attack this man, and I would like to do it in public. I wanted to be an alderman, not for graft but for experience, and knowing that I was of the full age of 21 years, and a British subject, I had the right to run for alderman. So in my own bedroom I held a committee with myself and me, and decided that I should run.

Next morning I met an influential man on the street, and I said, "Why don't they put some young fellows on the council?" and he said, "Yes, that would be a good idea. Why don't you run?" That was what I was after.

I went to the newspaper office, and I put in an article, that, complying with the wishes of a large number of citizens, I was offering myself as a candidate. And a lot of men promised to vote for me. Then both papers published a complimentary article about me, telling what I had done and what I could do. I was not misrepresented in those articles. I had no illwill toward the newspapers, as I wrote those articles myself. If any of you arise to eminence of that kind, take my example, do not be under any obligation to the newspapers. I was under no obligation to them, as I paid them both 15 cents a line for the articles. And I went into the council an independent man.

Now, in regard to this important subject,--and I do not think the A. L. A.---I mean the ones who are not here tonight---have the slightest idea what it really means, that on library income the success of our work depends. I hope all of those who are outside and would not come in and show an interest in this fundamental subject will not receive an increase in salary during the next

five years (applause). While I have no ecclesiastical standing, I will give my blessing to all that are in here, that you will all get a substantial increase before Christmas.

I say this in all seriousness that the one thing that is holding our country back most has been that they have been trying to build five story buildings on foundations intended for one story, trying to win success through various means of internal management and everything but the right thing.

(Reading from manuscript.)

Now, anything I say concerning this, I hope you will not confuse with what a library can demand on its own right and get, whether the council wants to pay it or not, and what the board can get. It is a different proposition altogether.

(Reading from manuscript.)

We believe that the principle is sound. I do not want those present to confuse the idea of this 50 cents even with the principle involved. I think the principle is sound, and it is the right principle. If you want to quarrel with me about the amount, I will have nothing to say.

(Reading from manuscript.)

That was a principle they adopted that the library should be managed by a board, and that that board should be independent, and to make it independent the appointing powers were divided. The appointing boards are all elected bodies, and there are three different boards.

I will give an illustration. There was a little row on in a council in Ontario, and the council wanted to stampede that, but by a certain law they were unable to do it. One man said to my face, "What redress have we; we would like to bounce that whole

board. We appoint three members out of the nine; we want to bounce them all. It would take us nine years to do it."

That was one principle, and we held to that same principle yet. The other principle was that the board, not being an elected board, should not have unlimited powers for taxing the people. On the other hand, it did not seem fair that an independent board of ladies and gentlemen should have to go to a council and beg for money. Therefore a board was entitled on its own demand to a fixed maximum tax rate.

(Reading from manuscript.)

You can see at the very beginning they had to guess at this thing because they did not know exactly what a library problem was in the year 1882. They did the best they could under the circumstances.

(Reading from manuscript.)

Now here is the danger of fixing the wrong rate. They knew the rate and probably thought they were on the same footing as other libraries. You see they had never been aldermen. They were satisfied with themselves---some of them were easily pleased.

They had no standards in their minds; they had not traveled, they had not come here, and therefore there were no standards. Therefore they thought the little library they had was all right.

(Reading from manuscript.)

For example, the Department of Education had the matter of the library rate under discussion. That was my job five years. They said to me, "We want to establish a library system. Go and do the best you can." I am paid for that, but, of course, not half enough.

It was desirable that throughout the whole province we should

have a successful library system. We are looking at this from the point of view of a whole province. We went to the villages, towns, rural districts, everything. We wanted the thing to grow up evenly.

How the matter of the tax rate was of first importance. I tried giving the libraries encouragement, but I have discovered that sort of thing does not go as legal tender in paying for salaries and books.

(Reading from manuscript.)

There is no Dominion tax except a little war tax, and we do not pay any tax to Great Britain and never did.

(Reading from manuscript.)

We had one little village with an assessment of \$220. a head, and one city with an assessment of \$1,600. We had one town of 8,000 with an assessment of \$440, and another town of the same population of \$1,000. Now try to get a rate on the dollar.

(Reading.)

Public libraries serve people and not property. Therefore we believe we should have this on a service basis. I do not know what state it is in this grand Republic, but there was one where a young lady was telling me that all they could demand and get on their own right was the amount based on the number of books in the town. We were basing it on the amount of property in town, and on the amount of valuation. Sometimes it was high, sometimes low.

(Reading.)

I am telling you there is no limit to what a library can get if it is lucky, but it can demand 50 cents per capita.

(Reading)

Now, we have there a farmers' government, as most of you have heard. The farmers are in power. Here is a generous man who has done more for teachers' salaries and will do more for librarians' salaries than any man I have met. Most of our Ontario farmers are not generous and liberal in expenditure like the farmers of the United States.

(Reading.)

You see they got a little mixed up. A half mill does not mean anything in particular to the people, and they take things for granted. But when we say 50 cents per capita is put in by the government, it means something. If we are not spending that, there must be something wrong. I remember one old Irish alderman,--previous to my time,--before the half mill came up, and there was in the budget, 1/4 mill for library board, stood up and said, "A quarter of a mill for libraries. I am against it, your Worship. Why, if it was only a third of a mill I would support it." I do not know what he would do with our friend Mr. Hamilton if he had him.

When I was there it said: Library rate, 5/10 of a mill. One man stood up and said, "Mr. Mayor, I was at the committee meeting that passed the estimate of the library board, and I would like to know by whose authority that has been changed. I was there when it was made one-half of a mill, and why is it changed to 5/10 of a mill?"

How many of you know what a half mill would mean to you in your town? It is far more than a half mill in most places. We have not had one word of question, notwithstanding the fact that the claimable rate in Ontario has been raised 67%. I will tell you about the result.

(Reading.)

Did you ever notice in a library budget that the two most important items are books and salaries? They are the most variable items. If you have to cut a thousand or two off your budget, it is invariably taken off books and salaries. You give a library in a town another thousand dollars, and it can put five hundred into book account and five hundred into salaries, and the larger your patronage the lower the service costs. So you see this 67 per cent will go largely into books and salaries for assistants, except those who are outside.

(Reading to end of manuscript.)

The PRESIDENT. I am very sure there are a number of people wanting to discuss these very interesting papers, and after the presentation of the next paper I hope we may have free discussion.

Mr. Ranck, who gave us so much in his paper last winter, is going to tell us how such a law would affect some of our libraries.

Mr. SAMUEL H. RANCK.

~~Madam President and members of the Council: I want to say~~
~~first of all that I thoroughly agree with Mr. Carson that the proper~~
 basis for library support is the number of people to be served in
 the community rather than the amount of property, and I think the
 American Library Association sooner or later,--and I hope sooner,--
 will go on record that that is the proper basis for city and county
 in making its basis of revenues for the support of libraries. Let
 me give you some illustrations.

My subject is "How such a law would affect some of our libraries,"
 but I want to illustrate this other point a moment. The schools
 are beginning to do that, and they have equalized the thing by
 general state revenues in addition to the local revenues. Cali-

ifornia has gone into the millions of dollars of supplementary revenues from the state. In Michigan we have over 7,000 library districts. Every school district in the State of Michigan is a potential library district. The only amount of money that a school district could get and claim, is penal fine money. The City of Detroit is a school district, and they got last year from their penal fines, \$60,000. A village near Detroit, where the Dodge automobiles are made, has a population of only 50,000, and in 1920 their amount for 50,000 people was less than \$3,000 of penal fine moneys, and that is all. Detroit revenues were supplemented last year by \$160,000 which came under the operation of the state constitution, and by \$660,000 which was to go in the budget,--that was the tax rate,--giving them \$820,000 for library purposes in the city of Detroit for 1921.

We have school districts in Michigan where the assessed valuation per child of school age is less than \$400. We have other school districts in Michigan where the assessed valuation per child of school age is over \$14,000. That is the difference; in one district a child has \$35 of taxable property back of it for the support of its education against another district that has only \$1.00, and it is the business of the state to equalize that. So far as library taxation is concerned, the same thing prevails. In the District of Columbia the amount of taxable property per child is only about \$25,000.

This sort of thing applies to libraries. Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Grand Rapids have about the same population. The difference in the assessed valuation of those cities is \$100,000,000---\$100,000,000 more in Grand Rapids than in Scranton. In other words,

the thing we should stand for is that all educational matters are ^{the} for/people, and that should be the basis for the consideration, and not property.

I first began to look into this subject for the Michigan Library Association, in 1920. I found that of the 24 cities in the State of Michigan with a population of 10,000 or over, that there were only six that received from penal fines, library revenues, from their own funds, endowment funds and taxation, an average income of more than 50 cents per capita. That was in the State of Michigan. Grand Rapids and Detroit, the two largest cities, got a great deal more than that.

The people in the rural districts are the people not getting support. As has been brought out, at least more than half of the people of the United States are without any library service worthy of the name whatsoever. At Chicago, in the paper that Miss Tyler referred to, this whole subject of taxation was covered in a general way, and I only want to repeat in a very brief way this statement, that this question of taxation is going to be upon us more within the next few years, and perhaps the next good many years than ever before.

We are now witnessing the biggest buck passing game in the question of taxation that this country has ever seen. It is up to us to study this question, and be familiar with the facts, for the sake of our work, in a way we never were before.

In compliance with the request that I make some application of the Ontario law to some representative American libraries, I sent out a brief questionnaire---only one question---to about a hundred American libraries in 33 states. I did not attempt to cover the whole ground. Mr. Milan said I could have five or ten minutes,

and I cannot cover the United States thoroughly in five or ten minutes. The question I asked was this: What was the amount that you received for your library from taxation for general maintenance purposes, not per capita purposes? I mean, if there was an assessment made for property, real estate, on which to build a building, that was not to be included, but for the general maintenance, books, bindings, and so forth, light and upkeep, and so forth, what was the amount?

I asked, to make it easy, that they should give it for their last library year, either 1920 or 1921, and stated that the comparison per capita would be made on the valuation of 1920. A good many libraries gave it for both years. I want to say this, that where they gave it there has been an increase in the income for the libraries of the United States so far as they reported to me, of about 20 per cent in their income in 1921 as over against 1920. That, I think, is a hopeful situation, and I may say also that I think part of this general educational campaign we have been carrying on has helped to bring that result about.

Mr. Carson has referred to some of the other sources of revenues. In Massachusetts the dog license was an important source of revenue for some libraries. They received over \$7,000 for dog licenses last year. In Seattle, Washington, they received \$28,000 from general city licenses. That was not a part of the tax budget. As I have already referred to the penal fines in Michigan, which last year in our case were \$28,000, that is not included per capita. Detroit is estimated at \$160,000. Detroit is right on the border, and one of the great sources of library revenue is fellows who are pinched for bringing the real juice across the border. The county of Monroe has over \$200,000 of fine money, and the Attorney General ruled

that should not be used for anything else than libraries.

Endowment funds are not included in this. In the Ontario law all those things are extras. The income received from taxation in the City of Providence,--over 200,000 people,--was over \$25,000 from taxation and \$145,000 from endowment and other sources. A good many of the New York public libraries have a large income from endowment funds. Revenues of that sort were not included. Neither were library book fines. Book fines is a very important source of revenue in some libraries.

I might say in passing that the way that thing fluctuates in different parts of the city due to certain changes, and also to certain changes in labor conditions, and so forth, has interested me very much.

There were 80 of this 100 and more libraries that I asked to send in the amount they received for maintenance in 1920 or 1921,-- I want to say that of the states south of Mason and Dixon's line, there is only one library in a state that received from taxation for library support and maintenance over 50 cents per capita. That was Kansas City. That is the only city in a so-called Southern State which receives anything ^{less} than 50 cents per capita. A number of cities are receiving a dollar or more than a dollar per capita from city library revenue. The highest is East Cleveland, Ohio, a suburb of the City of Cleveland, where the per capita revenue this year is \$1.36 for library support. That is the highest. One of the next largest is the city right nearby where we are holding our meetings, and that is Newton, Massachusetts, of which Mr. Dougherty is librarian, where the per capita income for maintenance of the library is \$1.22 1/2. There is one city still higher, Gary, Indiana, which is \$1.24 6/10, nearly \$1.25. Gary, Indiana,--who would have

thought it, after all the advertising that Gary, Indiana, has received in certain points. That does not include the amount Gary received from the work in the townships. The income received is considerably more than that particular amount.

I am not going to burden you with reading these things from the different cities, but I thought I would post them on the bulletin where everybody could read them. My native state of Pennsylvania has the lowest per capita support for libraries of any northern state. There is only one city in the State of Pennsylvania that is raising by taxation more than 50 cents per capita for library support, and that is Pittsburgh. I hate to say it, but the lowest city in the list is my native town---I do not think I ought to mention the town---5 6/10 cents per capita.

A MEMBER. You ought to go back.

Mr. RANCK. That is not as bad as it sounds, because there is a good reference library there. There is one city lower, but they have a large endowment fund. In fact, there are a number of cities having very excellent libraries receiving no money,--Wellsboro, Pennsylvania, and Hagerstown. The free library is almost entirely supported by endowment funds. They received only a thousand dollars from the city in taxation, and \$1,500 from the work in the county. The rest is an endowment from Mr. Newcomer and several other people. So that the amount is a little lower than my native town.

Now, Madam President, with your permission I should like to make one or two suggestions that I think the American Library Association ought to carry out. This was only a casual sort of study. I think ^{(This is a subject of such great importance that we ought to have the facts thoroughly and accurately, ^{presented} and I would suggest that there be a further study of this subject, considering}

all the sources of revenue for a city. ~~For instance, if a city is getting \$145,000 from endowment funds for the support of its library, that ought to be taken into consideration for the amount of library revenue and income.~~

After such a study I am convinced already that the American Library Association ought to declare its belief before the American people that a reasonable minimum for the support of libraries, including endowment funds supplemented by taxation,--a reasonable minimum for adequate library support which includes branch rooms, reading rooms and everything going with the service of a modern public library, should be held before the people as a dollar per capita instead of 50 cents. *quite much to him.*

The PRESIDENT. May we not hear from those who are interested in this important problem now by way of discussion?

Mr. WRIGHT. There is one angle of this question I have never heard brought up in Council or Library Association meeting, and that is: Why do not libraries speak for an honest assessment. We have an honest assessment in Missouri this year. The increase was 55 per cent. It scared the Legislature to death, and they restricted the amount of taxation in proportion to the increase of assessment, but the teachers and librarians got together and exempted the schools and libraries from it. So the schools and libraries of Missouri this year got an increase of 55 per cent.

If library people would join the teachers in this matter, we would not be worrying so much about our low salaries and short back funds.

Mr. GODDARD. I think it is a good thing to have an assessment every two or three years. When I lived in Washington, D. C., property was assessed every three years. In Pawtucket, Rhode Island, a

year and a half ago, the Business Men's Association told the city authorities that the business men would stand behind them if they would re-assess their city so they could adequately pay the teachers and the police force; and then it was found that they had not assessed the city since the memory of any man in city office, 20 or 25 years. Fortunately one of our wealthy men died, and his property came into contest with his widow and the heirs, and the city valuation jumped from \$76,000,000 in 1919, to \$129,000,000 in 1920, an increase of more than 66 $\frac{2}{3}$ per cent in one year. Now, our library, under the law, is allowed to have a certain proportion,--30 cents on a thousand dollars of valuation. If we really wanted it we could add to our \$23,000, \$15,000 a year, going behind the law. That is a question of the trustees being live enough to ask for what they ought to have, but I do think that librarians ought to see that the city authorities assess their cities at some regular interval, and keep their cities up to date.

Mr. HILL. Madam President, it is possible that we are looking at this subject at the present moment in rather a selfish way. We all want to get every dollar we can for the public library, but we ought not to do that, and we ought not to want to do it, without taking into consideration the departments of the city, the institutions charitable and penal, that depend upon the city or the county for a certain part of their support. Most of us perhaps would agree with Mr. Hamilton that the library board ought to tell the city assessors or the finance department how much money should be given to the library. For one, I do not think we ought without taking into consideration the demands that are bound to be made by the departments of the city. If the library board can say how much money shall go toward the support of the

library, so can the street cleaning department and the school board and every other department or institution that receives money from the city. If that were to prevail it is quite certain that those of you who pay taxes in the cities where such a law did prevail would make every effort to have that law changed if it had been put into operation. I am not quite sure that many of us would care at the moment to have what Mr. Ranck thinks we ought to have, a dollar per capita. I should feel that I had to do a good deal of thinking and studying to spend \$2,000,000 on the public library of the Borough of Brooklyn. Not but what I could do it, but I do not think in fairness and in justice to other institutions of the city that I would have any right to spend that dollar per capita.

Mr. RANCK. I want Mr. Hill to realize that he would not get \$2,000,000 as I have outlined it.

Mr. HILL. I know I would not.

Mr. RANCK. I mean there should be taken into consideration all the other sources of revenue. For instance,--I have forgotten what it is from the New York Public Library, but a good many hundreds of thousands of dollars goes into other sources that comes from endowment funds and other sources, and that should be taken into account, so that it would not add to the increased taxation. As a matter of fact in a very large number of cities, it would be a very slight increase to bring it up to a very reasonable minimum. The average of these cities was 53 $\frac{7}{10}$ cents per capita, exclusive of these other things.

The PRESIDENT. If we consider this really as important a matter/^{as} has been brought out this evening, do you think it desirable that the Council should give this matter further consideration by the appointment of a special committee, or by any resolution that

will look toward further study, and a possible statement regarding it. Can I have the views of some member of the Council on this subject? Mr. Yust, have you any suggestion to make?

Mr. YUST. Madam President, I agree with what one of the speakers said,--I believe it was Mr. Ranck,--that this subject of taxation is going to be a burning one for years in various respects. It seems to me we cannot do better than to make some provision for a continued study of this question. There is going to be, as there has been this year, an immense amount of legislation. What I referred to in my paper, dealt entirely with library revenues. There has been in the 42 states where legislative sessions were held this year, a large number of library laws, and quite a number of those dealt with the subject of revenue. It is going to be one of growing interest. It seems to me it is one we have got to deal with whether we want to or not.

Mr. HILL. In order to bring the matter before the Council, I move that the Chairman be authorized to appoint a committee to make further study and report upon this subject.

Mr. SANBORN. If the committee^{of five} makes a survey, the facts in the case will be collected by that committee as the questionnaire is drawn up, so there really is a committee to investigate the sources of revenue. A committee of the Council afterwards might take those facts, and handle them in a way to make them more intelligible.

Mr. BOWERMAN. It seems to me that something of the sort is very desirable. If after due study of this subject, the American Library Association could adopt a form that would express what is the adequate expenditure for city libraries, of varying sizes

and varying conditions, it would hold up the hands of the people where difficulty in getting appropriations is very great. If the American Library Association could establish a standard, either \$1.00 per capita, or 50 or 75 cents, and I could dangle that ^{before} appropriation committees in support of the estimates that are presented to Congress for appropriations for my library, I am sure it would strengthen my hands very greatly. Therefore I hope this will prevail, and that a further study will be made and that a final investigation shall be put forth in the form of something expressing the standards for various cities.

Miss DOWNEN. It seems almost paradoxical, but those of us who are trying to get appropriations of tax levies for new libraries, both county and municipal, found that while money was being spent like water through the war time, it was the easiest time I ever knew to get levies voted on for the establishment of new libraries. Now, the time is coming, and it is right here, when it is almost impossible to get the people to see, in towns where there are no libraries or in counties where there should be money spent for libraries, that there should be this levy made for the establishment of libraries. Everything is tight as a drum. It seems to me the sooner this thing is done the better, and that we should not wait for the committee of five, but that this report of Mr. Ranck's should be made as complete as possible, and published in pamphlet form, so that it may be scattered all over the United States and made effective at once.

Mr. ANDREWS. I hope there will be some study of the social conditions of these towns. There has been no indication that the city that is furnishing a million had a different social population, a different need. Very probably some of these small towns

that have tremendous millage taxes are very rich communities with small populations. I think those conditions ought to be brought out, and I think the committee can do so.

Miss TOBITT. Whether or not the appropriation should be made by the Board,--this has been discussed greatly by our Board year after year. I should like to see that subject dealt with and also this matter of taxation and appropriation that Mr. Ranck has brought out.

Mr. RANEY. The Association at the meeting this morning officially went upon record as requiring the Council to fix the policy of the Association. Here is a definite instance. That policy is going to be fixed by a Council which is gathering not more than twice a year. Its real function will be served at such meetings as we are holding this week. The week is filled with multitudinous engagements, private ones, with conflicting programs, and if anything of this sort is to receive adequate attention of the Council, it ought to be promulgated as the policy of the Association. It seems to me that if the Association is going to function properly, the Council must become a more or less continuous body. It, of course, cannot sit in session continuously as Congress does; it cannot be called in special session two or three times a year, and the only way it can fix a policy and make the organization an active, growing organization is that the proposals which involve serious matters of policy shall be adequately placed in the hands of the Council a considerable time in advance of the meeting, by thoroughly equipped small committees that can meet together, or at least communicate by correspondence.

To give a definite turn to this little preachment or sugges-

tion, would be an amendment to the motion that has just been made, that the findings of this committee be in printed, typewritten or other form, in the hands of the Council at least three months in advance of its next meeting.

The PRESIDENT. Will Dr. Hill accept?

Mr. RANEY. Two will be sufficient.

Mr. HILL. I do not accept that, Madam President, because this committee might not be ready to report a week or a day before the Council meeting, and that would prevent the presentation of the report before the following meeting of the Council. I say, let us leave it in the hands of the Committee to make a report in such manner as it pleases. If the Council wants to have the report printed and turned over to the next meeting of the Council for consideration in its printed form, well and good, but let us get a report as soon as possible (applause).

The PRESIDENT. Inasmuch as the amendment was not seconded, we will pass on to the vote on the motion of Dr. Hill, that a committee of three be appointed by the chair to consider further this important question of library revenues, and report to the next meeting of the council. (Motion of Mr. Hill is seconded.)

(Motion is put and carried.)

The PRESIDENT. If there is no further business to come before the meeting, a motion to adjourn is in order.

(Meeting adjourned.)