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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR
Her Honour the Honourable Iona V. Campagnolo, CM, OBC

FIRST SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2005

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

Prayers.

Introductions by Members

N. Simons: I just want to call the attention of the House to some friends from the Sechelt Peninsula, the members of council of the Sechelt Nation: Marita Paul, Gary Feschuk, Tommy Paul and, I believe, Stan Dixon. I'd just like the House to make them welcome.

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. de Jong: In this chamber I call committee stage debate on Bill 14, and in Committee A continued estimates debate, for the information of members, of the Ministry of Education.

Committee of the Whole House

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES COMMISSION AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

The House in Committee of the Whole (Section B) on Bill 14; S. Hawkins in the chair.

The committee met at 10:05 a.m.

On section 1.

L. Krog: Hon. Chair, I wonder if the Attorney General could explain to the House the reason for increasing the number of seats from 81 to 85.

Hon. W. Oppal: I wish to introduce Neil Reimer, senior policy and legislation analyst, who is here to assist.

The 85 members is a discretionary matter for the Electoral Boundaries Commission to determine whether or not that's an appropriate number. Ultimately, it would be for the Legislature to determine the number of members that will take part in the next sitting.

Section 1 approved.

On section 2.

L. Krog: Has the government given any consideration as to who would be appointed, or are they talking about a commission of one or more persons? If so, will that be in keeping with the traditional practice of this Legislature?

Hon. W. Oppal: The system will not be changed. There will be a retired or a current Supreme Court or Court of Appeal judge. There will be the Chief Electoral Officer and a third party recommended by the

Speaker after advice from the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition.

Sections 2 and 3 approved.

On section 4.

L. Krog: I would move the amendment contained in the orders of the day standing in my name.

[SECTION 4, by deleting the text shown as underlined and adding the text shown as bold:

4 (1) In this section, "single transferable vote system" means the electoral system recommended by the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform in its final report, issued December 10, 2004, and in its technical report, issued December 20, 2004.

(a) **"single transferable vote system" means the electoral system recommended by the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform in its final report, issued December 10, 2004, and its technical report, issued December 20, 2004; and**

(b) **"mixed member proportional system" means the electoral system described on page 258 of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform technical report, issued December 20, 2004.**

(2) The commission appointed under section 5 (1) of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act must, in addition to responsibilities assigned under that Act, make proposals to the Legislative Assembly, based on **both** the single transferable vote system **and** the **mixed member proportional system**, as to

(a) the areas, boundaries and names of the electoral districts under that system, and

(b) the number of members of the Legislative Assembly for each of those electoral districts.

(3) The report of the commission under section 10 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act must

(a) as an exception to subsection (1) of that section, be submitted no later than August 15, 2007, and

(b) include the proposals under subsection (2) of this section.

(4) Sections 11 to 15 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act apply in relation to the proposals included in the report under subsection (3) (b) of this section.

(5) In carrying out its responsibilities under subsection (2),

(a) the commission must, in its proposals included under subsection (3) (b), propose the same number of members of the Legislative Assembly as it proposes under section 10 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, and

(b) if, by amendment under section 12 of that Act, it changes the number of members from the number proposed under section 10 of that Act, the commission must make the same change in relation to its proposals under this section regarding both the single transferable vote system and the mixed member proportional system.]

On the amendment.

L. Krog: The purpose of this amendment to the bill before the House is to give British Columbians an op-

portunity for at least two choices when it comes to the Electoral Boundaries Commission providing information to our province's citizens about the various choices.

As the House is well aware, the Citizens' Assembly gave consideration in the end to basically two forms of voting. That was the single transferable vote, which is the main purpose of the bill before the House now. It also gave some consideration.... Indeed, some 20 percent of the members of the Citizens' Assembly voted in favour of mixed-member proportional representation.

What is clear is that there is a genuine appetite for reform. Certainly, that was made extremely clear by the vote in the spring election. Although it did not achieve the stated 60 percent, British Columbians expressed a great deal of dissatisfaction during the course of that election with our existing first-past-the-post system.

[1010]

The opposition is certainly receptive to the fact that the government hasn't abandoned the concept of electoral reform in bringing forward this bill. We believe, however, that a full and frank discussion must take place, and this bill provides that opportunity. However, the bill as it stands, without passage of the amendment that I'm proposing this morning, will in fact limit British Columbians to only one choice, and that is the single transferable vote. Admittedly, it will be a significant improvement over what occurred in the spring when British Columbians had no general idea of what that would look like at the end of the day, what sort of boundaries they would be talking about in terms of regional voting, how the system would work.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission will have a wonderful opportunity to do that. But the position on our side of the House is that given the popularity of mixed-member proportional representation, given the support for it amongst British Columbians, given the broad discussion that took place during the election around the concept of electoral reform, we believe it is appropriate to offer British Columbians, through the Electoral Boundaries Commission, more than one single choice.

By reporting back on mixed-member proportional representation, it will afford British Columbians the opportunity to make an informed decision and to at least, in a sense, have three choices. To stick with our existing system, which has clearly become somewhat unpopular and now — I think I'm correct in saying this — with only 58 percent of British Columbians voting in the last provincial election, a system that is perhaps not achieving the participation it once did.... They have that choice, a single transferable vote, and we believe it is appropriate to give them that further opportunity for mixed-member proportional representation. Then British Columbians can make an informed choice with the work of the commission.

The opposition certainly appreciates the government's continued interest in electoral reform, but if we are going to give the opportunity to British Columbi-

ans to make what will be one of the most fundamental changes to our electoral system in the history of this province, then surely it is appropriate to give British Columbians that choice.

I do not wish to detract from the hard work of the Citizens' Assembly, but they had the opportunity that most of us never have, and that is to study intensively and to devote their entire time to the study of electoral reform. Unfortunately, most British Columbians do not have that opportunity. They have working lives. They produce the wealth of this province. They teach in our schools. They attend schools. They serve the members of this Legislature. They produce our wealth, and so they're looking to us for some leadership. I think we would be remiss if we did not provide leadership on this issue by giving them at least one further alternative to consider.

So, hon. Chair, I would move the amendment that stands in my name.

D. Chudnovsky: I am pleased to stand today to support the amendment that has just recently been put forward by my colleague from Nanaimo. I do so for one fundamental reason, and I want to speak to that in a minute.

But I first want to express my support for the work that has been done over the last number of months by the Citizens' Assembly and also my support for the feeling, which is generalized across the province, that there needs to be some work done on the system of electing our MLAs. It seems to me, based on a close look and careful listening to the debate and the discussion that's taken place in the province over the last number of months, that there is a general appetite for looking carefully at alternatives to the current system of electing MLAs. I think we can also say, in a general sense, that there is an appetite for a system that provides some level of proportionality.

[1015]

That is one of the messages that I take from the work of the Citizens' Assembly, from the results of the referendum and also from the discussion and debate which we've heard across the province and which I certainly heard a lot about last spring. Having said that, it seems to me that the choices made available to British Columbians should be widened. The amendment that was put forward by my colleague a few minutes ago provides another substantive choice. If it were simply a variation on the theme, then I wouldn't be as enthusiastic as I am.

But it seems to me.... We work with a system — first-past-the-post. That's one choice. The Citizens' Assembly pointed us towards STV, which is essentially a regional system of proportional representation. There is a third choice — at least a third and many others — which is a substantive choice. That is a system of proportional representation in which citizens, residents, still have an individual representative for their constituency.

That's the choice that my friend from Nanaimo has put before the House. It is, in my view, a substantive

choice, one which the people of British Columbia should have the opportunity to look at. It's my own belief, for what it's worth — and we'll have an opportunity, I think, to canvass this as we go along — that it's the appropriate compromise.

Each of these systems is a compromise, but it seems to me one is a compromise which the people of the province should have the right to canvass, to engage, to debate and to discuss, in which there is proportionality and the opportunity for an individual to be accountable to the people of a particular constituency. That is MMP. Of course, there are a number of schemes of MMP. They're used all over the world. We need to look at them carefully and decide whether one of those is appropriate for our province.

Having said all of that, it seems to me that each of these three choices is a substantive choice. Each of them is a different compromise, one which the people of the province should have the right to discuss. I urge all members of the House, on both sides, to support the amendment.

Hon. W. Oppal: As the members of the House will know, earlier this year the government acted on its commitment to hold a provincewide referendum on the electoral system and to determine whether or not a new model that was proposed by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform ought to be adopted. The referendum was held as a part of the May 17 general election. As we all know, the proposal needed a 60-percent vote in order to pass on a provincewide basis and a simple majority in at least 60 percent of the province's electoral districts. BC-STV easily passed the second test, but it narrowly missed reaching the overall 60-percent popular vote that was required.

The assembly considered in some detail the system proposed by the hon. member — that is, the mixed-member proportional system was considered, as were a number of other systems. I have to say that it was rejected by a vote of 123 to 31. If we were to embark on the suggestion put forth in the amendment by the hon. member, it would be confusing to the public, because this is a system that's already been rejected by the Citizens' Assembly.

It would not be in the public interest, and, indeed, it would be confusing to the public to now put to the public the third alternative that is being proposed in the amendment.

[1020-1025]

Amendment negatived on the following division:

YEAS — 31

S. Simpson	Evans	Fleming
Farnworth	James	Kwan
Brar	B. Simpson	Cubberley
Hammell	Coons	Thorne
Simons	Puchmayr	Gentner

Routley	Fraser	Horgan
Lali	Dix	Trevena
Bains	Robertson	Karagianis
Krog	Austin	Chudnovsky
Chouhan	Wyse	Macdonald
	Conroy	

NAYS — 39

Falcon	Reid	Coell
Ilich	Chong	Christensen
Les	Richmond	Bennett
van Dongen	Hayer	Lee
Jarvis	Nuraney	Horning
Cantelon	Hagen	Oppal
de Jong	Campbell	Taylor
Bond	Hansen	Abbott
Penner	Neufeld	Coleman
Hogg	Sultan	Krueger
Lekstrom	Polak	Hawes
Yap	Bloy	MacKay
Black	McIntyre	Rustad

[1030]

On section 4.

B. Lekstrom: It's my understanding in going through this act that there was a lot of discussion....

The Chair: Member, just a moment.

Members, could you please leave the chamber quietly.

B. Lekstrom: It's my understanding that there was a lot of discussion during the last electoral reform vote in the discussions around the province dealing with rural ridings, northern ridings. I'll speak to my riding particularly, Peace River South, and my colleague to the north in Peace River North.

A question for clarification: does this give protection to some of the northern ridings? I think that was the intent — that we wouldn't see these ridings melded into one riding with less representation. While the population increases right now are focused on some of the larger centres, I want to ensure for myself and my constituents that there is some latitude in this document that would allow the protection of northern and rural ridings.

Hon. W. Oppal: There has been a shift in this province of population from the rural areas to the urban areas, and I want to assure the hon. member that there is a clear intent on the part of the government to protect northern representation in the Legislature. The bill gives the commission the necessary flexibility to make those recommendations in order to ensure that

northern ridings and northern representation will be protected in the Legislature.

B. Lekstrom: I appreciate the minister's comments because I think a great deal of British Columbians out there wanted to know how that representation would work.

Possibly more of a statement than a question: in the consideration that the Electoral Boundaries Commission has done and going out in this review, I think it's very important that we look not only at just the number of representatives. Particularly, I'll speak to Peace River North and Peace River South, where each riding has one member. My concern would be that a review could see these two ridings melded into one. Although you would still have two representatives, I think it would take away the ability for an elected MLA to give the due representation that the people require up there. It's a huge area already. If we were ever to look at a consideration, or if the commission was, to turning that into one region represented by two MLAs versus two distinct regions, I think that would be a step backwards.

I just wanted to put that on record. I think it's important that we look after the northern and rural ridings of this province, and it's important, whether you live in downtown Vancouver or in Cecil Lake in the northeast part of this province, that we have equal access to representation. That's very important.

Hon. W. Oppal: The issue that's been raised by the hon. member is a valid one. It's something, obviously, that the commission will consider and recommend. The alternatives and the issues are matters of some concern, and I can say unequivocally that the commission will address those issues.

Sections 4 and 5 approved.

Title approved.

Hon. W. Oppal: I move that the committee rise and report the bill complete without amendment.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 10:35 a.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

Report and Third Reading of Bills

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES COMMISSION AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

Bill 14, Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2005, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

Hon. C. Richmond: I call committee stage on Bill 15.

Committee of the Whole House

HEALTH STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

The House in Committee of the Whole (Section B) on Bill 15; S. Hammell in the chair.

The committee met at 10:37 a.m.

On section 1.

D. Cubberley: First time for a lot of things. First time commenting on legislation in the House, so I will be feeling my way with the way questions are asked.

[Applause.]

Thank you, member. That's encouraging.

The minister indicated previously in the section regarding nurse practitioners and their exclusion that a policy decision had been made to keep nurse practitioners out of the nurses bargaining unit under the Health Authorities Act and that the reason for this is that the nurses agreement isn't amenable to the pattern of practice of independent practitioners. So the legislation essentially precludes automatic inclusion in the existing bargaining unit under the existing collective agreement, and this is being done in order to ensure that nurse practitioners can practise with the appropriate level of flexibility and autonomy.

I just want to clarify. The minister's saying that while this step precludes nurse practitioners automatically being rolled into the BCNU agreement, nurse practitioners have all rights to establish an association for the purposes of advocacy on their behalf and for purposes of collective bargaining, if they choose, and that the minister would honour their preferences in the matter?

[1040]

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for his question.

The nurse practitioners are certainly free to select their own path forward. If they choose to form, for example, a professional association among themselves, they could do that. If they chose to form, under a separate bargaining table, some association with an existing union, whether it's the B.C. Nurses Union or any other union, they can do that. They can make application to the Minister of Labour under section 19(5) to do precisely that.

Section 1 approved.

On section 2.

D. Cubberley: This being a little bit more complicated to get at on clause-by-clause, I'm going to ask questions of a general nature at the beginning about the application of the clauses. I can't sort out exactly which one will govern, but each of the questions is pertinent to the intent.

My general understanding is that this is essentially about regulating information-mining and data analysis that could generate insight into population and sub-population health trends and that this kind of analysis provides a basis for analyzing current strategies that are in place and proposing new interventions that might improve population health. So I want to ask some questions of a general kind as to who currently uses this kind of information from British Columbia, both internal and external organizations — if there are any using it currently.

Hon. G. Abbott: While it's not entirely clear what the member means by internal or external, I'll give him the sort of general scope, and I think he'll probably form appropriate conclusions from his perspective about which is which.

Among those who use the personalized data of vital stats, that would include Stats Canada, Health Canada, the federal passport office, the federal Social Insurance Registry and Elections Canada. As well, the one university that is able to access under the current provisions is the University of British Columbia for special projects. There are also, however, on a depersonalized basis, statistics and so on available through VISTA, which I guess is a kind of amalgam of those depersonalized statistics.

[1045]

D. Cubberley: I'm interested to know whether the information that goes out currently is anonymized when it leaves our hands or if that occurs via the agencies handling it and whether, in future under the new agreements that are contemplated here, the data will be anonymized prior to it being received by those who want to use it for research purposes or whether depersonalization of it occurs in the hands of the researchers who are going to carry out the research.

Hon. G. Abbott: We'll do our best to answer the question. This may take a few questions to get all of the information the member desires. Basically, on all of the organizations that I described, almost all of which were federal, we share information with them because those tend to be benefits-related issues in terms of federal programs, etc. We share it under the provisions of a federal statute around their vital statistics.

The VISTA data warehouse is depersonalized information. The challenge we have is not around depersonalized information. I gather there's no difficulty in that. The challenge is in the area which we talked about in terms of UBC and their special projects. They are the one organization that has been able to access some of the personalized data, again, under special circumstances and conditions.

Really, the aim and scope of this bill is to try to extend to Simon Fraser and to others the opportunity for us to share personalized data under what are going to be, under the terms of this bill, very strict conditions and under well-defined circumstances. It is an attempt to find a better balance between the sharing of informa-

tion for societal benefit versus the protection of privacy, which is obviously very appropriate and important to British Columbians as well.

D. Cubberley: So these amendments are pertaining to data-access agreements that will be signed with a variety of bodies that are contemplated, which include universities, for the purposes of research that, broadly speaking, is deemed to be in the public interest of societal benefit.

[1050]

A couple of questions. I'm thinking of the university here, where there's a mandated committee that oversees research and has an obligation and responsibility to guide it. Will each of the types of bodies that are contemplated here have mandated guidelines for the conduct of research that would make them consistent with provincial legislation around freedom of information and protection of privacy? And will each body have some sort of entity that's designated internally to oversee the conduct of the research and to provide some form of ethical oversight?

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for the question. It's a very good one.

Every public body that would be potentially in receipt of personalized information would, in the first instance, have to be subject to the protections of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. If the body is not subject to the terms and conditions of FOIPPA, there will be no information-sharing with them. That's clear.

Second, before we enter into or exercise a contract with any of those public bodies for the sharing of information, there will have to be an ethics review, which would need to be done to our satisfaction that in fact the purpose, intent and aim of the research was societal or public benefit from the project. I guess a final point is that the contract that will precede the sharing of any information between Vital Statistics and that the public research body in question will be accompanied by a very prescriptive contract which will lay out definitively what the purpose of the data-sharing is, how the data will be managed and how the data will be used. So it will be a prescriptive arrangement aimed at ensuring the proper use and protection of that sensitive information.

D. Cubberley: The amendment under section 2 lays out a number of bodies with whom contracts might be negotiated. I'm just interested in (d), given that (c) covers off public bodies in other jurisdictions of Canada. Section (d) says: "a prescribed body that is public in nature." Can someone give me an example of what that's referring to?

[1055]

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for his important question. This does take us to a bit of an involved level.

The member's question was: what is a prescribed body that is public in nature? To begin, in terms of the scope of what we would consider a body that is public in nature, it would include, for example, a local public body, a local government body, a health care body, a social services body or a governing body of a profession or occupation if the body is designated in schedule 3 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Public body also, I guess more obviously, could be defined under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act as a ministry of the government of B.C., an agency, board, commission, corporation, office or other body designated in schedule 2 of the FOIPPA and (c) a local public body. Section (d) is intended to capture a public body that may be also prescribed by regulation.

In order to persuade the appropriate authorities that the body is public in nature, they would have to meet the prescriptive test set out by the ministry.

D. Cubberley: Just following that along a little bit, that would.... In a sense, you're capturing something like local government, where a power is devolved to the entity from the province. This provides greater clarity that, with devolved powers as opposed to being an extension of government, it can constitute a public body and that it might be eligible for access? Would it also include something like non-profit societies?

Hon. G. Abbott: I don't want to sound overly technical here, but the challenge generally in these bills is that we can readily understand all of those bodies that are set out within the framework overtly of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and that would include local government, as the member asked. What we are attempting to do in section (d) is to take account of those public bodies that may not be set out explicitly in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. What we will have an opportunity to do under section (d) is create a regulation that will prescribe how that public body might qualify.

We will develop that in concert with the Information and Privacy Commissioner to ensure that, in fact, it meets the test in terms of the intent of the bill.

[1100]

D. Cubberley: Would the amendments enable you to have agreements with public bodies outside of Canada?

Hon. G. Abbott: No, it would not.

L. Krog: I don't want to spend too much time swimming in a pool with the very small fish and the minutiae of this, but I must say that the minister's answers have given me great concern about this. The question of the member for Saanich South was fairly clear, I thought, in whether or not a prescribed body that is public in nature could, in fact, include a non-governmental organization such as a society or a non-profit.

My question is, very specifically.... If this is to be done by regulation — and that is, as I understand it, the minister's answer — then the scrutiny of this will not come back to this House. It will be passed by order-in-council. It seems to me that this section would allow a non-governmental organization — indeed, a private corporation, if it was prescribed by regulation as being public in nature. That could include a private company that delivers services to government that are public.

If that's the case, can the minister confirm that what the Legislature's being asked to do by regulation today, by passing this in the form in which it stands, is, in fact, to allow the potential for the government, through order-in-council, to allow non-governmental organizations to become prescribed bodies that are public in nature?

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for his question. It's an important one.

Again, only those public bodies that are contained within the bounds, the tent, of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act can enjoy receipt of this information. It will not be shared outside of that. First of all, every public body has to be subject to FOIPPA. Any proposal would be subject to an ethics review in terms of why the information is being used and how the information will be used.

[1105]

Further, it is our practice to always have the freedom-of-information and protection-of-privacy commissioner be a part of the process of assessing applications for the sharing of information. We don't see any possible way in which, for example, a non-governmental organization or a private organization could be in receipt of this information.

L. Krog: I appreciate the minister's answer in this, but I think the minister can understand my concern around this particular section. There is a growing tendency in governments across this country — and it applies to all political parties, including my party's former government — of passing legislation and giving regulatory powers to cabinet which do not come back to this House for public scrutiny. This, with the greatest respect, appears to me to be exactly that — that this will be done. Yes, the orders-in-council become public, and it will be public information once it's done, but there will be no debate about what those bodies will be.

The minister has assured the House that it will go past the Information and Privacy Commissioner and that all of those steps will be taken, but ultimately, it means that there is potential — and I haven't heard it this morning — that at some point a non-governmental organization can become a prescribed body that is public in nature because, for instance, it has one contract, so to speak, to deliver services only to government. In fact, it will still be a non-governmental organization; it will be a private body.

I guess maybe it's my small-town suspicion, but in smaller organizations, small communities, information becomes public. Are the people who work there sworn

to secrecy? Are they bound by the same oath that binds the exceptional public servants of British Columbia? All of those questions, it seems to me, are raised by this particular section.

I'm not satisfied, from a legal perspective, that using the term "prescribed body that is public in nature," with all the good intentions in what may follow, does, in fact, protect this information from being given to non-governmental organizations. My question to the minister again is: can a prescribed body that is public in nature potentially refer to a non-governmental organization if the government so chooses by way of order-in-council?

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for his question.

Our understanding here is that such an OIC as the member mentioned, which would be an order-in-council involving the sharing of information with a non-government or non-public body, would be contrary to what is contained here in the act and to the safeguards associated with this act.

If the member looks at section 41.1(2), it says:

- (a) an agency or ministry of the government of British Columbia, of another province, or of Canada, including a Crown corporation;
- (b) an aboriginal government, an educational body, a health care body or a social services body, as those terms are defined in the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*;
- (c) a public body in another jurisdiction of Canada that is equivalent to one described in paragraph (b);
- (d) a prescribed body that is public in nature.

[1110]

Again, as we read and understand this — obviously, what's being said in the House here is important, and I do thank the member for fleshing this out — the intent is sharing with public bodies as defined in this act, not with non-governmental organizations.

L. Krog: I appreciate the minister's response to this, but again, I don't sense that my question — perhaps I'm being much too obtuse this morning — has, in fact, been answered. This particular section appears to me to give the power to the cabinet to describe or define what is "a prescribed body that is public in nature."

If that, in fact, is what this House is being asked to do, then cabinet can decide that Citizen Advocacy in Nanaimo or the Red Cross Society of Canada is a prescribed body that is public in nature. Can the minister simply answer: is my reading of this section accurate — in other words, that this allows cabinet to pick whatever body or organization it wants, describe it as a prescribed body that is public in nature and, therefore, satisfy this section?

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for his question. This is a very important point. When a government passes an order-in-council, it must be pursuant to and consistent with an existing statute of this legislative chamber and of this province. For cabinet to pass an order-in-council which was inconsistent with the

existing body of law in this province would, I suspect, render it non-compliant with law. The test, just to be very technical here.... Most days I'm really happy I'm not a lawyer, and actually, this is one of them. At any rate....

[Applause.]

That's universally appreciated, apparently, as well.

The common-law definition that would precede any cabinet consideration of an order-in-council pursuant to this statute would be subject to this function-and-control test. Does the body exercise a function that is traditionally held to be a government function? Is the body established by an enactment? Does the body receive a significant portion of its funding from government? Does the government appoint most or all of the body's directors or chief executive officers? Does the government control the body through approvals of its bylaws?

Those would be some of the tests which would determine whether the order-in-council which was proposed to cabinet was consistent with the letter and intent of this statute. I recognize the point the member's making, but I hope that the debate has reconciled some of those concerns.

D. Cubberley: I just want to move a little bit towards the outcomes — the use and ultimate disclosure of the information, syndromic or otherwise, that's generated through this kind of research. There's legislation regarding anonymization of data that will govern, and it will be built into agreements that will occur. There are other safeguards that link the research, in some sense, to societal benefit and move it out of the realm of being intended for gain of some kind.

The question becomes: what happens once the information is generated? What, if anything, governs the way in which it might be used post-research? I'm interested in some comment on that.

[1115]

Hon. G. Abbott: I assume that I understood the member's question correctly. I think it related to.... Once a research project has been completed and the educational institution — Simon Fraser, for example — wants to have the research peer-reviewed and then go to publication, we would not attempt to limit that within the scope of this act beyond the obvious constraints around how personalized information will be used under the terms of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and under the terms of this statute.

It is in the contract that we will reinforce that any research would clearly have to be on a depersonalized basis. We're struggling here with the tension that exists within FOIPPA between freedom of information, sharing that information for the advancement of society in understanding chronic disease management or understanding any one of a thousand questions about how we can improve the health care system, versus protection of that information, to ensure that it's only used by bodies aiming to ensure society is advanced by their

work and that the information is depersonalized so that it is not used in a way that might prejudice. Any release of research is going to be depersonalized. That's an absolute.

D. Cubberley: One last question for me on this. Then, I believe, one of the other members may wish to follow a bit further.

I guess the question of how the outcomes are actually used is the part where control seemed least capable of managing it. Once it's opened up, it's then available in some sense for society to make use of as it will. I'm trying to anticipate not just from what's known but from where we may be going as we become more possessed of information around genomics. That is linked to individuals, but it's also, on a depersonalized basis, linked to various subsets of the population that could be defined by specific genotypes and that might have predispositions to one form of illness or another.

[1120]

I'm thinking about insurance companies and the way that they develop rationales for covering and not covering, and schemes that relate to those for payment. This may be asking for a level of explanation that can't be given, but how do we protect against the misuse of that information in the sense of disadvantaging classes of individuals in the future who might be prohibited from a certain kind of coverage, let's say, by an insurer? I'm just using that as an example — not to be definitive.

Hon. G. Abbott: The question the member asks is a difficult and challenging question, and it's certainly much broader than even this piece of legislation. It's a very difficult one, but I'll do my best to try to answer it, notwithstanding the challenging nature of it.

Again, none of the data that we share in relation to this bill and under the terms and conditions, which we've gone through a few times, will lend itself to the re-personalization, if you like, of that data. I mean, with the protections around FOIPPA, around the ethics review and around the contract, we are satisfied that in terms of the balance between privacy and sharing of information, we have put the burden of evidence on the privacy side to ensure that we can't have the personalization or re-personalization of information in a way which would prejudice an individual or a family or even the community, we believe. I'm not exactly sure where the member's going in respect to that, though.

[1125]

That then leads to the broader question: if we were to ban the use of vital statistics, the sharing of our information, to prevent any research projects from being done because of the potential that it might have to reveal information about some subset of society, is society better served by constraining or restricting or banning that kind of research? Or is society better served in trying to first manage the information flow to ensure that the depersonalization or re-personalization of that doesn't become an issue?

Again, as I said at the outset, we are trying to strike a balance here which would allow, for example, Simon

Fraser to do that benevolent research which will advance society in a way that protects the privacy of any of the information that goes to them, versus somehow constricting or restricting their opportunity to research and publish it so that it can be shared in terms of other jurisdictions. We think we've got the right balance here, but again, I respect that depending on where one comes down on these kinds of issues, you may or may not agree. I believe it's a good balance that, in fact, reinforces the importance of privacy in every case but does allow the sharing of information so that, hopefully, as a society we can continue to advance based on the research of our universities.

C. Puchmayr: I want to continue on sort of the same tack as the member on my side was heading. Recently, in February of this year, I attended a workshop that this government put on, which was "Synergies in an E-Society." There were some excellent speakers that you brought into this conference, speakers from all over North America, including the American Civil Liberties Union. One of the messages that seemed to come out over and over again in these workshops was the message about the American securities industry looking for medical information. That seems to be the most desired and sought-after information right now — medical information.

There's a new term called "syndromic analysis," where they like to analyze symptoms, and it can be used for a multitude of reasons. One, drug companies can decide what direction they're going and what's a good marketing profile for drugs. The other that troubles me is with insurers and insurance companies. I think that's where the question with respect to... You're taking the identification, the names, away, but if people are looking at whether a certain race of citizen has a higher incidence of certain medical maladies, would insurance companies, if they received this information, be prejudiced by virtue of some of the research we're doing?

I have a little bit of comfort with the freedom-of-information mechanism that we have in place, but when you talk about, you know, some of the precursors... Is it a government function? Does government control it? Does government fund it? Is it a public body? That certainly gives you some comfort up front, but as we start to privatize some of these services, including education services, doesn't it inspire some companies, maybe a drug manufacturer, to get involved in an education component so that they can access that information? What safeguards are you putting in place to ensure that that, in fact, doesn't happen?

[1130]

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for his question. Again, I think the question he raises is an important one. I guess, though, to set the context, as the member well knows, whether this act is passed or not, whether the changes we're proposing here are embraced by the Legislature or not, there is massive research that has been done internationally and nation-

ally by governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, private industry. Research is everywhere, whether it's within our purview or not.

What we are attempting to do through this bill is to manage the access to statistical information for appropriate research projects within our purview. As I've said on a number of occasions, in terms of how we have structured this piece of legislation so that we have that appropriate precautionary balance between the sharing of information and the protection of privacy.... I think the member opposite's questions have been very good in terms of fleshing out all of those areas.

Again, we do this with the intention of sharing information with institutions that aim to advance the betterment of society by taking that information and doing research on it to tell us about how we can produce, for example, better health care outcomes for the citizens of this province. Every public body who is ever going to be in receipt of such information is, in the first instance, within the big tent of the scope of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. If they are outside the scope of that act, they will not be in receipt of information.

Secondly, we will require an ethics review, which will be intended to meet our needs and the needs of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. As well, that review will have to satisfy the CEO of Vital Statistics, because ultimately he has responsibility in the chain of sharing.

All of those things — and particularly the contract we will have with, for example, Simon Fraser University or with UBC or the University of Victoria — will lay out very clearly what our expectations are in terms of what the purpose of the data is, how it will be depersonalized as the raw data moves into a research analysis assessment — and then, of course, ensuring that the depersonalization of the data does not lend itself to what I've termed "repersonalization" at any point. There are a lot of constraints around this information-sharing that I believe ensure, in a very precautionary way, that it will not be misused.

One can always resort to the argument that there is some at least modest risk associated with anything that government does. That's true. But I do believe that we have taken all reasonable steps here to ensure that, again, we allow those world-class institutions that we have in British Columbia to give us the benefit of all their knowledge, wisdom and expertise in relation to these things by telling us how we can produce some better health outcomes based on the analysis of that data.

C. Puchmayr: Seeing the time, I will try to sort of focus down a little bit. I'll ask the two questions right now. First of all, will our concerns be part of the ethics review? Is there a public forum or public process for this ethics review?

[1135]

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for his question. My education continues unabated here.

When an ethical review is conducted, it is conducted according to the guidelines of the tri-council

ethical framework. That involves the National Research Council, the Medical Research Council and the social sciences and health research council. These, as an amalgam called the tri-council ethical framework, have developed over time a way of defining and managing all of these ethical questions associated with the proper use of research.

Oh, pardon me. The Medical Research Council — and again, I'm glad this was pointed out to me — is now the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. They are now the third leg on the stool in terms of the tri-council.

There has obviously been lots of work done around this. The business of ethical use of research materials is not a new one and has been well defined as the social science community and the government community have tried to work their way through what is an appropriate balance between protection of privacy and the sharing of information.

Sections 2 to 4 inclusive approved.

Title approved.

Hon. G. Abbott: I move that the committee rise and report the bill complete without amendment.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 11:38 a.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

Report and Third Reading of Bills

HEALTH STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

Bill 15, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2005, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

Hon. B. Penner: I call resumed debate of estimates for the Ministry of Health.

[1140]

Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF HEALTH
(continued)

The House in Committee of Supply (Section B); S. Hammell in the chair.

The committee met at 11:42 a.m.

On Vote 34: ministry operations, \$11,323,248,000 (continued).

D. Cubberley: I hope everyone is feeling refreshed this morning. Looks as though we have about 17 min-

utes before.... I guess it's a question of what your pleasure is.

We left off with a couple of open-ended things. I don't know if you're in a position for us to just tie that bit off. We were looking at some things to do with OR capacity. We were looking at the potential impact, or lack thereof, of the availability of acute care beds. We had been looking at some numbers that I introduced about the reduction of acute care capacity in the prior term of government. I was looking for some further comment and possibly some other numbers on whether there had been further reduction in a system that was among the more trim, in terms of acute care beds, in a country that is reputed to have one of the narrowest margins of acute care beds.

The other thing that had been introduced — and perhaps a little too much by way of questions in a row — was the potential impact, in light of the thin margin of acute care beds, of having a percentage of those beds occupied on an ongoing basis by people waiting for placement into a long-term care facility. I believe I indicated the number of 14 percent of acute care beds in the capital region being occupied on an ongoing basis by patients awaiting placement into a long-term or residential care facility. I was looking at the potential for a reciprocal negative impact on having a trend towards a very thin margin of capacity in the acute care sector combined with the problem of having, at least in the capital region and I believe in the Kelowna area as well, up to 14 percent of that stock of acute care beds occupied at any point in time by people waiting for placement — in effect, operating with 86 percent of capacity, if those numbers are accurate.

[1145]

I'm looking for some comment on that and whether that is having an impact on our ability in particular to move orthopedic surgeries through our operating rooms in a timely manner or whether that has some effect on their being pushed off and, by dint of being elective surgeries, not acted on as promptly as they might otherwise be.

Hon. G. Abbott: The member is going to have to start asking less complex questions, or I may start having such complex answers that I fill up the entire balance of estimates in one response. But it's an important question, and I'll do my best to answer all of the many elements that are inherent in the question that's been posed.

First, in terms of Canadian in-patient hospitalization rates, the most recent data we have on a pan-Canadian basis is a comparison between 1995-1996 and 2002-2003. That data suggests or demonstrates that as a comparison with other jurisdictions like Ontario, Quebec, Alberta — the larger jurisdictions among the provinces in Canada — British Columbia is very much on the mark in terms of the in-patient hospitalization rates. We're not unusual in any way compared with other comparable jurisdictions in terms of the in-patient hospitalization rates.

Second thing. We talked a little about how acute care beds across the nation and across the world have really been declining as we have seen the rise of more ambulatory care kinds of facilities and procedures and so on, which have taken some of the pressure off acute care beds.

[1150]

There are three factors that really have an impact on bed utilization at the acute care bed level. They are: appropriate admissions — ensuring that before someone is admitted to an acute care bed, the acute care beds are in fact where they should be as opposed to an alternative level of care facility or referenced, perhaps, to a primary care facility or out-patient services at an ambulatory care. All of those are within the scope of appropriate admissions.

Secondly, appropriate and timely discharge. Are people able to go home when it's appropriate for them to do so, or are they being retained longer than they should? Again, there's been a lot of work done in the system to try to ensure that appropriate discharge is in place and appropriate length of stay is also in place. In terms of the issues that come into play on that, in terms of lower rates of not requiring hospitalization — that is, avoiding inappropriate admissions to facilities — that has moved from 5.9 per 1,000 in 2001-2002 down to 5.3 per 1,000 in 2003-2004, and now down to five in 2004-2005. So that's the rigour around admissions policies and management that has made a difference.

Are acute care beds sometimes inappropriately occupied by people who really should be in alternative levels of care? The answer is yes. That does happen. There are occasions when people who really should be, typically, either in residential care or perhaps, on occasion, in assisted living, have to occupy an acute care bed for a period of time.

I mentioned last night the experience of my father in the late 1990s, probably about 1998 I guess, when he had a series of strokes which incapacitated him. He spent probably the three most unhappy weeks of his life in an acute care bed in Shuswap Lake General Hospital, not because he didn't get all the care and attention that the staff there could provide, but acute care beds are focused in a different direction than alternative level care beds. He was much happier when he was able to move to Bastion, which is a residential care facility. He was able to receive the kind of care and attention and focus there that is easier accommodated in that than in an acute care bed.

So that does happen. In the perfect system, one would never have a conjunction between acute care beds and alternative level of care beds. In a perfect system, we would always have the perfect balance so that one never had to wait, as my father did for three weeks and other people for longer periods of time, for those beds. We would have a perfect system where there was always just the right number of acute care beds and just the right number of alternative level of care beds, but we never get that perfection. We do always have a degree of conjunction between those systems as people are moving back and forth between the two systems.

Also, this gets a little bit more complex in that, at times, the needs of a long-term care patient might be such that they could be moved back or forth, depending upon the diagnosis or prognosis or whatever that's assigned by the physician. They might say, "Really, Mrs. Smith has pneumonia, and we believe she should be moved back to an acute care bed for a period of time" — or they may not. In the case of my father, when some pneumonia moved through the residential care facility, they left the patients in that facility. On other occasions, other families or other caregivers or other professionals might assign a different decision in that case. The lines get blurred a little bit between acute care beds and alternative levels of care beds, but generally speaking, we try to have sufficient resources on the alternative level of care side and sufficient resources on the acute care side, so that there isn't a lot of conjunction between the two.

[1155]

I am pleased to report that based on the information that we have, we have seen since 2001-2002 when alternative level of care use of acute care beds was at about 95 per 1,000, it has now dropped down to just over 75 per 1,000. So there's still some conjunction there, but generally, we're seeing less of it. It'll never be eliminated, for the reason that I said — that sometimes the diagnosis is not that clear in terms of which facility they should be in. Overall, we want to reduce the inappropriate use of acute care beds.

Then we add on the additional complexity that the member raises: is it possible, for example, that the inappropriate use of alternative-level care beds in some facilities might have the impact of delaying or cancelling surgeries — for example, in orthopedic surgery? Again, while conceptually, that's possible, it is the learned view of those who know the system better than I that that would be, certainly, the exception rather than the rule. It is far more likely that it will be quite possibly the availability of health human resources that will be the prevailing factor, as opposed to inappropriate use of an acute care bed.

D. Cubberley: I'm mindful of the time. I am trying to work along a little bit with the overall problem that we have in the area of orthopedic surgery. I'll introduce numbers here that are a little bit of a context in a relative sense for how we're doing. I think these numbers are drawn from the Fraser Institute report, so you know, it's perhaps not the first resort for data. On the other hand, the report does make interesting reading.

It ranks B.C. eighth among provinces on wait-lists from specialists to hospital — on average, 11.2 weeks for all specialist surgeries, compared with 9.4 nationally. We're lagging the national average on specialist surgeries. B.C. continues to have a particular problem with orthopedic surgery, where the median wait time in B.C. is given as 33.9 weeks for orthopedic surgery, which it says is 8.6 weeks longer than the national median wait time for orthopedics.

I'm looking at orthopedics and asking myself about that sector in particular, for the host of reasons that

we've canvassed in prior discussion, and looking at the factors that may provide some explanation for why that's happening. Obviously, not having dedicated surgery space but having blended or universal operating rooms where access is more difficult for elective surgeries is probably a factor. We've talked a bit about that.

I'm not convinced that availability of acute care beds or their occupation by other patients does not push surgeries off or extend the amount of time. It may be a limiting factor in access. There are obviously other things. Health human resources and the availability of personnel to staff those ORs is another factor.

I think, in the interests of time, I'm probably going to leave that there, but I do want to close with a brief comment on the service update in which the goals are given for the ministry — high-quality patient care being goal two. I just find it interesting that in the area of performance measures on high-quality patient care, while we acknowledge the importance of access to care, the performance measures given are timely access to residential care, waiting times for key services — and those are radiotherapy and chemotherapy in the cancer sector — and then waiting times for key services, and what we use is hospital admission from the emergency department.

If we're looking at performance measures as things that may drive system change, and we've identified elective surgeries as being a larger problem than other areas, why would we have performance measures drawn from areas in the system where it's performing very well, traditionally, or where we have made targeted investments, such as in the cancer sector, that have advanced the performance level? Why would we not have a performance measure that relates to elective surgery that would then stand as a system-driver for change?

I know we can't go further with that at this point, even though the minister is eager.

The Chair: Noting the time.

Hon. G. Abbott: The member raises some very good questions there. We could, perhaps, reserve the response to those till after lunch.

Madam Chair, I move the committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 12 noon.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

Committee of Supply (Section B), having reported progress, was granted leave to sit again.

Committee of Supply (Section A), having reported progress, was granted leave to sit again.

Hon. G. Abbott moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: This House stands adjourned until two o'clock this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 12:01 p.m.

PROCEEDINGS IN THE DOUGLAS FIR ROOM

Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR
EARLY LEARNING AND LITERACY
(continued)

The House in Committee of Supply (Section A); H. Bloy in the chair.

The committee met at 10:08 a.m.

On Vote 23: ministry operations, \$5,073,905,000 (continued).

The Chair: I just want to point out for Hansard that the member for Coquitlam-Maillardville has a bad back today and will be standing and will continue to stand. I'll acknowledge her question by thanking the member.

Hon. S. Bond: I want to welcome my staff who are here with me today in the small House. They do a fabulous job. They certainly worked very hard again last night. I want to introduce my deputy minister, Emery Dosdall; Ruth Wittenberg, assistant deputy minister; Keith Miller, a lead director; Rick Davis, a superintendent; Claudia Roch, who is also with us; and Susan Kennedy, the director of diversity, equity and early learning.

I'd like to begin this morning by presenting the information that was requested of our ministry yesterday by one of the members opposite. I would like to respond to questions that the hon. member raised. I have a package of information that we are prepared to share with the member, but I would like to highlight some of the specific issues that the member brought to the table.

[1010]

First of all, the issue of the literacy innovation grants. The member asked for some examples. In the binder of information that he will receive, the grants are listed by school district, each district's amount and the title of the project. When we look at some of the work being done by districts across the province, it's actually quite remarkable. We should be proud of the work that some of our districts are doing — all of our districts.

We want to highlight just briefly.... I was asked yesterday for a sense of the flavour and what the grants look like. In fact, school district 23 in the Central Okanagan received approximately \$150,000. They were able to expand their primary literacy program to include a program that focuses on intermediate and middle school students. They're using strategies that are developed under the school planning council goals. Each school then created a unique program to meet individual student learning needs.

Let me give you an example at Pearson Road Elementary. They used a great deal of data — including foundation skills assessment results, primary screening programs and a number of other tools — to decide which learning outcomes students needed assistance with. The school library is colour-coded by reading level as well so that each student can select their just-right book. In school district 52 in Prince Rupert, they received \$74,000. The Prince Rupert school district was able to use its grant money to adopt a more cohesive approach to literacy in the district.

The grant money has provided an opportunity for teachers to come together through release time and after-school meetings to share best practices and to collaborate on new methods of instruction. One new method introduced is a new approach to novel studies known as a literature circle, which focuses on comprehension through discussion rather than traditional homework. Also, importantly, the district was able to purchase first nations literature for the literature circle. Some great work is being done there.

A large urban school district in Burnaby received \$138,000, and they are using the dollars to support refugee students through their innovation grant. Many of the refugees that come to their district have never attended school, despite the fact that they are of secondary-school age. So the district has developed special ESL programs in the area of foods, art and home economics to transition the students into a school environment. Those are just some of the examples of the fantastic work being done through the literacy innovation grants.

The member also asked for guidelines and criteria to be included around the School Community Connections program. The \$10 million is being provided to utilize facilities for community purposes. The goal and the theme is making schools the centre of their community. We've included under one of the tabs the announcement about the program and a very sophisticated process for applications, monitoring and ongoing assurance that those projects are being utilized for the reasons the money was given.

Explorations. The list of grants from across the province has been included. Again, we looked at where those camps were being offered. We had the camps offered in places like Tatla Lake and Hudson's Hope, so the complete list of those camps is listed.

Community LINK. The member asked for a list of school districts. It's provided within the binder.

Enhancement agreements. We have the list of signed, draft and planned agreements. We have an

example there, in particular, that we highlighted, of the Cowichan district, as was requested.

Finally, the question about why partner grants increased by \$4.5 million. One of the issues that Ministers of Education across the country are facing — and British Columbia has taken a lead role in this area — is the whole issue of access to copyright. Certainly, in my time as Minister of Advanced Education, this was an issue. We actually have increased that part of the budget. It's considered a partner group, because it's the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.

The issue is that there is an ongoing debate, actually, in terms of the possibility of increased tariffs for all provinces, not simply British Columbia. The tariff would result in a yearly fee of approximately \$7 million for British Columbia. We're currently working as ministers with one of the top copyright lawyers in Canada on behalf of all provinces to try to find a more reasonable negotiation of the licence, but it is apparent we may be facing in British Columbia increased costs related to copyright.

[1015]

In terms of prudent fiscal planning, we need to be sure that if that comes to happen, those dollars would need to be applied to that particular issue through our partnership with CMEC.

So that, in summary, is the list of requests that were made by the member opposite, and we will be happy to provide him with a binder with that information in it.

J. Horgan: I thank the minister and her staff for completing their assignment on time. I know that a lot of work went into this, and I appreciate it very much. In my inventory of requests there are two issues that I didn't hear the member speak to, and I'll just ask quickly. One was the ministers who make up the Strong Start committee, and a second one was a list of districts that are involved in the Action Schools B.C. program.

Hon. S. Bond: We'll finish our homework and get that back to you as soon as it's reasonable.

J. Horgan: I thank the minister. Also, there was a request for a capital list so that we can expedite questions in the course of the next day or so from other members on this side. With that, I'd like to give the floor to the member for Coquitlam-Maillardville to discuss areas of concern to her. I'll be returning later in the morning.

D. Thorne: Thank you for allowing me to stand. I will sit if I can.

First of all, I would like to thank the minister and her staff for the briefing that we had several weeks ago. It was very informative, and we did appreciate it.

To start, I'm going to refer to the minister's accountability statement, where the minister states that following the May 2005 election Education was given responsibility for early learning, literacy and municipal

libraries. I would like today to focus on the early learning and literacy portions of this statement.

My first question is around funding for education. I'm wondering what funding has been shifted into education.

Hon. S. Bond: The additional funds that have come to our ministry as a result of change in mandate are \$12.872 million. Those are focused on libraries, and in fact we're still in discussion with the Ministry of Children and Families regarding the early learning component.

D. Thorne: How many staff support this reorganization?

Hon. S. Bond: There are 13 FTEs related to libraries and two related to early learning.

[1020]

Interjection.

The Chair: Member.

D. Thorne: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. This is more difficult than I thought, and sitting down kind of broke it up the last time.

Are any of these FTEs new? I mean, have they been moved into the Education Ministry to support these three areas, or were they there last year? Looking at the budget sheets, it looks like the FTEs at 14 haven't actually changed and don't into the foreseeable future.

Hon. S. Bond: The 13 FTEs that are related to libraries are, in essence, a shift from another ministry, so there are not new FTEs. They are simply being shifted from one ministry to the other. The two FTEs related to early learning were an internal reappointment of their work. In essence, we just reutilized some of our staff in a different way to focus on early learning.

D. Thorne: Can the minister please provide detail on where this funding and these FTEs were taken from — which ministries and which programs?

Hon. S. Bond: The 13 staff members came from the ministry that was previously called Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services. The funding for libraries was transferred directly from that ministry. As I said, the two staff related to early learning are internal reorganization from our staff, and we're still in negotiations for funding with the Ministry of Children and Families related to early learning.

D. Thorne: We understand that this ministry has had \$2 million of the federal child care dollars shifted to it for this year, but this fact was disputed by the Ministry of Children and Family Development when we did estimates with them. They told us that this ministry will only get federal dollars subject to the consul-

tation process. Could you please clarify the status of those \$2 million in federal child care funds?

[The bells were rung.]

The Chair: I'll be declaring a recess in order to vote in the House.

The committee now stands recessed until the big House is completed.

The committee recessed from 10:23 a.m. to 10:34 a.m.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

On Vote 23 (*continued*).

D. Thorne: We understand the ministry has had \$2 million of the federal child care dollars shifted to it already for this year, but this fact was disputed by the Ministry of Children and Family Development in the estimates process. They told us that this ministry will only get federal dollars subject to the consultation process. Could you please clarify the status of that \$2 million in federal child care funds?

Hon. S. Bond: We have earmarked \$2 million for early learning in our budget presentation because we felt it was important to identify our expectations regarding the funding. Having said that, not one dollar has been expended, and we are certainly still in discussions with the Ministry of Children and Family Development. We are also still in the middle of a consultation process.

D. Thorne: I understand from the answer that the Education Ministry has not yet gotten the \$2 million and is waiting for the results of the consultation process, or they have the \$2 million and are waiting for the results of the consultation process.

Hon. S. Bond: We are waiting for the results of the consultation process, but certainly it's our expectation that our discussions with MCFD about the \$2 million would continue as well.

[1035]

D. Thorne: At this point, is that thought to be the extent of the money coming to the Ministry of Education after the consultation?

Hon. S. Bond: It's our expectation that the \$2 million will be the extent for this fiscal year, and we will continue to discuss with the Ministry of Children and Family Development future budget allocations. Also, we are awaiting the results of consultation to see how best to utilize those dollars.

D. Thorne: Moving into the separation of early learning from child care, the minister has used graduation rates as one of the reasons to justify the govern-

ment's decision to separate early learning — i.e., pre-school — from child care. Will the minister please provide the research that she is relying on for this decision to the opposition?

Hon. S. Bond: First of all, I want to just have a bit of discussion about this, because we need to make it very clear that we believe early learning takes place everywhere. In fact, child care is a very important place for early learning to take place. So it's not a separation in terms of concept. What we want to do is work very closely with the Minister of State for Childcare to look at how we can provide an integrated approach to making sure our children are ready to begin school.

The research that we'd be happy to share has been created by Dr. Clyde Hertzman. The work that he's done — the EDI tool that he uses — points out that about 25 percent of our children arrive at school, and they are not actually school ready. So it's a very useful tool and excellent research, but I think it is important to state that early learning takes place everywhere. Certainly, child care facilities and opportunities are an important component of that.

D. Thorne: I will talk a little bit about Hertzman later in the questioning. Right now I'm wondering what consultation the minister and her government did before it split up child care from early learning and moved part of these services to children out of the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Hon. S. Bond: Well, in fact, we are the lead ministry responsible for early learning in government, also for literacy and libraries. We're absolutely delighted about that. But our new ministry responsibilities, as the lead for early learning and literacy, show that our government's intent, which we've been very clear about, is that we look at a coordinated approach and focus on lifelong learning for all British Columbians, including the very youngest ones.

[1040]

In fact, we are working closely with our colleagues. It's not simply the Ministry of Children and Family Development who retains responsibility for child care and key early childhood development programs. Health also retains responsibility for child care licensing. Our role as a ministry is to look at the area of early learning. All of this work needs to be coordinated, and our ministry has been designated the lead ministry.

D. Thorne: I repeat my question to the minister: what consultation was done before these things all started to happen?

Hon. S. Bond: This is, I think, merely an evolution of the beliefs this government has had from the beginning of our mandate in 2001. We believe that there needs to be a coordinated approach and a coordinated strategy. As I mentioned in the previous answer, the Ministry of Children and Families actually retains responsibility for child care and key early childhood de-

velopment programs and services. Health also retains responsibility for child care licensing.

When we were elected in the last provincial election, in fact, the designation of ministries changed. It was based on our belief that we need to look at a life-long learning approach. What better place to talk about early learning than in the ministry that's responsible for learning in the K-to-12 system?

D. Thorne: I guess there was no specific consultation done then, because I'm not getting an answer. I will move on to the next question.

As part of the federal-provincial agreement on early learning and child care, the B.C. Liberal government is starting a consultation process on how best to use the \$600 million in federal dollars over the next five years in order to build a first-class child care system. What role is this minister, her staff and her ministry playing in this consultation process?

Hon. S. Bond: In fact, there are a series of meetings taking place and opportunities for people to talk about several things. Obviously, I have a new ministry with a new education mandate which includes literacy, libraries, community use of schools and early learning. There are consultations going on. There are 60 school-based consultations taking place, which I expect to be completed by mid-December. We're doing that in partnership with the Ministry of Children and Families. In addition to that, we are having more focused consultations. Again, my staff and the Ministry of Children and Families staff are working very collaboratively on both of those processes.

The second series of regional consultations is focused on early learning and child care. Those meetings will continue, and we are holding information meetings with key stakeholders which ultimately will result in a provincial forum, which we are very much looking forward to hosting in December. In addition to that, there are web-based public consultations. So in fact, we are talking to both stakeholders and to the general public, and we are doing it collaboratively with the staff of both ministries.

[1045]

D. Thorne: So the only public input is on the Web. The actual consultations in person are all by invitation only. Is that correct?

Hon. S. Bond: The general public has web-based opportunities for public consultation, but in terms of the consultations that we are having.... As I understand it, another member may choose to discuss that more in depth. When we moved forward with the consultation process, we actually asked school districts to provide us with a group of people best suited to have that discussion. Let me give you a list of the people suggested around who should be included. I'll leave it to the member opposite to decide whether it means the general public.

The suggestions included parents, students, school district staff, school trustees, service club representatives, post-secondary representatives, aboriginal leaders, health professionals, community union leaders, RCMP, librarians, community literacy leaders and library board members. That's for the one side of the consultations.

Secondly, when we're working with our partners in the Ministry of Children and Families, participants in those consultations will include from this group — again, government and ministry not making those invitations but, in fact, people in local communities asked to put those groups together.... Here is the list of people who may well be invited and included — it is up to districts or up to regional offices: child care providers, early childhood educators, faculty and post-secondary ECE programs, parents, school superintendents, aboriginal representatives and health authority representatives.

D. Thorne: Has the minister been involved in any consultation sessions with her government's provincial Child Care Council?

Hon. S. Bond: I have not, but my colleague the Minister of State for Childcare has, along with her senior staff. They meet regularly, as I understand it.

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

D. Thorne: The minister has told the media that over the next two years she is planning to develop education programs designed to enhance early childhood development and that she is working in conjunction with specific stakeholders, including parents and professional early childhood teaching associations. This would obviously be part of the list of people that was just named by the minister.

How is this ministry's consultation across the 60 school districts being coordinated with MCFD's consultation on the best way to use the federal \$600 million?

Hon. S. Bond: The consultation processes are actually run jointly in a collaborative way across both ministries. In fact, the consultation information plus the information gained from key stakeholder meetings will be funnelled and looked at corporately. That will form the basis of a discussion paper that will bring together information from both of those processes.

D. Thorne: We understand that the ministry's consultations on how to use the federal child care money have been by invitation only. Was this the idea of the federal government, or was it done by the provincial government — this decision?

[1050]

Hon. S. Bond: Obviously, the federal government does have expectations. We would expect them to have expectations around talking to people about how best to utilize these dollars.

In fact, they do make suggestions about who might be included, but we believe that we have broadened the scope of those discussions beyond what the federal government might expect. Certainly, the composition of the meetings is locally determined. That's not something that we dictated or prescribed. We simply said to put together the best group of people possible, including a lot of the stakeholders that I mentioned to the member opposite. We look forward to the results of that consultation and think it will certainly be helpful in shaping policy.

D. Thorne: The Minister of State for Childcare confirmed in her estimates that the consultation sessions were set up to be by invitation only, and when we asked the minister to make information about the sessions public, the best that was done was to put vague information on the website — just the city and the date of these sessions. I think the minister opposite, as well as her staff, understands where I'm going with this.

There are a lot of people who have a vested interest in how these dollars get spent in every community. A lot of them are the leaders in the communities. But they definitely have vested interests. You know, both sides of us could name names on that — which we're not, obviously, going to do. But there are a lot of people who may have opinions that they will not express on a Web basis. They won't even know in most cases about these consultations.

I myself, as the MLA in Coquitlam-Maillardville, did not know that the Coquitlam consultation was taking place, and I think I told the staff that at the briefing. Since then I have spoken to the school district and the school board, and that won't happen again. Nevertheless, there are other people in the community, maybe people who don't hold a position like me, who might be very interested. I'm merely trying to determine here what purpose it serves for the government to have consultations that are strictly by invitation only.

Hon. S. Bond: I think it is important that we read into the record once again the list of people that actually were chosen by local organizations. In fact, school boards were given the opportunity to choose the participants that they felt best reflected the information that government wanted, so I think we should be perfectly clear. Government did not issue invitations to the consultation.

We actually encouraged and allowed school boards and regional offices to choose who would best inform the shaping of public policy. That list includes parents, students, school district staff, school trustees, service club representatives, post-secondary representatives, aboriginal leaders, health professionals, community union leaders, RCMP, librarians, community literacy leaders, library members. That was, as I said, an expansion of the types of groups that the federal government would even suggest. It was much broader. It was an attempt to be inclusive but also an attempt to gain the kind of effective information that's required in developing policy.

Finally, if there are issues with people's comfort level with web-based consultation, certainly that's something we could have a discussion about. But there is the opportunity, and many people are utilizing it, to provide opinions through web-based consultations.

D. Thorne: Thank you for the list again. I also have received the list on e-mail. My point is obviously not shared by the other side. I believe that at least part of the consultation process should be open, in-person consultation, obviously, with parents — working parents in particular, not necessarily people who are organized, who would be known in the community to be invited, because they wouldn't be known. But they would have some very serious opinions on how child care money should be spent when they're working parents themselves who can't find adequate, safe child care that they can afford.

[1055]

I think it is important that I'm at least down on record as making that statement, because I believe it. That being said, I'm wondering if the minister will be consulting with any parent groups — specifically parent groups, not one representative of a well-known parent group. If so, at some point I wouldn't mind knowing who those parent groups are. Are they just a group of parents loosely linked together, or are they some big, well-known group other than the PTA and the school groups?

Hon. S. Bond: There is a series of consultations going on. The invitations are not being issued by government. There is opportunity for broad-based input through web-based.... The web-based consultation is very interesting, because it's actually being run simultaneously to the consultation process. It is for interested parties who are unable to actually make the events that are scheduled locally by those organizations.

We also meet regularly through an advisory body called the Education Advisory Council, at which place there are representatives, for example, of the B.C. Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils representing thousands of parents across this province. Certainly, that's an agenda item that will be discussed at EAC as well.

D. Thorne: Okay. How do the early childhood learning and the early literacy programs fit together? Are they separate initiatives at this point, or are they being coordinated?

Hon. S. Bond: In fact, we are looking at an integrated approach. It's hard to separate early literacy from early learning, and we think it's appropriate to look at models that already exist that actually celebrate early learning opportunities and provide excellent outcomes.

We are looking at some of the early learning partnerships that already exist with schools across the province. For example, in Coquitlam there is a program

called PALS, Parents As Literacy Supports, with school district and literacy project funding in 11 schools last year, now moving that to 27. There's the Tri-Cities family literacy program, which has community sponsorship and the United Way, in at least six schools. There are the Mother Goose programs, which are funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development in five schools; a great program called You Make a Difference, where parents and children engage in activities related to both early social and language development — again, funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. So there is a variety of models, and the issues of early literacy and early learning are very closely linked together.

We intend to capitalize on that — so very much looking at an integrated approach. We are developing a model, but we want to look at all of those things that are available across the province.

D. Thorne: Nobody would deny that those are excellent programs. I'm actually familiar with the Coquitlam programs. In fact, I've helped work on some of those programs. But unfortunately, they don't always help the single mother who lives down the street who leaves for work at seven in the morning and gets home at seven at night.

[1100]

Anyway, moving on. The ministry is apparently, as you've mentioned, looking at several different models for early learning and literacy — the Burnaby model, the model from school district 63 in the Okanagan, the Parksville model and, of course, Clyde Hertzman's early development intervention model. Is the minister presenting all of these models in the consultations re the 600 million in federal child care dollars?

Hon. S. Bond: In the provincial forum we expect to be able to demonstrate some of the exemplary models across the province. But in consultation, we're actually there to hear from people about their ideas and suggestions about how we can best deliver a brand-new mandate in partnership with the Ministry of Children and Families. We are not presenting models at consultation processes. We're actually listening to people who have great ideas about what government should be considering.

D. Thorne: After the September 29 announcement of the child care deal with the federal government, we found out that the language of ELCC includes school readiness. The human early learning partnership group — or HELP as it's known, which I believe the minister will be acquainted with; Clyde Hertzman leads this initiative, of course — had this to say about school readiness versus early childhood education. These are Clyde's words:

It seems to us that many who are not in the field of ECE do not yet understand that research has shown that play-based, child-focused, developmentally and culturally appropriate approaches to learning and to development in the early years are the most successful programs both in the short and long term.

Does the Minister of Education agree with HELP on this point?

Hon. S. Bond: We absolutely agree with the work that Dr. Clyde Hertzman does and with the comments he's made. In fact, my deputy has met with him on regular occasions.

It isn't a matter of one issue versus another one at all. This is about a coordinated approach to serving the families of British Columbia. That does include a mother who leaves for work at seven in the morning, because we want to find models that actually allow the children in that family to have the kinds of opportunities.... That includes child care. It perhaps includes early learning centres, early literacy centres. This is a great news story for people in British Columbia. We are working collaboratively to sort out how best to deliver those services, and we are doing it in collaboration with the Ministry of Children and Families.

D. Thorne: It seems to me that this statement by HELP is in direct contrast to the minister's public comments on school readiness. I'm wondering why this government is taking an approach that does, in spite of what's being said, separate early learning from quality child care.

Hon. S. Bond: It's not at all in conflict with the comments that we believe that we need to help families prepare their children to be ready for school, because we know that their success in school.... It also helps in classroom size and composition — all of those things. If we can help the 25 percent of children identified with Clyde Hertzman's EDI tool, we know it will make a significant difference not just in school but for families across this province. We believe an integrated and coordinated approach is an appropriate way to do that. We are listening to people across the province as we develop the role. It's significant, and we certainly concur with the work that Dr. Clyde Hertzman has done.

D. Thorne: It's just this kind of play-based, child-focused care described by HELP in that statement I just read that is provided by early-childhood-educated trained child care workers in quality child care centres. Does the minister agree that this is a form of child care that supports both the children's development and families in their workplace participation?

Hon. S. Bond: Yes.

D. Thorne: Is the question of finding a model that promotes both early learning and supporting working families being explored in these consultation processes?

Hon. S. Bond: Yes.

D. Thorne: The minister told the *Vancouver Sun* in early September that one of the possible results of her ministry's efforts would be the development of family

learning centres across the province and the possible incorporation of preschools within elementary schools.

Could the minister tell me why she is floating ideas with the media before having even launched the consultation process?

[1105]

Hon. S. Bond: The minister is actually simply reiterating the fact that across this province, school districts, community organizations and others are already using models that employ the very kind of thinking that is going on. So there is always dialogue and discussion about ideas and about how to move forward a brand-new mandate in a new ministry.

In addition to that, we are doing a significant degree of consultation in partnership with the Ministry of Children and Families. I actually think talking about early learning, literacy and the challenges that families in this province face is important. It is significant. Raising awareness about the significant issue of 25 percent of our children identified through Dr. Hertzman's work is absolutely essential to have a public debate and an informed debate about that issue.

D. Thorne: Can the Minister of Education explain how working parents would be able to take advantage of these family learning centres that she envisions and has laid out in some detail for the media?

Hon. S. Bond: We certainly recognize the importance of high-quality day care. We also know that what we're looking at doing is enhancing opportunity, certainly not removing any, so we look at some of the models that are in place. We look at family day cares. We look at the fact that in some homes, grandparents take care of children. We want to provide the kinds of opportunities where they may choose to participate in an early learning centre that may or may not be located in excess space in a school situation.

We know that quality day care and child care are important. We're simply suggesting that there may be other models we could add to those programs that already exist. We think that's essential. The more options and the more choices we can provide all of the families in this province, including working parents where two parents work in a family.... That's essential. I think that's exactly what this discussion is about.

D. Thorne: Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had enough money to fund all of these programs that are obviously wonderful? I mean, early literacy is not something anybody is going to argue against in school readiness, etc. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could afford to have all of those programs in the education system and still build a universal, quality child care system as well?

Can the minister cite the studies that have indicated that her school-readiness approach is more appropriate for three- and four-year-olds than the learning-through-play approach of early childhood educators?

Hon. S. Bond: Well, we don't have an approach yet. We're in the process, actually, of developing and listening to people who have expertise in this field. That's why we're encouraging both school districts and regional offices to bring together people to talk to us about how best to serve the needs of our families. We know that early learning is play-based. It includes physical, social, emotional and language. That's exactly what early learning is about, so there is no model. This is about looking at choice and looking at the models that already exist. Can we enhance? Can we add to...? Most importantly, this is about providing options for families in this province in the ways that best serve their children's needs, and we're going to continue to have that discussion.

D. Thorne: I guess the minister can't give me the names of any particular studies that are saying that this school-readiness approach is more appropriate. I mean, one example of a school-readiness program that's been running for a little while in the Ministry of Education is Ready, Set, Learn. I have some concerns about that, although I'm sure that for some children from middle-class families it works very, very well.

[1110]

I wonder: how do we reach the people who really need this kind of service whose children don't get into the schools or into preschools? How do we reach those parents to come to Ready, Set, Learn? From what I hear and read, we're not reaching a lot of those people. I'm also wondering — because I know that measurement is very important to this government — how you measure the effectiveness of the Ready, Set, Learn program in reaching the families that we need to reach to give them school readiness.

Hon. S. Bond: I'm happy to talk about the Ready, Set, Learn program. Let's talk about what it's done and what it needs to do. Does it meet the need of every child in the province yet? No, it doesn't. But what it has demonstrated is that it has been an incredible catalyst for communities working together.

Ready, Set, Learn was begun by the ministry as a school-readiness initiative, and it was implemented first in 2004-2005. At the end of that, evaluations were done to look at how successful it was. One of the ways we can tell that it's been successful is that initially we had interest from 86 percent of the eligible schools that actually participated. This year we have seen that 96 percent of eligible schools from all 60 districts are registered. In fact, one of the questions that's asked when we evaluate Ready, Set, Learn is: how have principals and others within the staff made efforts to reach out to those families who have, perhaps, vulnerable children or first nations children in particular?

School districts are utilizing this program in incredible ways. The district of Abbotsford has seen community partnerships formed as a result of Ready, Set, Learn that simply did not exist before. One of our school districts.... Actually, the superintendent, in order to try to encourage children who may not have

attended before, to help them come, dressed up in a bunny suit, drove a bus and picked up those children with their families to make sure there was some way of reaching out to those children.

Ready, Set, Learn is a beginning. It certainly is working, and we look forward to finding ways to utilize tools such as Ready, Set, Learn to reach out to those families who have more vulnerable circumstances. In particular, of concern to me are first nations children.

D. Thorne: In terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the program, is there any specific measurement occurring?

[1115]

Hon. S. Bond: There is an evaluation form that is completed. In looking at the feedback that's been submitted on the evaluation forms, it is largely positive. The main concerns expressed were about timing, with requests for wider windows of implementation. Schools and school districts support the concept of Ready, Set, Learn, see its benefits and are seeing, in particular, beneficial relationships and early connections being established with and among family and community partners.

The fact that we are actually providing a book has made a significant difference to many of those families that the member opposite and we are concerned about. In some homes, actually, there isn't access to even a book. This provides the opportunity for those families to receive that resource. Certainly, the evaluation forms that have been received after the first implementation year are largely positive.

D. Thorne: Looking at the money left over from the 2003 child care agreement, \$207.8 million left unspent.... At this time, are any of these funds being directed or planning to be directed to the Ministry of Education's budget?

Hon. S. Bond: That's a question best suited for another minister, but as we understand it, none of that is being directed to us.

D. Thorne: Earlier we talked about the \$2 million that is.... Well, the ministry doesn't have it yet, but it's been talked about — the ministry getting \$2 million of the \$92 million on the table for this fiscal year. Is this the only money that's been talked about, or does the minister anticipate receiving any of the other federal dollars slated for new strategic direction re early childhood learning?

Hon. S. Bond: As I answered previously, the \$2 million is all we expect to receive in this fiscal.

D. Thorne: Just wondering if there's been any discussion at all on how much might be anticipated in the next fiscal year.

Hon. S. Bond: No. Again, as noted earlier, those dollars will be determined after we decide strategically

and together, based on the consultation we have, how we will move those issues forward and what model or what variety of models we might utilize. That won't take place until after we have the consultation completed.

D. Thorne: I'm going to refer now to an article in the *Times Colonist* — an editorial, actually — called "Don't Send Toddlers to School." This was in response to the Ministry of Education's public plans in September — the trial balloon about this whole issue. Part of the *Times Colonist* editorial said: "The Minister of Education seems to be in a hurry. It's not hard to see why. B.C. stands to get more than \$600 million over five years from what was supposed to have been a federal national child care plan but is now being divvied out piecemeal to provinces who can show that they can put it to good or other uses."

I'm wondering if the Minister of Education will finally admit to this House that her ministry is trying to get a piece of the \$600 million in federal dollars for the national child care plan. I could read more of the editorial, but I think we all know the editorial to which I'm referring, so I'll just leave it at that question.

[1120]

Hon. S. Bond: Of course, we're having discussions about how best to utilize those dollars. In fact, in the criteria laid down by the federal government, early learning is actually one of the areas captured by the use of those dollars.

The most important thing.... I think it's ironic in terms of the comments made in the media that we're moving too quickly, because normally it's that we're moving too slowly. We're actually in a consultation process that will help us shape the use of those dollars. We want to use them wisely and carefully. Most importantly, we want to find the best way to ensure that they provide absolute top-quality child care with appropriate opportunities for a variety of families, but yes, we are in discussions about that. That's the point of the consultation process.

D. Thorne: To summarize what the rest of the editorial goes on to say, it talks about qualified early childhood educators also being excellent at giving our kids the stimulating learning environment that they need. Hertzman also says the same thing, as I have quoted. So aside from shifting federal child care dollars into her budget, what justification can the minister make for fragmenting child care and early learning?

Hon. S. Bond: Well, as I've explained numerous times over the last little while, it's not a matter of either/or. It's a matter of working together across ministries to find the best way to utilize millions of dollars that have now come to this province, but we also want to find a way to support families in an integrated way. Is there a way we can look at early childhood opportunities? At quality day care? At quality child care? Is there a way we can utilize excess space in schools?

We need to be thoughtful in how we plan to work together, but I can assure you of one thing. These dollars will be focused on families in this province and how best to serve their needs.

D. Thorne: In my last few questions here, I'd just like to take a look at the school space corporate linkages. Appendix A in the agreement indicates that one new strategic direction for the ministry includes building community capacity through School Community Connections. I'd like to know how this new strategic direction is being funded.

Hon. S. Bond: We would like some clarification from the member opposite as to which document or which program or which specific initiative the member refers to.

D. Thorne: I'll get that. Appendix A, which is page 45 in your service plan.

Hon. S. Bond: We do need some further clarification. If the member opposite could repeat the question and give us the page number one more time, please. Is it the 2004-2005 service plan that's being referred to?

D. Thorne: It's 2005-2006 to 2007-2008. Yes. It's appendix A — its changes from.

[1125]

Hon. S. Bond: Thank you to the member opposite for her patience as we went through piles of paper.

Building community capacity is actually.... What we're talking about there is how we increase literacy in the province, how we improve that. As the member opposite knows, that's our number-one goal in British Columbia.

School Community Connections is actually a program that was discussed by another member opposite last night. It is a partnership with the Union of B.C. Municipalities and the School Trustees Association of British Columbia. It's a \$10 million program, and in the binder I provided to the member opposite, certainly the criteria for School Community Connections are completely included there.

The other issue is through libraries. We know that, obviously, libraries have a critical role to play. Many of them are involved in literacy projects already in this province. So our whole goal, again, is to look at a collaborative and focused approach to improving literacy and, in particular, focusing on connections in communities and utilizing libraries.

D. Thorne: Some of the \$600 million federal child care money could find its way into funding this program at some point in time.

Hon. S. Bond: The funding is as I explained. It's a \$10 million program for Community Connections, and that money is being managed through a partnership between — the ministry is participating in that — the

UBCM and B.C. School Trustees Association. That's a \$10 million fund. In fact, the library budget is the library budget, and I think it exceeds \$12 million.

D. Thorne: Can the minister please tell the House what sorts of partnerships are envisioned? Would, for example, corporate for-profit organizations be able to be partners and be given use of public facilities in schools? For example, would a corporate for-profit day care be eligible?

Hon. S. Bond: We have not in the criteria — which were developed in cooperation with the UBCM, the B.C. School Trustees Association and the ministry — ruled out any possibilities for partnerships. In fact, that will be determined locally, as school boards work with communities to bring forward joint proposals about how best to utilize space and create amazing connections in communities. We've not placed those parameters on the program. There are criteria in place, and there is actually a three-stage proposal process in terms of Community Connections. I think it holds incredible opportunities and possibilities, and there is no limitation. Boards and their communities will make those determinations. Proposals will be judged, each on their own merit.

D. Thorne: The child care agreement that B.C. signed with the federal government specifically includes, as one of its goals for the federal child care dollars, the creation of business opportunities. So I'd like to ask this minister once again if her government will approve using public dollars and public facilities for corporate for-profit child care.

Hon. S. Bond: In fact, the utilization of space and determination of who might utilize that space is up to the discretion of school boards in this province. The point we're trying to make with School Community Connections is that we want to find ways for communities to be able to access public assets like public buildings. There are certainly millions of dollars invested across this province, so we're asking communities to partner with school boards. Obviously, school boards will be cognizant of their own policies, and those proposals will reflect the policies of that individual school board.

[1130]

D. Thorne: Today as the critic for early learning and literacy and child care, I'm just interested in the federal \$600 million, which is earmarked for child care and early learning. I'm interested in for-profit child care and public dollars and public facilities. So I will take that answer as yes. It looks like if school boards approve, then this government will approve using public dollars and public facilities for corporate for-profit child care centres in school buildings. I'm taking that as a yes.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

This is on subsidies. I know that enhanced and new subsidies have come out in the past few months, and that's great. A lot of families have really benefited from that. I'm specifically interested in the subsidy that I think is a new subsidy, according to the Minister of State for Childcare. Actually, it's not as new as I thought it was. But it's where children under six, an unregulated licence is not required.... That would be the people whose grandma is looking after them, or their neighbour down the street, I assume, can now get two child care subsidies: one for child care and one for preschool.

I'm wondering if the group preschool experiences that are referred to in the third category of subsidy refer as well to preschools in the school system. If so — if the answer to that is yes — I would like the minister to confirm today that school districts and her ministry are already making government child care policy.

Hon. S. Bond: That question would best be directed to the Minister of State for Childcare.

D. Thorne: No. Actually, I would like some kind of an answer from this minister. Because preschools in the school system.... I believe this is part of the move into early learning. It's coming from the school district board in the Okanagan. I actually have quite a bit of information on the Central Okanagan school district. They're using child subsidies to collect preschool subsidies as well — a privilege never provided before. This is not coming through child care. This is education. This is exactly what we were just referring to with school districts making the decisions.

Hon. S. Bond: Those arrangements are made with the Minister of State for Childcare, which is part of the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

S. Simpson: I've got a short number of questions here that relate to sex education. As the minister will know, we're seeing increasing sexual activity among young people in our schools. It seems from what I've been told from discussions with the folks at Options for Sexual Health, which used to be Planned Parenthood B.C., their information is that kids are getting younger and younger and engaging in a variety of forms of sexual activity.

[1135]

These are serious issues, as I'm sure everybody would know. We deal with questions around sexually transmitted diseases; obviously, around pregnancy; around education, generally; and around how young people learn about sex.

It seems critical that we need to ensure that that information is provided consistently and in a comprehensive and thoughtful way to young people, and it certainly seems to me that the school system plays a critical role in providing that education to our young people in British Columbia. Yet it also seems that there is quite an inconsistency in how different school boards and districts deal with this question. Some deal with it

in a more comprehensive fashion. Some deal with it in a very cursory and superficial way.

My questions to the minister will relate to what responsibility the ministry views itself as having in ensuring that this particular aspect of personal planning and education and health for young people is addressed in a more consistent way across the province. The first question I have for the hon. minister is: what does the minister view as the role of the ministry in terms of sex education and sexual health for young people?

Hon. S. Bond: Sexual health education in B.C. is delivered as part of an overall health and career education curriculum. It is a required area of study from kindergarten to grade ten. The ministry's responsibility is to prescribe learning outcomes. Our job, in essence, is to set the standards related to sexual health education.

We do provide suggestions for instruction, for classroom assessment and learning resources, and those are provided but not prescribed by the Ministry of Education. Final decisions regarding instruction, assessment and resources are left to the professional judgment of educators who understand the specific needs of their students and their school communities. So in fact, the ministry's responsibility is to determine learning outcomes. Those are provided, but in the bigger picture, it is professional educators who make the determination about how that is used in classrooms.

[1140]

S. Simpson: How, then, does the ministry measure that? What we see, as the minister, I'm sure, will know, is that some districts put significant hours of time and bring in professionals and others to work with young people in terms of delivering sexual health education. Others do take a more cursory approach. Or boards choose, for whatever reasons, to not engage the topic as thoroughly as some may say is necessary.

In terms of these outcomes, how does the ministry actually measure those outcomes to ensure that children are getting the kind of education and information and training that they require, based on the ministry standards?

Hon. S. Bond: When we look at curriculum development, one of the things that is important to us is that curriculum is developed with teachers and by teachers so that it's appropriate in terms of development. The ministry's responsibilities are to set the standards and lay out the learning outcomes. In fact, we rely on the professional judgment of educators within classrooms.

It's not simply in this area of curriculum but in every area of curriculum. The same pattern is in place and the same responsibilities. Ministry creates standards — curriculum — and looks at learning outcomes. The delivery of that is based on the professional judgment of educators, the role of school boards and districts in that. In fact, the IRPs that are related to sexual health in particular ask that districts involve parents and guardians in this process as well. Ultimately, the

accountability for the delivery of the program is left with professional educators at the classroom level working in consultation with school boards and with their communities.

S. Simpson: With this and getting back.... Just a question related to curriculum now. I certainly stand to be corrected by the minister here, but it's my sense that the curriculum is developed at the provincial level. Then it is, obviously, delivered by our educators in the schools, and they have latitude around interpretation of that as they deliver curriculum, but the curriculum is fairly specific in many areas.

The question I would have is: is there any curriculum outside of outcome that is actually provided with an expectation that teachers will deliver that curriculum in the fashion that they deem appropriate as educators?

[1145]

Hon. S. Bond: To the member opposite: he is absolutely correct. A curriculum is developed provincially. It is developed, obviously, with and by teachers, and that's really important — not just in this area but all across the system. In trying to best express this so that we can understand it, curriculum describes what students must learn or the learning outcomes, and that's really the ministry's responsibility. We don't, though, provide how it must be done. That's not the ministry's responsibility. That is up to professional educators working with their school boards.

As a ministry, we do provide suggested learning resources, for example. Again, it's up to a teacher, a board or a district to decide how best to utilize those resources, if any of them, but we do provide those suggestions for teachers who are looking for resources to assist them. In essence, curriculum provides the learning outcomes and what the students must learn. We don't prescribe how. That's left up to the judgment of our professional educators.

S. Simpson: I'd just like to read a quote here out of a report that was done around the Canadian guidelines. It was a quote from one of the people who was surveyed, a public health worker. I think that this is important. As they said, "I have no idea what goes on in each classroom. There is no consistent manner of sex education. It differs from school to school, class to class, teacher to teacher, year to year. Public health is sometimes asked to come in and teach, but we have no idea what has been taught before, when they will get more education or what the curriculum is."

It would seem to me that public health, obviously, is a key partner in this, along with education and the delivery of this. I'm interested.... I will put two questions together here, because I think they are related. One is what that relationship to public health is, in terms of developing those models or those outcomes, and how they play a role in that. The second question is around your saying that teachers, obviously, have primary responsibility for this.

The question I have is that we know that teachers are fully trained to deliver mathematics, English or science. They're not necessarily fully trained to deliver this particular aspect of education. I'd be very interested to know, hon. Chair, what kind of specific education or training is provided to educators to be able to do this work. Is there a requirement to have outside expertise there who can support that?

[1150]

Hon. S. Bond: To take the two questions separately.... First of all, when we're developing curriculum we do partner with the Ministry of Health and with health experts. Certainly, that's not something we would do independently. We involve teachers and health experts.

Secondly, in terms of the opportunities for teachers to be trained, as the member opposite does know, they are trained through universities and receive very general training, but school districts also arrange or work to deliver this particular curriculum in a variety of ways. I'll give the member opposite some of those examples.

Certainly, there are teachers who interpret and address sexual health learning outcomes in their individual classrooms, and that's a way it is delivered in the province, but some school districts train teachers to provide the sexual health education outcomes in their schools. There is additional training provided by school districts in some cases.

Finally, one of the more common ways for the curriculum to be delivered is through partnerships. Some school districts actually hire public health nurses or educators to provide those programs within classrooms.

Again, the ministry's responsibility is to provide the outcomes and the curriculum. School districts have the opportunity to look at a variety of ways of delivering the curriculum. Ultimately, teachers in classrooms looking at the individual children that they have in that class make professional judgments about how to deliver the learning outcomes.

S. Simpson: I have one last question to ask on this, but just a quick comment before I ask the question, since I won't get up again on this. As the ministry ensures continuity across the province around educational outcomes and works very closely with teachers, school boards and administration to deliver that, I would hope that the ministry — I'm sure they do pay good attention to this — would pay some increased attention to this. In my community I certainly know that we are seeing increased numbers of teenage pregnancies and problems around STDs with young people. This is a growing challenge and problem in our school system, and it's one that I think we need to address through education. I would encourage the minister and the ministry to focus increased attention. I know they're paying attention, but focus increased attention on this.

My last question in relation to this, and the minister referred to the question of parents and guardians.... Clearly, this is a sensitive area of education and training and can't be done without the engagement of parents and guardians so that they have a comfort level about what's being taught in the classrooms and also so that there is some consistency, hopefully, from the message at home to the message in the school, if that's possible.

Maybe the minister could tell us a little bit about what role the ministry plays in ensuring that information is provided to parents and guardians and to increase their comfort level about this whole topic.

[1155]

Hon. S. Bond: Recognizing the importance that family plays in this topic — and I appreciate the member

opposite's commenting on how important it is that we involve parents — the ministry does recommend within the school curriculum that within those documents they involve parents and guardians. It does provide strategies for how to inform parents and guardians, and it is our understanding that the vast majority, if not all school districts, do utilize that opportunity. But the ministry does make that clear in curriculum and provides suggestions of how to contact parents and guardians.

J. Horgan: I move that the committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 11:57 a.m.

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