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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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Honourable Bill Barisoff

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CONTENTS

Tuesday, November 22, 2005
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Routine Proceedings

	Page
Introductions by Members	2067
Committee of Supply.....	2067
Estimates: Office of the Premier (<i>continued</i>)	
C. James	
Hon. G. Campbell	

Proceedings in the Douglas Fir Room

Committee of Supply.....	2081
Estimates: Ministry of Education and Minister Responsible for Early Learning and Literacy (<i>continued</i>)	
Hon. S. Bond	
A. Dix	
M. Sather	
D. Chudnovsky	
J. Horgan	

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2005

The House met at 10:04 a.m.

Prayers.

Introductions by Members

D. Cubberley: It's my pleasure this morning to welcome to the precinct and the chamber two grade 11 classes from Pacific Christian School who are here today with their teacher Mr. Tim Kamsteeg. They're here to learn about the history of this venerable institution and are enjoying seeing all of the sights there are to see in this beautiful building. Would the House please join me in making them welcome here today.

[1005]

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. de Jong: I call Committee of Supply. In this chamber we will be debating the estimates for the Premier; in the little House, for the information of members, the estimates for the Ministry of Education.

Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: OFFICE OF THE PREMIER
(continued)

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

The committee met at 10:07 a.m.

On Vote 8: Office of the Premier, \$10,664,000 (continued).

C. James: Today I'd like to start off by talking about the new relationship and first nations issues and taking a little bit of time to explore that and to explore that issue.

As the Premier knows, when the announcement was made around the new relationship and the document signed by the Premier and first nations leadership in British Columbia, he was joined by colleagues on this side of the House in saying that we supported that direction and supported the direction that was being taken in the *New Relationship* document — a very positive step for British Columbia to look at building a better relationship with first nations.

As we know, and as I know the Premier knows, benefiting first nations communities and making sure that we provide support for first nations communities isn't simply a benefit to those communities. It is, in fact, a benefit to all British Columbians. Making sure that we address the poverty, health, employment and education issues for first nations across British Columbia will benefit us all. Dealing with the uncertainty around treaty negotiations will again provide a solid economic base for us in British Columbia if we're actually able to

provide the kind of certainty that just isn't there right now. Certainly, you have our support in making sure that document actually works and goes forward.

I just want to talk a little bit about actions related to the document, because I think that's the important piece, not only in this issue but in the other issues we've canvassed over the last day or so, which is to make sure that the actions follow the words. We know that one of the first relationships that was built with first nations — around the Tsawwassen accord that was signed by the Premier and signed by first nations leadership around children and families — shows, in my mind, that we need to be very careful about making sure that our actions follow our words. That document talked about support for regionalization, support for moving in the area of children and families and support for first nations communities, and in fact, we saw budget reductions that impacted that decision after the fact.

I think it points out again the importance of making sure that.... The words are there. That's wonderful, but I think first nations would remind all of us in this Legislature that they've heard those words before. It's important to have actions follow words for all of these issues.

[1010]

Just to talk a little bit about the document itself, we heard the Premier's staff talk about the fact that the document wasn't a signed commitment. It was simply an agreement to enter into discussions. I wonder if the Premier can indicate when we expect that to be a signed document, what the process is for that and what the time lines and expectations are from his point of view on that issue.

Hon. G. Campbell: This, indeed, is one of those cross-government issues that I was trying to identify yesterday. I should go back for a moment and say that the *New Relationship* document that was drafted by the First Nations Leadership Council and the government was not a signatory document. It was really saying: "Here's the broad framework that we hope to be able to move forward in."

I am very pleased that the First Nations Summit, the Assembly of First Nations and the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, for the first time in, I think, three or four decades, have come together and said: "Let's work together with the government with regard to this." Really, what we're trying to do is establish not just a new vision but a new set of actions that we can take, which would — again I want to emphasize this — go across government. So it's a theme that, in terms of my office, we will be following as we move forward.

The First Nations Trust that we put aside in September — the \$100 million for the New Relationship trust — is in the process of being developed with the deputy minister of aboriginal affairs, my office and the Leadership Council. I actually don't know exactly where they are with regard to that, but I hear that the progress is good. That is clearly something we've got to come to conclusion on before the end of January.

[A. Horning in the chair.]

First of all, I want to acknowledge the fact that the Leader of the Opposition has said from the outset that this was something that the opposition is interested in doing, as we are as a government. I concur with the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, one of the things that I think will distinguish this approach from previous approaches is that when we have the plan put in place and we're building that plan with first nations leaders, it will be an action plan. But it is a long-term plan as well. We're not pretending we can solve a lot of this overnight. We intend to make sure that as we put that plan together, there are specific actions and specific steps we will take to assure British Columbia's first nations that we don't just have a shared vision, but we have a shared course of action that we intend to follow and that we intend to measure as we go through this.

So as we think about this, I think that this week will be a very important first ministers' meeting. I have had the opportunity of going across the country and meeting with other provincial leaders, as well as with the Prime Minister, with regard to building a new relationship for first nations. We've focused in on five specific areas. One is health, the second is education, the third is housing, the fourth is economic development, and the fifth is new relationship.

[1015]

If I can stand back for a second and just talk about British Columbia. There are about 100,000 decisions a year made in British Columbia that could have a direct impact on first nations people across the province — both urban aboriginal people and aboriginal and first nations people on reserve. Those are of critical importance to all of us in terms creating stability and long-term certainty.

I think one of the things that has been clear as we've listened to the first nations leadership is.... The critical shift in direction here is that we're saying to the first nations leadership, "You map the course, and we'll follow it with you," as opposed to: "We'll map the course, and you can tell us what's going on."

In terms of our time lines in terms of specifics of the New Relationship trust — that time line — we're going to have to have the conclusion of that and what the framework will be for that. If there's a legislated requirement for that, it will have to be done in time for the next session of the Legislature, because we have to do this in terms of March 31, 2006. We hope that we can move through the next number of months to build on what we've done in British Columbia and perhaps include the federal government in building a new relationship as well.

I think it's critical to remind everyone, as we move to the new relationship, that it's not about moving away from treaties. In fact, it's an effort to try and create an environment and an atmosphere where we can move on with treaties and actually have some resolution brought into place.

My goal is to have the plan that we come up with, with first nations leadership, set specific measures, set specific targets, set the map, the milestones that we're going to reach. I do believe this is important. The milestones we may want to reach are interesting, but the milestones that first nations leaders commit themselves to are going to be more interesting, and they're going to be far more effective. We are moving in all of those directions to try and ensure that happens.

For example, part of the new relationship is the work that's being done by first nations right now on what they consider to be the first nations pine beetle action plan. As I mentioned last night, there are three chiefs who are in the lead with regard to that. All first nations directly involved will have an input into that, with their own processes to develop that. There will be direct contact with the Minister of Forests as we do that. That's an example of specifics which will be re-sourced effectively in one ministry.

In health, if I can use health just as a second example. The Leader of the Opposition may recall that in September of 2004 there was an announcement by the federal government of \$700 million for aboriginal health in Canada. It was an announcement. The challenge is to take that announcement and to move it down through into different categories.

We've said that we would like to be more specific on health. We know, for example, that right now there's about a 400-percent greater incidence of diabetes in first nations communities than in non-first nations communities. We don't need any more measures to figure out that that's wrong. What we really want to do now is start mapping out a plan which will shrink that gap so the incidence of diabetes in first nations is the same as it is in non-first nations at the end of ten years.

We know there is a higher incidence of addiction, youth suicides, so we want to have a plan that will be specific to British Columbia and British Columbia first nations, in which we work with them and where they say: "We think that if you did XYZ, we could get some benefits out of that." I do think that's a critical part of this.

I guess one of the most important parts of building a new relationship is building capacity in first nations to deal with the huge array of issues that we asked them to be part of and that they rightly asked to be part of. We have to think in terms of how we can do that. The first part of that is to try and get all of our collective minds.... It's not that we don't want to do this. It's to try and get our collective institutional minds around including first nations as early as possible in the processes that we run through.

We want to try and build innovative processes within the public service. We want to look at opportunities, for example, for reciprocal secondments where first nations institutions may provide the government with some advice and where the government may send some people out to the first nations. So there's some back and forth with regard to that. All of that is an important part of this initiative.

[1020]

I'll just close with one last point. I think that at the end of the day, what we should recognize is that there's an enormous opportunity for British Columbia here. It happens to include first nations, and it happens to include the youth of first nations. There is a significant disparity between non-first nations demographics and first nations demographics. There's a larger number of young people being born into first nations communities than non-first nations. We want to be sure that each of those children has the opportunity to reach their full potential and their full promise. We want to understand from first nations leadership how we can make sure that they maximize that potential.

We've seen it, for example, in the Nisga'a community, where their direction of education has led to a significant increase in the number of graduates they've had. Those are all goals, I'm sure, that we all share, and it's all part of building a new relationship that touches each aspect of government, that includes first nations in that, that recognizes first nations for the contributions they've made in the past and for the contributions they can make in the future.

C. James: Thank you for the comments. I just want to follow up with the Premier on the area of working across government, because I think that's a very important part of the success of this document. If the *New Relationship* document sits with a minister in a ministry, it's not going to realize its potential with first nations communities in British Columbia. So I certainly agree with the Premier that this needs to be looked at across government.

I wonder if the Premier could talk a little bit about how that's being implemented on the ground in each of the ministries, whether it's Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Forests or Mining or whether it's Ministry of Education or post-secondary education. How is this document being enacted within those ministries? What kind of direction is being given to ministers to make sure that they're living up to this document? Then the next part of that question to the Premier is: who is ultimately responsible for this document? If first nations communities feel that things aren't being followed up or the government isn't living up to the new relationship, who is ultimately responsible for that issue?

[1025]

Hon. G. Campbell: I'm trying to get this so that it's actually an answer that might be helpful.

I think it is important to note, as the Leader of the Opposition has suggested, that this goes right across government. The lead ministry with regard to this — and it's in fact embodied in the name — is Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation. So the minister that is ultimately responsible for the government, for the people, will be the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation.

But it's important to note that in looking at this, it is not the ministry alone that will be doing this. In this

regard it's not a stand-alone stovepipe ministry. In fact, this is a major theme for the government. If I stand back for a second, we have two deputy ministers' committees that are set up right now. One is on natural resources and the economy. The other one is on social development. Ministries report into that to make sure there's integration, and hopefully there's some synergy out of the different ministries and their actions. The Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation sits on both of those. He's one of the few ministers who sit on both of those.

When we look at this, what the Leader of the Opposition will see.... As we move towards the new set of service plans for 2006, you will see references to the core issues with regard to the new relationship reflected in each of the service plans of each of the ministries. Just last week we had a couple of days when we were meeting with the Leadership Council.

If we talk about the Leadership Council for a minute, the Leadership Council meets on a regular basis — I don't know if it's every other week or every three weeks, but on a regular basis — with the Deputy Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation and the Deputy Minister to the Premier. They know that if they have a challenge, they're welcome to call my office at any time. I encourage them to call the minister first and try and solve it, but if they have an issue, I would invite them to come and join me.

We have a first ministers' meeting coming up at the end of this week. Last week I had the opportunity to meet with all of the members of the Leadership Council to talk about what we thought was going to happen, what we could do together, etc. That may sound superficial, but I think it's important that, as well as formal relationships, we have informal communications and relationships that we build over time.

To I give you an idea, when we sat down and tried to go through some of this in terms of the new relationship, we looked at all the ministries in the two-day meeting. I wasn't at the meeting, but we looked at all the ministries. We looked at the core requirements of each ministry to start to build this relationship and build this capacity over time. I think it's a fair characterization to say that I'm sure the Leadership Council was encouraged. Whether they were pleased or not, I'll let them decide. But they were encouraged by the fact that we were identifying those. There was, I think, significant feedback on that. We are clearly making progress.

I've said to the Leadership Council and I'll say to the Leader of the Opposition: this is something that is important to us. We want to have real plans in place that we can move on. I'll give the Leader of the Opposition some examples: forest and range agreements, which are a very important part of how we manage our forest industry, and mountain pine beetle. Both of those were dealt with in detail with the Leadership Council — how we would manage those. There will be some changes to those as we move ahead to try and reflect the new relationship.

In health. The health outcomes and how we actually move forward with the indicators, what the indicators are that we'll use to start, where we will go and what we can actually accomplish would be included in that, and first nations will be part of that.

In education. Curriculum development — I think there's no question that this is an area where there is significant work that has to be done. As we move towards 2008, which is the 150th anniversary of when British Columbia as a whole colony was brought together, I think it is an opportunity for us to look at what the encounter between European cultures or new cultures and the first nation cultures were, what their history is. I think it's very interesting for us when you think back and think of....

I'll use myself as an example. When I was taught history, I was taught about explorers. I was very seldom taught about the first nations people that took the explorers by the hands and told them how to get from A to B. I think there's a lot of work that has to be done as we build the stories of first nations into our provincial understanding of what our history is and what our future can be. I think that's going to be critical.

[1030]

Curriculum development, also first nations language. I think for too long we lost first nations languages, and we shouldn't have. I think it's very difficult to retrieve the ones that have been lost. But the ones that we have, we have to nurture. We have to try and find a way that we can enhance them culturally and provide for the long-term sustainability of first nations languages across the province.

In tourism, sport and culture. There is an examination of aboriginal and first nations tourism. In sport there is a look at the opportunity that aboriginal and first nations sports may have. When you look at the Olympics.... I know one of the things we're looking at is how we could bring some of the Arctic and northern sports to the Olympics as demonstration opportunities. The Attorney General's office is looking at legislative review and litigative reform that may be required.

Legislative review, just to put it on the table, is to look at the legislation we have in place that requires a public servant to do A when the courts have said to the public servant: "No, you must do B." We're trying to get those things reconciled and brought together. That's a pretty significant project that is underway with the Attorney General.

The environmental assessment process and how we include first nations in the environmental assessment process.

So that gives some idea of some of the cross-government issues we have. We want to ensure that it meets expectations. I think one of the challenges is to think that this is going to be easy to do. It's complex; it's multi-layered. I do want to just take a moment to once again recognize that the true leaders in this and the real bearers of the torch of trust, if you want, are the first nations leaders themselves.

As we look at the history of the province — and this is not in any way casting aspersions on our history or the people that went before us.... I think the history of the province is one where it would not be difficult for first nations leaders to say: "We will not even try to trust." So one of our goals as we go through building the new relationship is to try and re-establish, or maybe establish, some trust for the first time in a long, long time between first nations and our public institutions.

I should say to the Leader of the Opposition one of the things that I think is most encouraging about this. It's easy for some people to say it won't work. I think there is a desire not just on behalf of first nations leadership to make this work but also on behalf of the public to make it work. When the public looks at some of the conditions and some of the results that we have, whether it's in health or education, they don't want those gaps to exist either. So I'm hopeful that we will see some significant improvements.

Those improvements will be guided by the first nations leadership. My deputy minister and the Deputy Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation will continue to meet on a regular basis. The Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation will have ongoing meetings and dialogue and will.... I can tell the Leader of the Opposition that across government I have said to ministers: "One of the things that you must change, if you haven't done it yet, is to have in your focus how we're going to build a new relationship with first nations and aboriginal people across British Columbia."

C. James: Thank you for those comments.

I just want to touch on a couple of the specifics that the Premier mentioned as he was going through the cross-government work and the areas that the government was exploring with first nations. I appreciate that some of this work is ongoing and that there aren't answers for all of the pieces, but there are a couple of specifics happening right now that, again, seem to contradict some of the words in the *New Relationship* document with the actions of government.

One of the pieces to talk a little bit about is the mountain pine beetle. The Premier mentioned the mountain pine beetle and the need to make sure that first nations had the opportunity to be involved in that process. In fact, we were all fortunate in British Columbia to have first nations leadership come together in Prince George and put together a wonderful document. They took the initiative themselves to put together their own action plan, their own direction to be able to address the mountain pine beetle and to have their communities directly involved in that.

[1035]

I just want to ask the Premier: will he be asking the Ministry of Forests to take a look at the \$100 million that has already been allocated and look at how that can be reworked with first nations involvement — to look at, for example, year two and year three of the plan they put together? Again, I think it's very impor-

tant to make sure that you're living up to the word — that the Premier and the government are living up to the word of the *New Relationship* document and how that's impacting on your actions.

Hon. G. Campbell: We have some things underway that are not completed yet. There was a meeting in Prince George. Both the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation and the Minister of Forests attended the meeting. There was a report that came out of the meeting. It was submitted to the ministries that work on this. There are three chiefs — I don't recall their names; I had it last night, and I put it away again — that are involved now as their leadership in doing that.

I believe — I'm not certain of this — that resources have been provided for the ongoing development of that plan. The framework for the plan has been laid out. We provided \$100,000 to assist in the development of the strategy. I mentioned earlier that we're looking at potential for seconding people from first nations into the government. We're looking right now at how we can bring someone in from first nations directly to help marshal that plan through government.

In terms of the three-year goal, are we willing to look at amending it to reflect the first nations plan? The short answer is: yes, we're willing to look. How will that happen? My short answer is: I don't know. But we will certainly do it, and the spirit is exactly as the Leader of the Opposition has suggested. The first nations are directly involved. This clearly has significant impact on first nations communities as well as non-first nations communities. We want the plan, in keeping with the spirit of the new relationship. We would like them to know that they're going to help drive this. On top of that, there's the \$15 million first nations benefits trust that's available to first nations that have been directly impacted by the B.C. Rail investment partnership. So we are trying to build that. That's part, I think, of building institutional capacity not just inside government but outside government in first nations.

C. James: Thank you for the comments. I think it's important that all ministers are aware of these kinds of conversations, because many first nations that we're hearing from — and I'm sure the government is hearing from around the province — are very concerned that there seems to be one direction coming from the leadership and the Premier and different directions coming from ministers and ministries. So I think they will appreciate the comments that the Premier made and will appreciate knowing that they have an opportunity to be able to raise those issues as they come up and an opportunity, in fact, to be directly involved in funding and in having first nations people involved in implementing these plans. I think that's a very important piece.

Just to continue on with specifics, I do want to take a moment to talk a little bit about forest and range agreements, because I think the Premier mentioned the fact that the framework for the new relationship was a

general document. It wasn't a signed document; it was a general document. In fact, if you take a look at the document itself, it is very general. It talks about building relationships. It talks about putting together consultation mechanisms — all critical, very important work.

The one specific in that document is the forest and range agreements. There aren't specifics in any other area in that document. The one point that is specific is on forest and range agreements. Premier, why is that specific in there when the rest of the document is generalities?

[1040]

Hon. G. Campbell: Forest and range agreements were specifically included in the *New Relationship* document. They were new agreements that had been brought in over the last couple of years, and they're a critical part in terms of providing first nations with both a revenue share and operating areas, as well, for them to carry out their activities in.

I think the really important thing as we look at those forest and range agreements — and there were some discussions about them last week, as I understand it — is that they are a way of establishing trust between the first nations and the government. It is important, I think, for us to continue to build on those and to recognize how they can be part of creating economic opportunity for first nations.

First nations have been very clear to us that it's not that they want to stop economic opportunity. They want to be part of economic opportunity. One of the challenges they've said to us that they faced in the past was that they would receive a pile of documents that the government may have been working on for two years and were asked for a response to that pile of documents in two weeks, and they're not going to do that. There's no reason to expect that they should do that, so their obvious answer is no.

One of the things that I think we've tried to do is create not just a renewed sort of look at our land use planning with regard to first nations.... But forestry is such a critical part of first nations history and culture and economic future that the forest and range agreements were specifically allocated....

I think, actually, it's a good sign that they were specifically talked about within the *New Relationship* document, because it shows that a vehicle that is relatively new has some resonance with first nations in terms of its effectiveness. We want to keep building on that effectiveness as we go ahead and try to include first nations in our resource industries and resource future in British Columbia.

C. James: Just to continue on talking about those agreements, in looking at the wording in the *New Relationship* document where it talks about a joint working group to review the forest and range agreements, I think that's certainly a positive step. In fact, as the Premier himself said earlier, everything in government needs to be reviewed in light of the *New Relationship*

document — not just forest and range agreements. I think it does raise questions around, again, why this specific issue is in there.

But it also talks about making recommendations on options for amending those agreements in order to make them consistent with the vision and principles in the *New Relationship* document. My question to the Premier would be: are there current problems with the forest and range agreements that this was put in the document to try and address?

[1045]

Hon. G. Campbell: I apologize to the Leader of the Opposition. This is taking some time to get this, but I want to try and get it right. In terms of the *New Relationship* document, the first issue I think we would all understand is that first nations don't want to sign a forest and range agreement today which may be changed for tomorrow in terms of building that *New Relationship* document. That's what we'd all expect.

There have been some issues that we've dealt with. I think it's the Huu-ay-aht case. In the Huu-ay-aht case, one of the things the judge said was that it was not fair or equitable to decide that you're going to allocate resources on a per-capita basis. First nations have come to us and said they think there's got to be a better way of allocating those resources. We've said we recognize that there should be a better way of allocating those resources. What would be a fair way of distributing those resources? We are working with them to do that.

Last week there was a major review done of the forest and range agreements to try and see how we could put that framework in place with regard to the resources that are available and how we're moving ahead. There has been some conclusion reached with regard to that, I think, but first nations will now chat with their legal counsel. Our officials will look at that, and that will come back for approval to the table.

When we look at this, though, what we're saying is that as we build this and move ahead.... I think the first time the vehicle was introduced was about 2002. There are forest and range agreements with 94 first nations right now. There are about 15 million cubic metres of resources available. There are shared revenues of about \$107 million, I think, that have been available.

In terms of the new relationship, what we're saying is: "Okay, identify what your challenges are" — I can't give you the inventory; I'm sure the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation could, with your critic — "and identify what the issues are." Let's see how we work together to resolve those issues. As we work together to resolve those issues, we'll amend and change and alter the existing forest and range agreements so that we can build on that.

[1050]

It may well be, as we move forward and build additional capacity, that there will be another generation of forest and range agreements. I can't foresee that we will stop improving those as we go ahead.

I do want to just take a moment to talk about: why forest and range agreements and not all the other things in government? I think, as well, as we build the new relationship, we have accepted with first nations that they have a capacity challenge. How do we meet that? I think we also have to recognize that in government, there's going to be a capacity problem. This is a very fundamental, if you want, programmatic and policy shift in government, so there is a challenge. It's not necessarily a challenge with me, but it could be a challenge with me.

Let's take, for example, the RAV line in Vancouver. My traditional way that I would look at that was: well, the city is doing that, it's taking place in the city, and they should get on with it, and da-da-da. Da-da-da is something I often think in terms of policy, but you know, let's do that. It takes a bit of a step back to say to yourself: "Hold it. What are the impacts that it might have on first nations in terms of an environmental assessment or something?"

Institutionally, I'm sure there are many things and many behaviours in the institution of government, across government, that we're going to have to change. We'll make mistakes. Again, I go back to some of the issues that we've had to deal with over the last six or seven or nine months as we've tried to build this new relationship. My deputy may get a call from a first nations leader who says, "What happened to the new relationship? I thought we were going to do this," and we'll actually pull back and say: "Yes, that was something that we didn't do the way we'd like to do it, and we'll do it in a different way."

I should say that on the other side of the table the same thing has happened, where something has taken place, and we'll say: "Hold it; that's not what we were expecting to happen." They'll say, "Yup, you're right," and they'll change it. I do think there's a lot of back-and-forth on it.

I think it's important in terms of the forest and range agreements for us to recognize that there are some things we may have to change. We're willing to change them, and we're willing to change them with the first nations leadership.

C. James: Just to continue on with those comments, I appreciate the Premier talking about the specifics around the forest and range agreements and the challenges there. The reason the questions are raised is that it comes back to my earlier point about making sure that there's consistency across government in these issues, particularly with the new relationship.

As the Premier suggested, we did in fact canvass this issue with the minister of aboriginal affairs as well as the Forests Minister and heard that the forest and range agreements are just fine. I think it comes back to the contradiction and the direction that needs to be given from the leadership to say to all the ministries and the ministers that there's a reason this document is put together, that there's a reason we've set a direction to work with first nations and that that's critical to do. I

think that's very important for the Premier to pay attention to.

The Premier mentioned the Huu-ay-aht. That is a case, as the Premier mentioned, that was sent back. The forest and range agreement, in fact, through the court process, was ruled not to have done a good consultation. The government, in fact — and I quote from the court ruling — had "a complete failure of consultation based on the criteria that are constitutionally required for meaningful consultation." It's very clear that there was a problem with that case.

I just want to be clear. I heard the Premier say that there's an agreement coming with the Huu-ay-aht. I just wanted to ask the question about whether the government is living up to its new relationship and not appealing the court case and going forward in trying to find a solution — or what process and what stage we're at with that court case.

[1055]

Hon. G. Campbell: I understand that we have an agreement with the Huu-ay-aht. I also understand that we are currently in the midst, as I've mentioned, of developing a new agreement that does things like ensure that if there is an uplift because of pine beetle or because of some other challenge, first nations are part of that. It's not something we can anticipate today, but it's how we can look at that. Those are some of the issues that we're dealing with.

I'm hopeful that... I think, actually, that the discussion has been robust enough that we are going to have an improved agreement that will work for first nations across the province, and we'll continue to pursue that.

C. James: I'm pleased to hear that. I'm sure many of the first nations who are working hard right now around concerns with forest and range agreements will also be pleased to hear that government is willing to take a step back, to relook at those agreements and to be able to negotiate them in the spirit of the *New Relationship* document. We'll be holding the Premier and minister to account for that as well.

Just to close off on this area, and then we'll move to the Premier's office and office budget. The last question on this. The Premier talked about making mistakes and about the fact that, as we go through this, mistakes will be made and we'll have to take a step back and we'll have to start again. I agree with those comments. So I just want to finish off.

When we look at the new relationship, I think the naming of the ministry Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation is a very strong statement about building relationships with first nations. One of the areas when you talk about reconciliation is acknowledging that mistakes were made and then rebuilding the relationship. My question to the Premier is to ask about the referendum that was brought in, in 2001 — whether he acknowledges that it was a mistake and whether he regrets bringing that referendum in.

Hon. G. Campbell: I do think it's important that we acknowledge mistakes. I don't actually believe that the referendum was a mistake. I think it was important to ask British Columbians. I think it was important to include British Columbians in this, what is a significant provincial initiative.

I was asked at the First Nations Summit if I would renounce the referendum, and I said at that point that no, I didn't believe I should. I think the principles are working on behalf of all of us in British Columbia. Having said that, I recognize that many aboriginal leaders still would like me to renounce those.

[1100]

I do think that the way for us to build this bridge to the future is to make sure that everyone in British Columbia feels part of it. This has always been about building a relationship foundation that is built on mutual trust and on principle. The Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation — it's not Aboriginal Affairs anymore; it's Relations and Reconciliation — will continue to pursue that, and I will continue to pursue that with first nations leadership.

I think that the really important part of this, as I look to the future, is that we have a past to deal with. We have tried to deal with that as a government. We were the first government to officially apologize to aboriginal and first nations people in British Columbia. We were the first government to introduce real revenue-sharing and forestry opportunities. We are a government that has reached out to aboriginal people in terms of economic development — literally dozens and dozens of economic development agreements. Just as first nations leaders have tried to be open to the challenges we face in the province, I've tried, and our government's tried, to be open to the challenges that they face as aboriginal and first nations leaders.

I do think that today, particularly... I should say that I actually do believe that the first nations leadership have made major contributions to the province over the last number of years as we've moved to build a new relationship. A new relationship doesn't sort of happen because it happens on one day; it happens over a period of time as we go forward to do it.

When I look at the five agreements-in-principle that we have, we've made progress with those. I think there's an opportunity for some breakthrough treaties which will be very important. I recognize the frustration that first nations have had in terms of being at the treaty table, too, and that they've invested something like \$260 million in their treaty negotiations across the province and have had very little beyond the five agreements-in-principle.

There are many that are very close to resolution. I've had a request from the first nations leaders who were involved in that to come in and talk to me about what the big hurdles are in terms of moving forward with that. We have 300 individual agreements with first nations in every single part of the province. We have new Treaty 8 agreements with regard to energy development. All of those things are possible, I think,

because everyone feels like they're part of this now. I don't think anyone feels that they're excluded.

As we move ahead, I'm very hopeful about this week. We have, for the first time in a generation, a first ministers' meeting on aboriginal issues. Again, it's British Columbia's first nations leadership and the first nations leadership of Phil Fontaine, who has really said, unequivocally, to first nations people across the country: "Let us reflect on the fact that multiculturalism in Canada was here well before Europeans or Asian communities or new immigrants came. Multiculturalism is the first nations mosaic of Canada." He has said quite clearly to them: "We want to lift everyone up." And they've said, as we would say in the province: "We want to do that through education, through health care, through building healthy communities."

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

I think this is going to be a critical time for us to see whether all of us can reach beyond the boundaries we self-impose. There are institutional boundaries that are imposed by the federal government that say at times: "We'll deal with first nations on reserve, but we won't deal with them off reserve." First nations people are first nations people — on or off reserve.

There is now an aboriginal leadership that is willing to embrace all first nations people as well. The Inuit people.... We don't happen to have many Inuit people in British Columbia, but there are 53,000 Inuit people spread across literally hundreds of thousands of square kilometres of space. How do we deal with the Inuit people as a separate aboriginal group? The Métis people in British Columbia and from Ontario to the west.... The Métis National Council is looking for ways that we can actually embrace that.

I think one of the most important things for those groups is that they touch back with the people that they represent. They all have ways of communicating. With our first nations.... They have at least two referenda before they proceed with something. I think that's a healthy thing for them.

I believe that what we've done is.... Through whatever challenges we've faced in the past, we are now ready to deal with some of the challenges we have in the present. I think by dealing with those challenges in the present in partnership, with mutual respect, recognizing first nations, recognizing their leadership — recognizing, for example, as I go to the first ministers' meeting, first nations leadership will be part of our delegation; they will be part of the activity that takes place with the first ministers.

We have to do two things. We have to do things differently. We have to do them openly. We have to do them with respect, and we have to do them based on principle. I believe that we are making real progress in that regard and will continue to.

[1105]

C. James: Just to close off on this issue with some comments on the way we started this discussion on the

new relationship. I think all of us in British Columbia are incredibly fortunate that first nations have been as resilient and as patient as they've been. Whether it's the current times or past times, the first nations people in British Columbia have not been treated well by governments of every political stripe. I think it's important for us to acknowledge the fact that for first nations to come back to the table again to deal with something like the new relationship or the regionalization of Children and Families, when they have not had a good relationship and those words have not been followed through with action.... It really gives credit to first nations and aboriginal people in our province.

So certainly from the opposition, we'll be working hard to find success in this area, and we'll certainly be watching closely to make sure that the actions follow the words that are here on behalf of aboriginal people across the province.

Just to move on to the Premier's office and to the budget for the Premier's office. One of the areas that we have seen in the Premier's own accountability statement is a commitment to fiscal management, a commitment to transparency and a commitment to accountability. I wonder if the Premier could provide us with the budget, some discussion of the budget for his office, the number of FTEs, and the comparison between last year and this year in those numbers.

Hon. G. Campbell: I'm glad to give some general overview, but if the Leader of the Opposition has some specific questions, I'll be glad to answer those too.

Estimates for '04-05 were \$8.8 million, and this year they're \$10.6 million. There are approximately 110 FTEs included in the Premier's office at this point, which includes both the political staff and the public service staff.

C. James: Just to continue on with those numbers, I wonder if the Premier could please respond around why the increase and what the increase was there for, both in the dollars as well as the FTEs.

Hon. G. Campbell: The increase is about \$1.8 million, which is 20 percent. The FTEs have increased by 25. So where have those two things come from? The first is the deputy ministers' policy secretariat, which I announced earlier. We have two deputy ministers' committees. One is on social development, and the other is on natural resources and the economy.

[1110]

One of the things that we decided to do as we moved into this second term was try and provide more integrative services across government. We have a number of excellent people in the public service. As kind of an experiment in 2004, we had brought people from different ministries into a policy secretariat. They had been effectively taken away from the ministries and put into the policy secretariat. We felt it would be better to provide not just a growth opportunity for those people but also to provide the opportunities for

those ministries to properly backfill those people who were coming in to deal with specific projects.

There's approximately \$1.5 million for the half-year of this year, and it's about \$2.4 million a year going forward. There are 19 people involved in that. We also have in the Premier's office \$300,000 for communications. There are six new FTEs in place to deal with that.

C. James: Just continuing on, one of the other shifts that occurred when we took a look at last year versus this year around the Premier's office, of course, is the transfer of the public affairs bureau from the Premier's office to the Finance office.

One of the areas the Finance Minister talked about at her first press conference was that the office had been transferred, so the public affairs bureau had been transferred over from the Premier's office to Finance, but the actual budget didn't transfer over until '05-06. In other words, the budget stayed, but the responsibility was transferred over. I wondered what rationale there was for doing it that way. Why was the public affairs bureau transferred but not the budget to follow with it in '04-05?

Hon. G. Campbell: This is two estimates back, but let me go back to this. When we did the transfer, it was identified that we were doing it. We were reducing the workload of the Premier's office. We put it directly into the Finance Minister's office. I'd refer the Leader of the Opposition to page 24 of the supplementary schedule of accounts, which covers off how this transition took place. The Minister of Finance pointed this out, as well, last June. On September 9, 2004, the Premier announced that the ministry responsibility of the public affairs bureau was being transferred. It's not unusual to transfer responsibilities.

The budget was then managed by the Ministry of Finance. It was something that was kept on the books. The Minister of Finance assumed responsibility for the office, including administration and spending decisions. However, as the formal budget transfer of the public affairs to the Ministry of Finance did not occur until '05-06 estimates, the disclosure of the 2004-2005 appropriation related to spending is reflected in the figure of the Office of the Premier back for '04-05 situation. We moved it, frankly, to reduce the workload of the Premier's office.

It is clearly the responsibility of the Minister of Finance from September on. It is now the responsibility of the Minister of Finance. I know that the public affairs bureau was canvassed during her estimates. I'm not sure if her estimates are complete, but during when she was in estimates.

C. James: Just to talk a little bit about the other shift in the Premier's office, and we'll get into the budget numbers as well around this, which is the creation of the new issues management area in the Premier's office. This is a new area, and I wondered what the difference is between this new communications area in the Premier's office and the public affairs bureau that

has been moved to the Ministry of Finance. What's the difference, and why was it necessary to set up another communications team in the Premier's office when you'd moved the communications team over to Finance?

[1115]

Hon. G. Campbell: Issues management is not a new function in the Premier's office. It has been in the Premier's office in the past. It doesn't take the place of communications. There are communications people in the Premier's office, but they're not necessarily issues management. The Premier's office does not have communications support from PAB as do other ministries. PAB is a governmentwide coordinative body and has a coordinating function in terms of communication.

Issues management is clearly there to help the Premier deal with the variety of issues that may come up on any given day — from avian flu to softwood lumber to what's happening in health care to what we are doing in education, etc. — that come on a sort of immediate basis. They're not a policy development tool. They're actually a way of the Premier being kept informed about what the issues of the day are and being provided with information so that if I'm required to respond, I am able to respond.

C. James: Just continuing on in that vein, recognizing that for the Premier, for this decision to be made, it was a new budget allocation, a new decision for this budget year. So while it may have been there previously, it was a new allocation, a new structure, for the Premier to put in place. I guess my question, continuing on, is: what changed from last year to this year where there wasn't previously an issues management team?

The Premier had the public affairs bureau in his office and, I'm presuming, had communications support of some kind or another in the office without having the issues management team. I'm presuming there was some kind of communications support to the Premier. What was wrong with the...? What needed to be changed from the previous communications structure that was there, provided to the Premier last year, to after the election when the new unit was put in place, the new dollars that were allocated to that, and how has that benefited?

Hon. G. Campbell: Just so there's no confusion in terms of what we're talking about, maybe I can take a moment. The organization of the Premier's office is on the website, so you can pull that down. But you know, I have a press secretary. His name is Mike — well, it doesn't matter what his name is. I have a press secretary — right? I have a chief of staff, and under the chief of staff, there's a deputy for issues management, a director of issues management, and that director of issues management is there to keep me informed of what's taking place on a daily basis.

There has been an expansion in budget. There's no question about it. I don't mean to be glib about this, but

what's changed is that there seems to be a lot more people in opposition than there were in the past, and there are a lot more issues that I have to be able to deal with than there were in the past. That's clearly one of the things that changed, and I'm upfront about that.

Issues management was always there. There are other activities that are taking place in the Premier's office that have required the additional people. You'll see that there is a deputy chief of staff for communications and research in the office at this point. They help with things like the Premier's speeches. They help with things like media monitoring. They help with things like legislative support. So that's there.

We also have a deputy chief of staff who's an executive assistant and a deputy chief of staff for policy co-ordination issues management. So again, there's a deputy for issues management, there's a director of issues management, and there are two.... The titles are senior coordinators for issues management. It's a seven-day-a-week challenge that they're dealing with.

[1120]

C. James: Just so I'm clear, the total number of FTEs within that issues management team is four? Or is that the total number of senior staff within that area? Just so we can continue on in this area, what is the total budget for that issues management — the number of FTEs and the total budget for this area?

Hon. G. Campbell: The total number of people that are in issues management is four. The budget is part of the overall budget, and with public accounts you can look back and see what the individuals are — what their remuneration is. So there was an addition of two in terms of issues management. There were two that were added to issues management specifically, and the issues management team is four.

C. James: Just a final question around this piece, which is again related to the change, and I appreciate the fact that there are now 33 people on this side of the Legislature. I guess we're flattered as an opposition that we now have an entire issues management team to be responsible for all of us 33 MLAs.

But I'd ask the question again of the Premier. Previously, as the Premier mentioned, there was some senior responsibility for issues management directly by the Premier, which is understandable, but was that responsibility not done previously by the public affairs bureau? What was the rationale around putting in a separate team and not having the public affairs bureau responsible for this issue?

Hon. G. Campbell: When PAB moved to Finance, there was no impact with regard to issues management in the Premier's office. There was an issues management team. There were two people. Now there are four. PAB is not an issues management function. The issues management done out of the Premier's office is done by my issues management team.

PAB has a coordinative and communications function across government. They may well be involved in terms of the communications officers, informing the media of various facts, or whatever, but they were never an issues management team for the Premier's office.

C. James: So just to focus, then, a little bit on the senior staff in the Premier's office and to talk a little bit about responsibility areas.... Just to touch on the key senior staff that were announced by the Premier in June, I'd like to start off first with the Deputy Minister to the Premier and Cabinet Secretary and ask: what are the responsibilities for that position, their role, what committees do they serve on, and who do they report to?

[1125]

Hon. G. Campbell: Maybe I can just anticipate a little where you might go. The Deputy Minister to the Premier and the cabinet secretary, as I introduced her yesterday, is Jessica McDonald. She reports directly to me. She is responsible, and she is head of the public service. She's an adviser to me on, to be blunt, any issues that she decides to advise me on and any that I decide to ask her about.

She supports cabinet in its decision-making. She has a responsibility for the two deputy ministers for strategic policy on natural resources and the economy and the deputy minister of strategic policy on social development. She also has responsible for the deputy ministers council, so she's the chair of the deputy minister's council, which is all of the deputy ministers. She is responsible for holding deputy ministers to account for their service plans. Service plans, I think you'll see, will cascade down through levels of specificity, but each service plan will include some reference to the five great goals and some reference to some of the themes we've talked about over the last couple of days. She is responsible for assuring that that is carried through and that the public service is carried through.

She's also responsible for a major initiative that the government is undertaking which is really a.... I don't want to call it renewal, but it's recognized that the public service is aging, and how are we going to deal with the transition of this public workforce, as we lose an awful lot of benefits from people who have been here for a long time and we bring new people in? So the revitalization of the public service, if you want — the repositioning of the public service....

I know that I personally think that public service is an exceptional calling for people. We want that to be attractive to young people across the province. We want to be sure that it's a place where people can feel comfortable coming, and if they decide to leave and come back, those are all things that are part of her responsibility.

So as the Deputy Minister to the Premier and the cabinet secretary, that deputy minister has a significant role in assuring that the province carries on with its

leadership and the progress that we've seen in the last number of years.

C. James: Continuing on in taking a look at the senior staff positions. The deputy ministers for strategic policy and social development — similar kinds of questions: what's their role, who are they reporting to, and what are they responsible for?

Hon. G. Campbell: The deputy minister for strategic policy and social development is a new deputy position, and it reflects my concern as we made the transition into a second term of government that we had to do a better job of integration across governments. I think there is a natural tendency for ministers to start to slowly narrow their scope of activity. When they're first appointed to a ministry — and I think I understand it — they're very open in terms of what the government is trying to do. Because of their day-to-day activities, because of the issues that they have to deal with, it doesn't take long before they start to shrink down and try to deal with just the problems that they've got on a daily basis.

So the deputy minister for strategic policy and social development coordinates government priorities related to social development. We talked yesterday about cross-ministry initiatives. Let me give an example: fetal alcohol syndrome disorder. We're trying to bring that together. We recognize that there might be activities taking place in Education, Health, Community Services, etc. The deputy minister's challenge is to create what I called — I'm not sure if it was this morning or yesterday — open-border government, where there's free flow of information, where we keep track. It's the whole government that is trying to accomplish these goals.

The deputy minister for social development chairs the deputy minister's social development committee, which are the prime deputy ministers that you would think of under social development — Education, Health, Community Services. There's a list. I'll forget some if I don't mention them.

[1130]

He recommends social development policy, legislation, coordinates activities through the deputy minister's committee and the public service towards the Government Caucus Committee on Social Development. He works with DMs and ministers in social development to provide advice generally speaking, and he supervises any policy secretariat activities that may take place with regard to social development. I think he also works to chair what we call the Strong Start committee, which is looking at children across the spectrum in British Columbia — health, education, childhood development, aboriginal relations and reconciliation, etc.

C. James: Continuing on, the deputy ministers for strategic policy, natural resources and the economy. Again, to the Premier: what is their role, who do they report to, and what committees are they sitting on?

Hon. G. Campbell: The deputy minister of strategic policy for social development and the deputy minister of strategic policy for natural resources and economy report to the Deputy Minister to the Premier. Really, the natural resources and economy deputy minister has a similar parallel function in some ways to what I mentioned earlier with social development. She chairs the deputy ministers' council on natural resources. Cross-government issues — she reports and brings reports to the government caucus committee. Natural resources and the economy — she is a critical part of directing the policy development secretariat in areas of that nature.

When you look across government, you'll see that there are ministries that we've tried to put as accountable for specific areas, but there are a number of ministries that are included. She may coordinate that. So it's a very similar role, and she, too, reports to the Deputy Minister to the Premier.

C. James: The other senior staff person that the Premier talked about is Ken Dobell — similar kinds of questions. Again, to the Premier: what is his role, who does he report to, and what kinds of responsibilities are in his area?

Hon. G. Campbell: Mr. Dobell is a senior adviser to the Premier. He is on contract. He is not part of the organization. He will take on tasks that we refer to him. For example, he was one of the people that was involved in the Prince Rupert port activities with the federal government. He was a major player in terms of trying to coordinate the Pacific gateway initiative that we tried to get the federal government to agree to, which is a national strategy on opening transportation gateways. We wanted to focus and actually lead with the Pacific gateway, so Mr. Dobell worked directly with the Prime Minister's Office, the Minister of Transportation, the Minister of Industry, etc. in trying to form that.

I think the Leader of the Opposition would know that Mr. Dobell was asked — and this is, I think, how you can distinguish this — separately to act on behalf of the federal government in looking at the port challenges that we faced in the summer. That was a separate contract that he asked permission from us if it was all right if he carried out, and we did give him permission to do that.

He has acted as a liaison on softwood. He has been an industry, government, intergovernmental relations liaison on softwood. He has a contract that pays at a rate of \$250 an hour and has a maximum upside of \$230,000, including fees and expenses.

[1135]

I did want to mention one other person that I consider to be a senior policy adviser to the Premier who is mentioned in our organization chart, and that's Allen Edzerza, who's the special adviser on first nations issues. He was appointed as a special adviser on aboriginal issues in April of 2005. He does report directly to my deputy minister again. He advises me on strategic issues of importance to the government, particularly

with regard to the new relationship and first nations. He assists the government and first nations on building new approaches. He liaises with aboriginal organizations on behalf of the government to try and build mutual respect, and he works across all ministries to provide guidance, in terms of what we were talking about earlier.

Those would be the senior-level people that are.... Mr. Edzerza is part of the government. Mr. Dobell, as I mentioned earlier, is on contract.

C. James: Just continuing on in that area, I'd like to ask the Premier: why a contract rather than an employee? Why was the decision made to look at contract? As well, what was the cost of the yearly salary before Mr. Dobell was moved onto contract? I appreciate that I've got the information now about the maximum cost of the contract. What was his salary last year, before he was moved onto contract?

Hon. G. Campbell: Mr. Dobell's salary when he was Deputy Minister to the Premier was \$203,000. Mr. Dobell retired. When Mr. Dobell retired and said he wanted to leave the public service — we ask people to serve; he had spent four years here in the public service, and he was clear with me that he would like to retire — I said to him that I would like to have the benefit of his advice on various things as they came up. We have come up with a contract which will allow us to take advantage of that advice should it be needed.

C. James: Just continuing on, the Premier mentioned some of the areas that Mr. Dobell was working on which certainly seem to me to be very key to government, very key to the people of British Columbia — whether it's the teachers dispute, whether it's the softwood lumber, whether it's the port. These are very key responsibilities, and I'd like the Premier to talk a little bit about accountability.

Who does Mr. Dobell report to? How does the Premier ensure that there is accountability for someone who is no longer a public servant but is, in fact, working on contract? Then the last piece in this set of questions is to ask: how does the Premier ensure that there aren't conflicts of interest around contracts that Mr. Dobell may do, separate and apart from the government contracts?

The Premier mentioned one area; he was working with the federal government. There are often conflicts between the position of the federal government and the position of the province on a whole range of issues. So to the Premier: how does he ensure that there aren't conflicts there for the people of British Columbia?

Hon. G. Campbell: I think one of the important points to note here is that Mr. Dobell reports to me. He provides me with advice. He would not be engaged in a contract in terms of providing that advice without the minister knowing that I was asking Mr. Dobell to be a part of that.

For example, with softwood, the Minister of Forests drives the softwood file. Mr. Dobell may act on behalf of the government in working with ministry officials, etc. He'd work with the Deputy Minister of Forests in terms of looking at what the policy options are. He is truly providing us with a bridging opportunity there.

[1140]

In terms of the whole range of issues that I talked about, I think it's fair to say that in all of those, Mr. Dobell does not have line responsibility. He does provide advice to me, to a minister, to a deputy, and we take advantage of the expertise that he's built over his years of public service. He strictly advises me. Before he takes an outside contract, there is a requirement in his contract that he must check with my deputy minister to see if we see any conflict of interest. He would do that, I think, without hesitancy, and we give him our advice. He would not take a contract that we didn't agree with. If he takes a contract on, it would be one that we did agree with.

In terms of the actions of government, the ministers and the deputy ministers are directly accountable to me. When I feel that Mr. Dobell's advice is not adding value, I'll stop asking for the advice. That's, I guess, the accountability he has to government.

C. James: A final question around this area is about the issue of the contract itself and the terms and conditions of that contract. I wonder if the Premier could provide a little information for taxpayers on the terms and conditions of the contract. How will the Premier make those decisions around the fact that he doesn't need or want the advice or feel it useful anymore? What are the terms and conditions within that contract to allow the Premier to close off that contract?

Back in June we had a press release that talked about Mr. Dobell only working part-time, on contract. Just so I'm clear with my numbers, the Premier mentioned that the previous full-year salary for Mr. Dobell was \$209,000, and the current part-time contract is up to \$230,000.

Hon. G. Campbell: Mr. Dobell is working part-time, if you want. His contract provides for part of his time being provided; he's not working full-time. He will have an hourly rate. His contract is for \$230,000, which includes expenses and travel — just so we're clear about that.

At the end of the year the public accounts will be clear about what Dobell consulting services receives in terms of the contract that Mr. Dobell has signed with us. That contract can be received from FOI. In terms of that, the reason I say it can be received with FOI is that there may be proprietary information that should be severed, but the contract has been requested by FOI and has been provided under FOI, so it's available.

C. James: Moving on, then, to the whole area of cabinet and the workings of cabinet and a little bit of discussion on that. One of the areas that the Premier talked about proudly in the first term was the whole

area of open cabinet meetings and the success of open cabinet meetings, the opportunity to be open and transparent with the public. My question to the Premier is: what happened to open cabinet meetings? What would be the Premier's assessment of those open cabinet meetings in the first term?

[1145]

Hon. G. Campbell: The Leader of the Opposition is correct. I don't think we've had an open cabinet meeting since last January. It might have been February — but January or February.

We will continue to have open cabinet meetings. We won't have them necessarily on a monthly basis, but we'll continue to have open cabinet meetings. Open cabinet meetings will continue to be places where we discuss parks and protected areas, where we might discuss treaties and the opportunities that they present. As we move into the new year, open cabinet meetings may also include areas like ministerial service plans that will be provided, and there will be other decisions that will be coming forward.

We've clearly been, over the last number of months, in a period of transition, but I think open cabinet meetings actually worked. The public has told us that they've received information from them, and we'll continue to have them.

C. James: Back to the Premier again. How does the Premier and how does cabinet make decisions about what issues go to open cabinet meetings? The Premier mentioned the environment and trees would be discussed at open cabinet meetings, but I think the public would be interested in knowing what kinds of issues will be talked about there. So I think my question is: what kinds of issues are determined for open cabinet meetings?

My next question to the Premier is: how often will those open cabinet meetings be held, and what are the costs of each of those open cabinet meetings?

Hon. G. Campbell: I'm sorry for my little laugh there. I'm not sure if you heard me, or if I didn't say this properly: it's parks and protected areas and treaties, not trees. However, if you feel trees would be good for open cabinet, we're glad to talk about them. There's the cedar and the Douglas fir. So I apologize if I didn't articulate that very well.

Parks and protected areas and changes in that. We committed that those would be held in open cabinet. Treaties will be held in open cabinet. Those decisions will be made in open cabinet. There are other areas that we will take forward to open cabinet. I think, for example, there's a significant public interest in health care and what the strategies are around health care. There will be opportunities to talk about ActNow and how we hope to do that across government. Some of the cross-government initiatives may well be taken to open cabinet.

I'm not going to commit, at this point, that we will have monthly open cabinet meetings. I don't think that

is as required as having substantive agenda items in open cabinet. Major financial updates are often given in open cabinet as well, so that not just the immediate vicinity can hear about it, but it's available for the public at large.

C. James: Just a final question around the open cabinet issue. The Premier's talked about some public interest issues that would go in open cabinet. Certainly, I think the public has interest in most issues that are going on. So my final question, again, is: who makes the determination around what agenda items are on open cabinet and, again, just the end of my previous question: what's the cost of each open cabinet meeting?

[1150]

Hon. G. Campbell: I'll let you know exactly what the budgeted cost is. I don't have an answer for that.

I do want to be clear on who decides what's on the cabinet agenda. The Premier decides what goes on the cabinet agenda, whether it's the regular cabinet agenda or the open cabinet agenda. It's one of the most fun decisions I get to make all week.

C. James: You'll get back to us with the total cost and the cost per meeting? I think if we can get that information....

I know we're getting close to time. I just want to touch on the freedom-of-information area before we wrap up here. Again, as I talked about, back in 2001 one of the commitments with open cabinets from the Liberal government was to be the most open and accountable government in Canada. That was a clear statement made by the Premier, and then again, as we've talked about through these entire estimates, we often didn't see the actions matching the words.

So we saw the FOI budget cut by 35 percent over three years. We saw in 2002 two sets of amendments which weakened FOI legislation. In fact, it gave public bodies more time to respond, increased fees — huge pressure that many organizations are facing in putting in FOI requests. Now here we are in 2005, and we hear through media reports that the government is actually considering a new set of exemptions for the FOI laws. So my question to the Premier is: why and what is the government looking at in the area of FOI and the laws around freedom of information?

Hon. G. Campbell: FOI is under the Minister of Labour and Citizens' Services, and his estimates will come up today. I think last night we were told not to talk about the potential for future legislation, so I don't intend to do that, but I do intend to point out at least some facts.

There's been a 12-percent increase in the FOI budget between 2000 and 2005-2006. There is no difference in terms of policy from what it was under the previous government. We've added 19 bodies to the act. We've required all public bodies to conduct privacy

impact assessment for new legislation programs and systems. We have extended privacy protection to include personal information. We've posted a personal information directory. We've simplified the process for adding public bodies, and we've brought in a requirement that the act be reviewed by an all-party committee of the Legislature every six years.

I do think it's important to note with regard to the budget under FOI that the commissioner has every opportunity to come and speak before Public Accounts and advocate for budget increases if he feels that that's appropriate. I do think it's also important to note that between 2001 and 2005 we've seen a 12-percent budget increase.

C. James: Just to give some examples of the challenges that are being faced right now with FOI... Thank you to the Premier for his comments, but the budget numbers are clear. There may have been an increase in the budget based on a decrease over the last three years of 35 percent. If we take a look at the number of groups and organizations that have been requesting information, it's clear that there are challenges. So I would ask a question of the Premier: does the Premier believe that the current wait times and the current fees that are in place for freedom of information, for people to make requests, are fair and reasonable?

Hon. G. Campbell: I think in terms of the detail, I would encourage the Leader of the Opposition to canvass that during the estimates this afternoon. But let me just say that any applicant can appeal if they feel that their application has been handled inappropriately. All requests are unique under freedom of information and privacy. Many requests are complex, third-party requests. We have to protect that information.

The previous government was criticized, in fact, for continuing delays. We've tried to improve on that, and it is important to note that at least we've had fewer complaints, at least, under this government than the previous government. Our goal is to eliminate complaints, but I think that it is a pretty lofty ambition when you're talking about something that is as dispersed and differentiated as this.

[1155]

As we move ahead, we'd like to improve this. We certainly want to improve transparency. I am pleased to say that the government has been not just noticed but recognized across the country for the openness of, for example, our financial reporting. Auditors General across the country have talked about British Columbia being the first jurisdiction where we have provided for generally accepted accounting principles. We've done that in a way that makes our accounts more accessible to the public. I agree that we want to be open and transparent. The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is one way that we're doing that. There are a number of other ways that we're doing that as well. We will continue to work on that as we move

forward. We welcome the comments of the all-party legislative committee on how we can improve the act, and we'll continue to work together to try and make sure that happens.

C. James: One more question, Madam Chair, just to continue on the area. I appreciate the specific questions to freedom of information. We will canvass it this afternoon, and I think there is an opportunity to do that.

The Premier talked about receiving fewer complaints. There are some very specific complaints that have come in under freedom of information, and I think it does relate to the Premier's statement and goal around being open and transparent.

For example, if we take a look at the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, they said that new to them, they have extensions for filing requests. They have increased user fees, and they believe all of these are contrary to the intent of the legislation. I understand that the Premier doesn't want to speak specifically to changes that may or may not be coming up, but I'll come back to my question around openness and transparency in government and ask the Premier whether he feels the current FOI system provides an opportunity for openness, transparency and reasonableness for people who are putting in their requests.

Hon. G. Campbell: I continue to believe that openness and transparency are important. I continue to believe that freedom of information and protection of privacy are important. I think, frankly, the all-party committee should be looking at how we can make improvements. I think the Canadian Taxpayers, for want of a better term, would surely want us to make sure we were meeting our full financial obligations with regard to their requests. They would ask that of other groups, and I'm assuming they would have the same principles they would apply to themselves.

I do think it's important for us, though, to recognize that there are always going to be challenges with this. We want to be sure that we improve with regard to this, and the goals that we set are there. We want to be the most open and transparent government in Canada. There are ways we can improve upon that. We will work to improve upon that. We will work with the all-party committee of the Legislature to improve that.

Madam Chair, if I can, just for one sec I'd like to say that I think the discussions we've had over the last couple of days have been worthwhile. I would invite the leader and, through the leader, her critics to look at the work that is going to be done over the next number of months in laying out the strategic plans that were put in place by the various ministries. One of our goals — the leader mentioned this; it's a goal that I share — is for us to have common public understanding of where we're going, why we're going there and how we're going to measure whether we're making progress or not. I would invite — as part of this process as we

move to improve service plans, improve accountability, improve openness for the public about the various issues that we deal with in government — the opposition critics and the leader herself to come forward with their recommendations for the measurements that we would use as we go ahead in the various ministries.

I wanted to thank the leader. I asked the Leader of the Opposition to send me her initial thoughts on how we might pursue the five great goals that government has established. I appreciate the fact that she's taken the time to return that information to me. It will be included in the work that we do. I would hope that as we move through estimates in the years ahead, we can continually work to look at where we'll measure, how we'll measure, what are the best measures, what we can actually have an impact on, what decisions we have some control over and which ones we don't have — so that we can try and make sure that British Columbians benefit from this.

[1200]

The new generation of service plans that I hope will be coming forward in the next budget are intended to try and not just provide the opposition with an idea of where we're going and how we hope to get there but also the public. I'm hopeful that we can continue to improve on the openness and transparency of government. I'm hoping we can continue to improve in education and in health care. We want to continue to improve and provide additional supports for seniors and children and people with special needs. We want to be recognized for our environmental sustainability and the way that we manage our environment and our economy, and we want to have an economy that keeps on thriving.

Those are the goals of government. I believe they are shared goals of British Columbians.

Vote 8: Office of the Premier, \$10,664,000 — approved.

Hon. G. Campbell: I move the committee rise, report resolution and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 12:01 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

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

Committee of Supply (Section A), having reported resolution, 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 12:02 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 10:09 a.m.

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

Hon. S. Bond: Two very quick items. I know we're pressed for time today. With me today I have a number of my staff members, and I wanted to just quickly introduce them: Emery Dossdall, my deputy minister; Ruth Wittenberg, assistant deputy minister; Keith Miller, a lead director in the funding department; Rick Davis, superintendent of the liaison department; Claudia Roch, lead director in the accountability department; and Monica Pamer, who is the lead director in achievement and assessment.

[1010]

Also, at the last session of estimates we had a number of outstanding questions left by members opposite. We agreed to provide answers and information, so this morning, rather than listing each of the items, I will simply say that the majority of those issues have been addressed. I have a binder for the member opposite with the information that he requested. If at that point there are still gaps in it, we would be happy to provide that. The binder is here. I would just ask that this information be provided, as requested, and I would be happy to fill in any gaps, as they are discovered.

A. Dix: Good morning to the minister. I have a question about a school in my constituency, Grenfell School, which is seeking a minor capital improvement. It's an extraordinary school. The minister will know because she visits schools many times that this is a remarkable place. I think as many as 40 heritage languages are spoken at home by the students.

The teachers and the principal and the parents do a remarkable job of making it a terrific learning environment, but they just have a space crisis in the school. The children eat lunches in shifts — three shifts over the lunch hour — because there's no room to eat. There are classrooms in former storage lockers in the school. All of the space is compromised. They need a minor

capital project to add a second floor to a series of classes that were added in 2003-2004.

This is a project that's been strongly supported by successive MLAs. Rob Nijjar, the former MLA, supported this project, and I support it passionately. It's important for the school — what they're achieving, the progress they're making. The test progress they're making, the work they do in multiple languages, the work they do in the community.... This is fundamental to the school being able to continue to work in that way.

I just want to ask the minister to look into that project. It's been on the list of projects, and there are some issues that I think the ministry has raised about it. I would like to ask the minister about it.

Hon. S. Bond: I'm sorry. Neither my staff nor I actually heard the exact name. It sounds like a wonderful place, and I'd love to know more about it. The name would help me.

A. Dix: It is Grenfell Elementary School. That's G-r-e-n-f-e-l-l.

Hon. S. Bond: School districts do provide to the ministry a list of their highest priorities for the projects that are important, through their district. In looking at the school districts capital plan that we have in front of us, that school is actually not even on the list that's provided by the Vancouver school board.

We certainly would be more than prepared to contact the school board to ask where that might be on their priority list, and we'd be happy to just have a discussion about that. But we'd urge the member opposite to do that, because we think it may be in the years out as well. It certainly isn't on the '06-07 capital summary plan that I have.

A. Dix: I believe it has been in successive capital plans. It hasn't been accepted by the ministry. I think there are some issues. The ministry, as I understand it, raised issues about the fact there was space at other schools within the broad east side of Vancouver. As the minister will know, the east side of Vancouver, for historic reasons, has been underrepresented in terms of schools and services for a long time. So this is an important question, certainly, for parents there, and they've been working very hard.

The former member for Vancouver-Kingsway presented a petition to the minister last year, and so I really just appreciate the minister following up and working on that. It's an ongoing project for all of us. If she gets a chance at some point in the future to visit that school, I think she'll be remarkably impressed by the work that everyone does there.

[1015]

I have a few questions. The minister will know that I used to work for an advocacy group in education called Canadian Parents for French. We've been through a period in the last few years of extraordinary growth in programs of choice, but particularly French

immersion, and in parts of the province that are outside the lower mainland.

I think some people get confused about the desire of parents to have their children learn languages. In fact, we see the fastest-growing districts in the province in terms of French immersion, in terms of learning second languages, are districts such as Salmon Arm, Quesnel and Coast Mountains. There is an enormous desire, particularly in resource towns where parents understand that their children are probably going to require different skills going forward in order to succeed in life. There is enormous demand for these programs.

I have a couple of specific questions for the minister. The first question is this. I understand from the Premier — in fact, yesterday — that a new agreement has been signed with the federal government. I'm wondering if the minister could briefly describe that agreement.

Hon. S. Bond: Just to conclude the comment about the capital project update, I'll have one of my staff members, who is excellent on the capital side, contact the member opposite about the project in particular.

The member opposite is absolutely correct. We recently have signed a bilateral agreement with the government of Canada for increased funding. It totals in excess of \$60 million. From the perspective of growth, it is a very good news story. In fact, where the rest of our enrolment is declining across British Columbia, French immersion is actually growing at a rate of about 5 percent in many parts of the province — absolutely.

The renewed protocol will bring the \$60 million to British Columbia, which will then allow districts to consider expansion or new programs. To the member opposite: the money simply comes through our budget but goes directly out to those school districts. So all those dollars will be going out and, hopefully, will address some of the challenges in increased enrolment.

A. Dix: I had a specific question about the funding formula, though. One of the big challenges, I think, for establishing new programs.... The minister will know this from the school district she used to represent — the school district of Prince George — where, in fact, outstanding programs are offered in Prince George, but there has been a really strong effort to try and offer programs in the town of Mackenzie, which ultimately hasn't succeeded up to now.

Part of it is that the challenges, the economies, are much more difficult in smaller communities in terms of improving programs — not just for French immersion but for core French. Remember that the majority of students.... There are 220,000 students in the province studying core French who aren't in French immersion programs.

I would argue that the quality of that education has, in fact, declined over the last few years — not just the last five years but over time. It's been declining partly because teachers leave that to go to the French immersion system and respond to that — elementary

teachers, in particular, want their own classrooms — but also because we haven't applied resources to that.

It's mandatory to have a second language between grade five and grade eight, but that experience at grade five is rarely with a teacher who speaks the language. The initial experience most people have in the province learning a second or third language in the public school system is not a positive experience. I think part of the work that we hope to see the minister do with the new money is to respond to that.

[1020]

In terms of the funding formula where you send the money out to school districts, essentially, it's done on a formula based on 14 categories. There is a small inequity in that formula with respect to immersion that I just want to ask about, and I want the minister to consider.

School districts that have multiple communities within their districts with French immersion programs.... I'm talking specifically about Coast Mountains, which has Hazelton, Kitimat and Terrace; about Nechako, which has Vanderhoof and Burns Lake, I believe; and Williams Lake, which has Williams Lake and 100 Mile House. They're operating separate French immersion programs in all these communities. The fact that there is a program in Hazelton doesn't help in any way — in terms of economies of scale — with the fact that you have a program in Terrace.

I think those districts — and perhaps Prince George, if a program were to be offered in Mackenzie — should be treated, for the purposes of the flat item of the funding formula, as being several districts. In other words, if you have a flat item for library or for learning assistance in a French immersion program and you get \$9,000 for it for the district, if you've got multiple communities a certain distance apart, I think that that should be reflected in the funding formula. As you make the change in this funding formula going forward with the new agreement, you should consider that.

The places where these programs will be at risk are places such as Hazelton, 100 Mile and Williams Lake — places where there is a declining student population over time. When you have a program going K-to-12, at the back end of the program the declining population of a town like Terrace or a school district like Coast Mountains really affects the viability of the program. I'm asking the minister, I guess, to consider supporting rural districts and smaller programs more disproportionately with this funding, because they need that in order to survive and have options. There is a particular injustice, as I say, with these several districts with multiple communities with programs. I'd like the minister to consider that.

Hon. S. Bond: Certainly, it is our intent to look. We have done a rural schools task force, and we're very concerned about the issue of rural schools and the unique challenges that they face. One of the issues we face is a recruitment challenge, obviously. It is very difficult for us to attract some of the professionals. It's changing in some fields, but we need to work on that.

We're also looking at new technology to try to help with the kinds of issues the member opposite brings forward, such as webcasting. It has turned out to be very successful.

I think that there certainly is a very thoughtful suggestion in terms of the inequities that the member opposite has presented. I'm prepared to actually take that recommendation into the technical review committee, which looks at the funding allocations for the system as a whole, but rather than sort of making a decision on the fly, I think that is a thoughtful consideration. With the fact that we do have new dollars, it may be an opportune time to look at those kinds of issues. We certainly do not want to see it impact the programs that already exist, so we will be happy to take that to the technical review committee. It might take us a little time to look at that, but I'm happy to take that suggestion forward.

A. Dix: Just in particular, in light of programs such as Hazelton.... As the minister knows, Hazelton is going through some very difficult times right now. As the minister knows, this impacts programs, because people start a program.... I remember having a case in 100 Mile House, where they have a small program. A family left town. They moved to Sechelt with five children in French immersion. You may think: "Well, they left town with five children. It's not such a big deal." It had an enormous impact on the program through all the grades. It's already a program that is run through triple-split classes and so on.

I think those districts, in particular, need help. I'd like the minister just to consider and her officials to actually look at what's happened in Hazelton as a school district. I give a lot of credit to the Coast Mountains school district, because they've got Terrace, Kitimat, Hazelton, and they run programs in all three places.

The reason there's a program in Hazelton is that the school district, parents, teachers and everyone work together. It's at John Field Elementary in Hazelton, and 40 percent of the students in the French immersion program are aboriginal. The reason that the program succeeded and was launched is that as part of the program all the students study Gitksan language and culture for two hours a week. This is an extraordinary public success program for B.C. public schools, a message we can take nationally to show that no one in B.C. has lessons to learn about what makes this country a great place to live.

[1025]

I ask the minister — in particular in the case of that program, which is really suffering right now — to see what steps the ministry can do to help, particularly with this new money for that community.

I'll just say that this was my last question. I know others have other questions, but I wanted to thank her very much.

Hon. S. Bond: I want to just quickly recap. Coast Mountains, Nechako and Cariboo-Chilcotin are the three districts in particular.

Interjection.

Hon. S. Bond: And southeast Kootenay.

What I'll do is have my staff look at how that process might work and report back to the member opposite.

M. Sather: I wanted to ask the minister a question around the grade-ten examinations. As we know, the makeup of the classrooms throughout the province is changing. Over the years it's changed a lot. We have a lot more students that are coming from troubled homes. Some come with inadequate sleep or nutrition. They may be suffering trauma in the home. They may present as students with a cognitive disability, or they may actually, in fact, be students that have a cognitive disability.

Special education teachers that I talk to in my district are very concerned about these students that sometimes are described as being in the grey area, if you will. They're not codified special needs students. They're very concerned about the barrier that the grade-ten examination presents to this particular group of students. They're very worried that their education is going to be halted as a result. They argue that testing for the purpose of preparing students for grade-12 examinations, if that's what they're going on to, is not really necessary and that students are tested all through high school. They have mock exams in the final years for the provincial exams if they're going to take them.

I just wanted to ask the minister what she will do to ensure that this group of students isn't disadvantaged and that their education isn't prematurely ended due to this exam or barrier.

Hon. S. Bond: Certainly, I know that there has been much discussion about grade-ten examinations and how our students will accommodate that. One of the important things as we looked at developing them — obviously, with teachers and experts — was that we didn't want them to be high-stakes examinations. And really, we've looked at a practice that sees that in fact to be the case.

One of the things we have to look at is outcomes. When I look at the 2005 exam pass rates, they actually ranged from 83 percent in science ten to 92 percent in English 10. In fact, one of the things that we were very clear about.... It actually accounts for 20 percent of the students' marks. We want to make sure that they are, as we've said, not high-stakes.

[1030]

We are looking at a number of ways of making sure that if a student doesn't reach that or achieve that pass rate, they will have the kinds of assistance they need to be successful. We're not insisting, for example, that they take exams over and over again. There are actually ways that have been suggested, such as additional classwork or focusing on a particular segment of the course, to help those students be successful.

We are very pleased with the initial results that we've seen with the grade ten examinations. The member opposite is correct. There are a series of examinations throughout students' experience, and we've found that in the first set of examination results, our students are actually being very successful.

D. Chudnovsky: I want to pursue some issues around testing with the minister for a few minutes, if I may. The minister just a minute ago talked about the grade ten exams not being high-stakes exams and counting for 20 percent of the grade. If that's the case — and I know that certainly that's the view that the ministry takes — what's the point?

Hon. S. Bond: We actually believe that a number of assessment tools and a number of methods of assessment are important in a student's career, and we do believe that testing is one of those assessment tools. I certainly am a personal believer that there are other ways of assessing children in classrooms — teachers do it all the time — but we do believe that testing is an important tool.

D. Chudnovsky: I wonder if the minister could articulate for us, in terms of the range of evaluative and assessment tools that are there for us, what particular purpose provincial testing plays in that range.

Hon. S. Bond: Certainly, we have extensive curriculum in the province of British Columbia, and one of the things that's important is that learning outcomes are met. One of the ways of assessing whether we have a consistent approach to presenting curriculum and making sure that students are achieving outcomes is using a test. As I've said clearly, testing is one possible assessment tool to make sure that our students are meeting the outcomes that are expected.

D. Chudnovsky: Would the minister agree that with respect to determining whether there is consistency in the presentation of the curriculum and whether the outcomes are being met, there are a range of other choices for determining whether that's happening?

[1035]

Hon. S. Bond: We certainly know that in education, there are a number of tools. There are a number of ways of assessing that. But we also know that in the world of education, testing is one of the tools that is used, and it's something that we actually think does provide benefit to the student with that opportunity.

D. Chudnovsky: Thank you, Chairperson. Perhaps I could ask the same question in another direction. Is it not the case that the two justifications that the minister has given for the provincial grade ten exams, which we're talking about now...? I hope my friend will let me talk about the exams in general, but is it not the case that those two goals — consistency and account-

ability, if you will, or outcomes, management — can be determined without the use of provincial exams? Isn't it the case that if we wanted to, we could determine whether the curriculum is being presented in a consistent way and the learning outcomes we desire are being met? Couldn't we determine that without the use of provincial exams?

Hon. S. Bond: Certainly, testing is a critical evaluation tool. It is an assessment tool that's important. We believe there needs to be balance, but in fact we believe it is a critical component of making sure that our students' achievement is measured.

The Chair: May I remind the member that my title is Chair.

D. Chudnovsky: Mr. Chair, what did I call you?

The Chair: Person. My title is Chair.

D. Chudnovsky: Your title is Chair? Isn't that what I was...? I'm sorry.

Chair, do we have a determination of what the provincial testing regime costs the system in a year?

Hon. S. Bond: When you put together the composite of creating the exams, administering the exams and marking the exams — everything in the province to do with testing — it would be \$8 million.

D. Chudnovsky: Is there a determination made...? Is there a systematic investigation of the time taken in classrooms around the province in preparation for the exams with students?

Hon. S. Bond: When teachers use the curriculum in British Columbia, they are as a natural outcome preparing students for examinations.

[1040]

D. Chudnovsky: Absolutely. I would agree with the minister, at least to a point. But she...

Hon. S. Bond: That's a good start.

D. Chudnovsky: I'm an easy guy to get along with. The minister should know that. She might ask one of her staff about his experience. Anyway, we'll get to that over time.

I was asking a more specific question. No doubt everything that we do in classrooms every day, the range of activities and the range of processes, prepares students for life in general. I was asking a more specific question. I would ask the minister whether, in the wealth of accountability processes that go on in the Education Ministry, there is a determination of how much time is spent specifically in classrooms preparing students for the specific exams that they're about to take.

Hon. S. Bond: No, there isn't.

J. Horgan: I want to thank the minister and her staff for the preparation of this binder. I think that she and her staff are a beacon of light for her colleagues at executive council. I know from talking to my colleagues during this process that certainly the Minister of Education and the ministry have been the most forthcoming with information, and that speaks to the importance of accountability. I want to touch on some of that.

I also want to comment on the number of times I said "thank you" to the minister during the estimates. As we get through the last couple of hours, I'm hopeful I'll continue to do that. My mom would be proud of me if I did.

We've been talking about grade ten testing. I'd like to ask the minister, if she can advise me: how many jurisdictions in Canada have grade ten graduation requirements?

Hon. S. Bond: Rather than take a bunch of time, we think Alberta has a comparable, but other than that, we're not certain. I guess we're beginning work on binder two.

J. Horgan: I'm curious, then. If there's no sense from your executive how many jurisdictions in Canada have a grade ten requirement, could you advise me what literature, what academic evidence, compelled the ministry to go that route?

Hon. S. Bond: There was a significant consultation period where this was discussed. We should also remind the member opposite that there previously was a foundational skills assessment done at the grade ten level, so in fact students were examined. There was also a look at several other jurisdictions. Again, we will provide that information to the member opposite at a subsequent time.

J. Horgan: Could the minister explain the process that led...? She mentioned a consultation process. I assume it included traditional partners, but perhaps she could outline who those partners were.

[1045]

Hon. S. Bond: Between January and April 2002 there were regional consultation sessions held at more than a hundred locations across the province. Sessions all used the same questions so that there was continuity. They were attended by educators, parents, community members and students. That then went on to be a two-day symposium to discuss further themes. There were 150 people present at that, including post-secondary representatives, and that was in May 2002.

From September to December of 2002 there was a second round of consultations after a draft framework was proposed in September. That was discussed at 40 public meetings — more than 100 written responses. An additional 2,600 members of the public responded on line. In January 2003 a second provincial symposium was held to conclude the process. The title of the

consultation, for the member opposite, was graduation program requirements review.

J. Horgan: I thank the minister for that comprehensive review, but I'm wondering if she could, just to close this off, advise how the participants were selected.

Hon. S. Bond: It was certainly a combination of invitation and public, so there was room for all participants to be involved. If it was by invitation, it was not by the invitation of the ministry. It was districts who put together the people they felt would best be able to participate. That included principals, parents, superintendents, trustees and teachers, but it was a public process. As I said, in phase two there were 40 public meetings, and in fact 2,600 members of the public also participated through on-line response. So it was a very thorough consultation with a combination of public meetings, open to the public, and a process set up by individual districts.

J. Horgan: I have two brief capital questions focusing on school district 62. The first one is about John Stubbs middle school, which has recently been approved.

I want to know if the minister could, at least, commit to a discussion with staff, parents and local representatives in school district 62. If the progress and success at David Cameron Elementary, a school in the district that caters to hearing-impaired students.... If John Stubbs, when it is constructed, could provide middle school opportunities for hearing-impaired students in the lower Island.... The program at David Cameron is outstanding, but once the kids leave that elementary school, there's nowhere for them to go within the district.

There's going to be a middle school built — John Stubbs. The second question would be about the proposed high school. I see an opportunity for continuation of the good work at the elementary school and a K-to-12 program for hearing-impaired students in district 62.

[1050]

Hon. S. Bond: My staff has assured me that a conversation with the district and with parents and others involved would be the appropriate mechanism for doing that. Certainly, I will ask my staff to make arrangements to have that discussion. I don't want to presuppose any other planning that's been done by the district, but I would be happy to ask my staff to have that discussion.

J. Horgan: I'd be happy to facilitate that meeting with your staff and concerned parents. As I say, David Cameron has an outstanding reputation in the district, serving many hearing-impaired students. The challenge, of course, is that when you get through grade six, there's nowhere to go. Any of the progress that's been made to that stage is potentially lost. With growth

in district 62 and the opportunity with a new middle school on stream in the next 12 months and, hopefully, a new high school in the next 24 to 36 months, it's an opportunity to provide some continuity. Certainly, the entire south Island would benefit from that, if not the Island.

As I understand it from my discussions with parents with children in the process, Langley is the next best place to be if you can't be at David Cameron, and that's a bit of a hike. I know that transportation budgets are stretched, so a ferry ride or Helijet is not an option for these kids. So building locally is a good idea. If the minister wants to designate a staff person to talk to me, I'd be delighted to facilitate those meetings.

Going back to Belmont Secondary School in district 62 and the proposal to build a second secondary school in district 62, during the election campaign a candidate for election for the Liberal Party alleged a commitment from the former minister to accelerate land acquisition by one year. There was much fanfare and a commitment in a meeting with the Premier that this would be the case. Could the minister advise me on what the actual state of affairs is with respect to the new secondary school in district 62, and in Langford in particular?

Hon. S. Bond: I just want to go back and take one homework assignment off this sheet, because we end up with a long list every time. Grade tens that we know of in terms of in the grad program: formally, British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec and the Territories. There are a number of others. In fact, when you look at other provinces, it looks like every province in essence includes grade tens in the grad program. What they do obviously counts toward graduation. So there is a significant group of other provinces, if not all of them.

In terms of the secondary school, my staff has confirmed that Belmont is over capacity and that the site for a new secondary school is currently being acquired by the board — as I understand it, the Royal Bay development. Obviously, we have a number of issues to consider, but this is certainly one of the items that would be on our capital planning agenda as we move forward.

[1055]

I can't make a commitment or write a cheque today, but I can tell you it is on the radar screen of the ministry and will be in that big mix as we look forward to how we move those projects across the province board. So it is certainly on the list.

J. Horgan: "If I'm elected I will ensure that we get these funds right away. It's totally on the radar," Woods promised. I'm glad we're even using the same metaphors. It is important in my community. The minister will know through her staff that district 62 is increasing in enrolment. It was flat in 2004-2005, but with the proliferation of developments in Langford and surrounding areas, there will be a net increase in enrolment in district 62. Belmont in particular has, I believe,

1,800 students. It was built in the '40s, cobbled together over time to house 1,200 students. It's significantly over capacity, and we already have progress on the middle school front, so that's positive.

I also want to mention Happy Valley Elementary School, where my children attended. It burned down in 2003. If I'm correct, Happy Valley is on the capital plan, and construction is going to begin soon. Could the minister advise when she understands that construction will begin?

Hon. S. Bond: I continue, always, to be very appreciative of the work that the capital branch of the ministry does. They're just really phenomenal. Based on the information that we have as we speak, the tender is currently underway. Based on the forecast the board has given us, we expect the contract would be awarded by the end of the year. The construction period would be one year, with the opening date January of '07.

J. Horgan: The happy people of Happy Valley will be pleased to hear that news. I couldn't resist saying that. And I concur, again, with the minister on the stellar group in capital. They do tremendous work. They have for as long as I've been associated with them, and I'm pleased to see that they're continuing in that vein.

I'd like to move now to the question of governance, mandates and the whole prospect of repurposing. I know the minister and I have had a number of brief interactions on this question, and I'm looking forward to a more fulsome discussion. My friend from Kensington and I are anxious to explore this as best we can in the time available to us today.

Can the minister advise when discussions internally began to repurpose school boards?

Hon. S. Bond: Well, obviously, the catalyst for discussion around not only the role of school boards but the role of communities and the role of parents and sort of the whole look at education and how we relate to the Ministry of Education started on the day that I received a new ministry. The Education Ministry is very different today after the swearing-in of a new cabinet. That was the catalyst for the kinds of discussions that are underway today.

[1100]

D. Chudnovsky: Could the minister give us a sense of the parameters of the discussion which she has talked about here today and which she talked about in the House the other day? That is, what are the — "parameters" is perhaps a good word — elements of the discussion? What are the topics of the discussion? What are the issues that she expects to be canvassed in this discussion on repurposing?

Hon. S. Bond: The parameters, as you can see by the history of this ministry.... When we looked at, as an example, grad requirements, there was a pretty thorough consultation process.

The mandate of the ministry has expanded. We are the lead ministry for literacy, for early learning and for libraries. The mandate of school boards is K-to-12 education. So the initial discussion is about how we work with school boards to look at incorporating some of the other responsibilities that this ministry is now responsible for.

I think that healthy debate about how we govern a system, making sure that it's always evolving.... I was a school board chair and a trustee, so in fact, the catalyst was the cabinet and the new mandate that I have been given.

J. Horgan: I agree with the minister that healthy debate and evolution are cornerstones of good governance. The challenge the public has with this is that although the minister was given a mandate from the Premier to be a member of executive council and to proceed with a series of new responsibilities, how that was brought to the forefront in the public mind was unfortunate. I think that would be an appropriate way to say that. I think we'd all agree with that on both sides of this discussion.

The challenge now, I believe, is that based on anecdotal information, speculation.... This is the language I've been using with the minister, because that's what we have in the public. It has been inadequate.

I'm wondering if the minister perhaps would have been better served — and the ministry and the government and the public — had there been a White Paper, a focus to this discussion. An open-ended debate involving a select few at the front end with a commitment to legislation just two or three short months from now has left the public in a bit of a tizzy. Could the minister expand on that?

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

Hon. S. Bond: I think any time you talk about change, people get anxious. I don't know that there's a perfect process, and I don't know that there's a way to alleviate that. The other message that's important here is that people hear things very differently depending upon their perspectives.

[1105]

In the summer months the whole discussion about how this ministry looks and how it should work with the K-to-12 system, in particular, was discussed with the superintendents association. It's been discussed with the principals and vice-principals. Before the consultation took place, the president of the B.C. School Trustees Association was made aware of the fact there was going to be a discussion about these issues.

When we talk about consultation, and the member opposite refers to a select few, I just want to make sure the record is clear: the ministry has not selected the participants in this process. We asked districts to put together key leaders in their communities, including — and let me use the list: mayors, councillors, library representatives, aboriginal leaders, health care professionals, members of the early learning community, teach-

ers, school trustees and students where appropriate. We said: "Please bring us the best group of people that can talk to us about a new ministry and how we best serve the needs of students."

But I think any time you're contemplating change, people hear that in different ways. Certainly, I can relate to the fact that people feel anxious about that, but the dialogue is ongoing. Ultimately, we will look at the advice we receive and decide whether or not changes are appropriate, to what degree and how those will best benefit our students.

J. Horgan: I don't disagree with the minister that consultation processes are complex. I do think inclusivity is the key to success, and as I understand it, this process was devolved to superintendents to select from a list that the minister read out. It wasn't inclusive in terms of its end result.

I appreciate that the ministry is allowing districts to self-select for these processes, but the result has been a perception, within the communities that I've talked to, that superintendents invited the people they wanted to invite and let other people sit and speculate. So perhaps the minister could provide to me the comprehensive list by district of all the participants, and what the extent of the consultation has been to this point in time.

Hon. S. Bond: We will work to put that list together — provided that it will take a little bit longer than tomorrow morning, I can assure you.

Again, the key thing, and I do want to make this point: I absolutely believe that people who work in the school system do it in the best interest of students. I would suggest that when we speak to superintendents in this province and ask them to put together the people that would best serve and participate in this process, I actually believe that's what they would do.

I'm happy to have my staff work to put that list together, but I think the most important thing for me and one of the key points in this consultation was that we did not want to select the people involved. We think that is an important consideration when you are listening to people. In fact, we went to those people who administer and manage in the system and said: "Please give us a group of people who are on the ground — front-line workers, people who are parents, students, aboriginal leaders — who have an interest and expertise to help shape this policy." That's how we did it, and I have every confidence that superintendents would have treated that process very respectfully.

J. Horgan: So this is what I can't help but call a self-selecting process. It was, district by district, based on the superintendents' expectations. I don't want to denigrate the work of superintendents, but in essence it comes to: "I'm going to flip through my Rolodex, see who might be appropriate and ask them to come along."

So once that was done, what took place? When did the consultation begin? What were the parameters of

the discussion? Which ministry staff were involved? What was the expected outcome on these initial discussions?

I'm throwing a lot of questions out. It's a bad habit. We talked about this earlier on. Maybe I will go back one step and say: what ministry involvement was there at these focus groups, and what was the objective of those ministry staff?

[1110]

Hon. S. Bond: We were talking about the workload of my staff, and I wanted to make sure that people were aware they were working very, very hard.

The process works this way. The Ministry of Education staff worked in partnership with the Ministry of Children and Families. This is a joint discussion, because obviously we share some very key components, and we're trying to work together.

We actually invited, from across the province, literally over a hundred people from school districts. They came to a training session to act as facilitators. So in fact, the Ministry of Education staff did not facilitate the meetings directly. We did have joint presentations in terms of an overview provided by the Ministry of Education. One staff person and the Ministry of Children and Families provided support and an overview as well.

A typical meeting — and I should point out that we're in the process of having 180 consultations across the province — would be a presentation of demographics — in other words, declining enrolment, what it looks like — the new mandate and explaining what the changes were and then the facilitators from the district, which would typically be a principal or someone who was trained in how to make sure the questions were asked consistently across the province. The typical meeting format was that.

In total I had four ministry staff that were involved. In addition to that, my deputy was involved. So there was a total of five involved in the process generally but certainly not in attendance at every single meeting.

J. Horgan: Could the minister provide me with any documents leading up to those consultations and any documents that were created as a result of those consultations or during those consultations?

Hon. S. Bond: We'd be happy to do that — certainly, the framework of questions and the work that we have.

The other thing is — and I appreciate this from one of my staff members — that we would also be happy to offer a similar presentation to the member opposite, so we could do the general overview kind of presentation that would have been done, a general walk-through of how the meetings are being conducted and the framework. Also, we'd be happy to present any documents we have.

D. Chudnovsky: I'd like to talk a little bit more about the notion of repurposing of school boards and perhaps introduce my questions by sharing with the

minister my own sense of people's perceptions of what repurposing might mean and then ask the minister, if she would, to comment on those specifically.

It strikes me, from discussions I've had with folks in my community and in others, that people, as they hear the ministry, hear three possible general notions of repurposing. One of them is the one that the minister spoke to a few minutes ago — that is, the broadening of the mandate of the ministry to include early learning, child care and libraries. It goes without saying, as the minister presented, that with the broadening of that mandate, there will be a requirement for the ministry to be structured differently and for school districts to be structured differently. That's the first thing I hear from people as they engage in this notion of repurposing.

[1115]

The second thing that I hear and that people have expressed interest in, ideas and concern about is amalgamation — the notion that there'll be some change in the boundaries of school districts. Attached to that notion is another one I've heard a lot about. That is amalgamation — perhaps not of school districts but of service. These are issues we've all in the field talked about a little bit.

The third notion out there is that there is sort of the fifth multiple-choice test — you know: all of the above, or other. The "e" answer to the test — other. That is: other increases or broadening or narrowing of the scope, mandate, power, job of school boards, and together with that, the giving of power, mandate, scope to groups that might not be school boards.

Those are the three things I've heard people talk about, and I am wondering whether the minister could help us from the point of view of the ministry and from her point of view with the extent to which those are in fact the discussions that are expected and anticipated.

Hon. S. Bond: The whole point of discussion is to allow for people to make suggestions and ideas. I would have to suggest to the member opposite that probably consultation doesn't preclude the "e" answer on the test. In fact, if you set up an opportunity for people to tell us the kinds of changes that they would like to see in public education, to focus first and foremost on students, you're probably going to hear the "e" answer. There are people who have different perspectives, different ideas.

I can tell the member opposite that we have one primary goal, and I know we probably share that. That is to make sure that whatever system we have in place and however it's governed, students are our first priority. If there are new ways of looking at how we better serve our students, it's absolutely incumbent upon me as a minister and us as a ministry to do exactly that.

D. Chudnovsky: Let's focus on the "e" answer for a few minutes and see where we get. I would agree with the minister that consultation is of little value if the answers are determined beforehand. So that general proposition is certainly to my taste. But that doesn't

speak to the question of where the minister and the ministry are at.

[1120]

My question with respect to "e" is: does the minister have a view as to whether... Beyond the issues of amalgamation of services — which is an important issue and needs a discussion and a debate; I don't mean to say that we don't want to engage on that — and beyond the issue of the increase in mandate of the ministry, does the minister have a view as to the desirability, the need for there to be changes, either a broadening of the mandate or a narrowing of the mandate of school boards?

Hon. S. Bond: It's our responsibility as a ministry and those who also govern the system on behalf of the students of British Columbia to have discussions about how better to serve the needs of students. I think sometimes that causes discomfort merely by the fact that we ask questions and provide opportunities.

We have an amazing public education system. The staff — that I'm lucky enough to work with — and I believe that we should engage in a discussion and a debate about whether or not we are best serving students with the way the ministry is structured. We have to look at how we do that — the way we integrate our work with other ministries, and most importantly, how our partners work with us. That debate is ongoing. We are waiting for the information to be gathered. We know that what we hear will shape the direction we move in, but we will be motivated by one thing first and foremost: how do we take the dollars, the resources, the people, the vision, the ministry and serve students in this province? We have to have that discussion.

D. Chudnovsky: In direct response to the minister, and speaking for this member and perhaps for others on this side, there is not a discomfort with discussion or with change. There may be disagreement. Speaking for this member, I've never been uncomfortable with this agreement — it's debate; it's the democratic process — nor uncomfortable with change that needs to happen from time to time.

It's necessary, though, when one is going to engage and perhaps disagree, that one knows what the ministry is thinking of. I would suggest, respectfully, that the ministry has — it strikes me — an additional responsibility. The one responsibility is certainly to facilitate legitimate and useful and productive debate and discussion with the community about the direction we want to take with respect to governance, always remembering that our prime motivation is the best we can do for students. No doubt about that. It's well-stated and often-stated by this minister.

There's an additional responsibility — at least one — and that is for the ministry to be clear about its view of these questions. That responsibility exists prior to, during and after the consultation. So I ask the minister one more time: what is the ministry's view of the directions that should be taken with respect to governance?

Beyond the issue of amalgamation, amalgamation of services and increase in the mandate, does the ministry have a view as to whether there should be an expansion or a reduction of the mandate of elected locally autonomous school boards — or not? If it does, what are those?

[1125]

Hon. S. Bond: I want to go back and just clarify. I certainly wasn't implying that the member opposite necessarily had discomfort with either debate or change, because for those of us who end up in this place, that's basically our job. Half of the reason we're here is to bring those different perspectives.

I was reflecting upon the concern that's been expressed in the system in particular. I never like to see that happen. I've been through enormous change, both in my own district and in ministries and government. Having said that, it is a naturally occurring phenomenon that certain people with particular perspectives react quite differently to the same set of information.

I think we've been perfectly clear about the ministry's view. We believe that discussion does need to take place. We have a new mandate. We believe that our relationship to all of our partners — including trustees, parents, teachers and others — must be shaped by the mandate we have. We're waiting for that information. We also have made it clear that we believe resources — and I know the member opposite agrees with this — are best utilized in classrooms, where we have opportunities to serve our students.

We are going to ask the tough questions about dollars that are used. How are they used? Who governs? Who best should be involved? I think we've been very clear about what this particular ministry is concerned about.

J. Horgan: The minister said just a moment ago that this whole process was governed by a desire to serve students, but as I understand the expanded mandate, it includes a whole range of members of the public. Libraries are accessed by everyone. Child care is accessed by parents, by grandparents, not students.

The challenge I think that the ministry has — and I know that your staff behind you is very much overworked.... We've launched a round-table process to deal with the issues, I would argue, of the old mandate. At the same time, you're launching an initiative to develop a new mandate. I certainly don't envy the people sitting around you today, minister.

My question would be.... If you started down this road, you had to have a plan. I mean, we have bright, intelligent people working on this file. What policy documents, what internal materials have been prepared by your executive to address this new mandate?

Hon. S. Bond: As the member opposite well would know from his time here, this ministry and others are constantly exploring ideas and opportunities. In fact, right now we're looking at early learning models, because we think it's important not to be precipitous. We

think it's important to look at what other jurisdictions are experiencing. In fact, we're currently asking school districts around the province what kinds of opportunities they provide for early learning within the district already. That makes sense. We actually have to do an inventory before we can move forward and say: "What should we be doing now?"

The discussion has focused on how best to serve students. We know that things change. Education has changed. In particular, the focus has been on a new ministry. The member opposite is quite correct. It is not just about students, although I think that if we use the word "learners," we could capture the group of people we're talking about, because we all learn every single day. I am also visiting libraries. We are talking to literacy organizations. We are working at learning about early learning and how best to do that.

Is it comprehensive? Yes, it is. Is it going to react to the consultation? Absolutely, it is.

J. Horgan: I'm certainly happier to hear the word "learners" from the minister than "clients." I'm hopeful that....

Interjection.

J. Horgan: I know. But I'm just saying that I'm very pleased to hear that, because "clients" makes me very, very uncomfortable. Certainly, the public that accesses materials for advancing knowledge would be learners, and I'm happy to hear that.

[1130]

My concern is — and it's because of my time here that I am concerned — that you have very capable staff that have been working at high speed for an extended period of time, trying to keep the balls in the air, and you've introduced several new balls. We're talking about school planning councils that are not up and running effectively right across the province — pockets of success, pockets of indifference and pockets of nothing.

While we're looking at contemplating school-based budgeting, and we're contemplating how parents involve themselves in the system, we've launched into a round table to try and resolve some of the challenges that we face now with the result of changing mandates within schools, within school districts, and on top of that yet another layer to deal with the new challenges that the minister and her staff have been given by the Premier.

My concern is, based on my time here, that that's not sustainable. I ask the minister: how do you propose to get to February with a coherent plan that does have the adequate consultation that we all want to see, without people saying: "I can't go to another meeting. I refuse to go to another meeting to talk about yet another subject, because I've got to cook dinner and get to the soccer game?"

Hon. S. Bond: First of all, I just want to point out that there's not an end date to this discussion because

the work that goes on to support students in this province is ongoing. Certainly, there are time limits, you know, when you look at certain processes that exist in government. But this is going to be an ongoing project. How are we going to get there? First of all, we're going to get there with incredibly hard work and a passion for believing that it is essential to challenge the status quo. Why are we concerned about challenging that status quo? Because our students deserve that.

What that means is that we have a lot of hard work to do. There is nothing more energizing than looking at new opportunities and looking at ways to make sure the system and our students benefit and that there is a great match. So we're going to continue to work hard. We're going to face the challenges of class size and composition, which need to be addressed, and we need to continue that process.

But it is essential and it is incumbent upon us as legislators and as people who represent students in this province to challenge the way things are done. When I look at school completion rates, and I want to say this, they're at their highest level ever — 79 percent — and I am proud of the work that's being done. Twenty-one percent of our students are still not completing their high school education. You can't keep doing the same things over and over again and expect the outcomes to be different. We're simply saying it's time to have a look. Let's do that in consultation, and then let's make the changes that meet the needs of our students.

J. Horgan: Again, I don't think the minister and I diverge too much on these issues except for the point of rubber hitting the road. Again, going back to my experience sitting behind the ministers or previous ministers, reality ceases to exist in this place. I think we've experienced that quite vividly over the past five days. When we have our thought processes, we move very quickly, we have rapid discussions, we have rapid policy debates, we make resolution, and then we move ahead. That's what executive council does; that's how government functions.

The challenge for government, and where we fall down as legislators and as public servants, is that the people out there are ten steps behind us. That's not because they're not interested and they're not passionate about education. They're trying to deal with what they have today. They recognize that there's a need to change in certain areas, but they want to do it slowly and incrementally.

[1135]

I'd like to do things very quickly. It's counterintuitive for me to say this, in a certain sense, but after talking to parents in my community, after receiving e-mails, there is fatigue, consultation fatigue. Is 79 percent good enough? No, it's not. I agree with the minister. But I don't believe we're going to get a big boost by having more rounds of consultation when we're still grappling, as we rightly should, with the issues of class size and class composition at the round table.

With that, I'll just move to that issue. I want to bring up two points in particular. Firstly, I'd like to ask

the minister why it is.... I understand that there was a desire to keep the group as small as possible so that there could be outcomes. The education advisory committees were ridiculed because they were too large and became talk shops. But I do have to say that I believe there would be a greater degree of success if CUPE members were at the table with other representatives in the discussion. They represent 29,000 workers in our system. They deal with special needs kids every day. Why did the minister exclude CUPE members?

Hon. S. Bond: In fact, the list of people who want to participate at the round table is lengthy. Certainly, I should point out that in one of our initial discussions — we've had two — at the round table, all of the partner groups brought lists of people, and certainly CUPE was.... That discussion did take place at the round table. I think it was the B.C. Teachers Federation that brought that concern to the table. Along with that, I have received letters from numerous other partner groups. So there has been significant discussion at the round table about how to accommodate....

There was agreement at the round table that for the initial year, as we move forward, that the membership would be maintained at the current status. We would evaluate that after a year, and we would also provide vehicles and mechanisms for partners that are not directly represented to present and be participants in the process. We're very conscious of the list of people that are not at the table. We're working on a process to be inclusive, and we will evaluate the round table membership after one year.

J. Horgan: Well, there are a number of others that aren't included. One of them would be parent advisory committees in the city of Vancouver. School districts in Vancouver are not represented by the overarching provincial body. That's 10 percent of the parents in the system — not represented. Similarly, vice-principals and principals in Vancouver — not, as I understand it, representatives of the broader provincial body — are not represented at the table.

But I'd like to go back to CUPE because I think this....

Interjection.

J. Horgan: It's their choice to not be members of broader provincial organizations, but they were excluded from this process and not by choice.

I'd like to go back to CUPE for a moment because I think the minister should seriously reconsider this issue. We have multiple representation of districts with respect to trustees, with respect to superintendents, and secretary-treasurers, as well, I believe, are members of the round table.

Interjection.

J. Horgan: No? Their association is not represented?

Interjection.

J. Horgan: Okay.

With the number of individuals involved in the system directly... We've talked to the minister who has said that we need change. We shouldn't shy away from that. We also shouldn't draw lines in the sand when we've made a mistake, and I think it was a mistake to exclude CUPE. I ask the minister again if she will reconsider that and take it back to the table for the next meeting.

Hon. S. Bond: At this point the membership of the round table has been determined, and unless there is a specific dialogue or discussion or change of direction by the round table, we intend to keep the membership. From my perspective, the most important thing that the round table represents immediately is our ability to actually begin in a thoughtful and well-informed way to discuss the issues of class size and composition.

In fact, the round table is moving forward. We anticipate meeting within the next couple of weeks, actually, and I have made a commitment, as has the Premier and other members of the round table, to ensure that there are opportunities for those groups not included to participate in the process.

J. Horgan: Can the minister advise me what partner group in the system is most intimately involved with special needs students in classrooms?

Hon. S. Bond: In fact, I would suggest that every partner has a significant role to play, particularly the teacher but also the parent. So it is a combination of people who serve our students in classrooms.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

We have done our best to try to reflect a group that we think is both manageable in size and has the ability to make those decisions move forward quickly. The round table has committed to being inclusive and will also bring opportunities for other partners to present to the round table.

[1140]

J. Horgan: If there is a student in school district 62 in a wheelchair in a classroom, who is taking care of the intimate and immediate needs of that individual?

Hon. S. Bond: I want to make this really clear. There's certainly a recognition that CUPE members have absolutely significant and important roles to play in classrooms. They are part of a team that actually support students. But I also have a responsibility to deal quickly and efficiently with the needs of the entire system. The round table had a discussion about the membership. We came to perhaps not a unanimous agreement but certainly a sense of consensus that there were members that wanted to be participants. Those names and groups were brought forward by all of the

parties, and in fact, we agreed that we would provide opportunity. There is a team of people. The student's educational program is the responsibility of teachers. CUPE members play a significant role in the team as well.

J. Horgan: So if they're integral components of the team, why wouldn't you have them at this ongoing and significant body to discuss issues about class size and class composition and what role they can play to improve the outcomes for students? It seems to me that this is a fundamental issue. Could the minister advise me which partners at the round table wanted to exclude these members?

Hon. S. Bond: In fact, the opposite is true. No one specifically said: "We're not going to have a particular organization." All of the participants at the round table brought a list of people who are not specifically represented. Let me name a few: librarians, specialist teachers, counsellors, first nations educators, secretary-treasurers, specific parent advisory councils. The list is endless, including the Chamber of Commerce of British Columbia who want to be there.

So we made a decision to move a process forward, and you know, it's a positive process. We are actually having the kinds of discussion that must occur in order to better understand the complexity of our students and the needs that they have. In fact, we are making opportunities available. We're sorting out how to do that. Round-table participants have been asked to bring their lists of other parties that they would like to see have an opportunity to dialogue. That will be done at the next meeting.

J. Horgan: We're making a mistake excluding this significant group. I agree that there's a long list of people who would like to participate in this process, but this is a fundamental group. There are 29,000 people employed indirectly by this government to do good works in the school system who are not at the table to discuss the very issue they have intimate knowledge in. That's a mistake. I believe that the minister should acknowledge that mistake. It's not painful. I've been acknowledging a mistake for the past five days, and it's liberating.

[1145]

Do the right thing. Invite CUPE to the table so that we can have a fulsome and comprehensive discussion about these important issues where I know the minister wants to make success and make progress, and I share that enthusiasm. But you have to have that fundamental group at the table. They're dealing with special needs kids every single day — every single day. I would argue that trustees are not doing that. I would argue that superintendents are not doing that every single day. Face to face, one on one — those are front-line workers, and they should be participating.

Hon. S. Bond: CUPE will have the opportunity to be involved in the process. The round table has had

that discussion, and I would respectfully disagree with the member opposite. In fact, I believe that every single partner has a significant role to play every single day in a child's education. As I look at the role that many of the partners play, it is significant.

The reality is that we want to move this process forward. We want to allow people to have the opportunity to participate. We've committed to making sure that will happen, and you know, we're going to move forward with another meeting of the round table very shortly.

J. Horgan: The minister made reference to 12,000 pages of documentation the last time we were here. Has the minister had any success in collating that information in a coherent way for public participation?

Hon. S. Bond: The issue isn't about being coherent or about collaboration. The issue is about children. Absolutely, it is fundamentally about children. I was very surprised by the member opposite's comments in the media about this issue.

We actually took the documentation to the round table for a reason. First of all, we want the format to be understandable. I can tell you that there's a lot of expertise on this side of the room, and even to get the formats right is important. There were also some issues with some of the data. We wanted to make sure the data was completely accurate. For example, we had one class that had 111 students in it. Well, you can imagine our heart rates. In fact, it was because there was a typographical error, and there are 11. So we're cleaning that up in the sense of format.

Most importantly for me, this is information, and this concern is shared by the members of the round table, I think, in consensus. By consensus, I'd have to say that the data is very specific. In other words, it is broken down class by class throughout the province, but it also identifies particular children with particular unique needs. I want to be very clear that I want to have no negative impact on individual students as a result of this information, so we're trying to find a balance. To discuss the whole issue of composition, you actually have to talk not just about the number of students in the class but about what is the complex nature of that class. This is about student information and being sure that when we go public, we protect those individual students.

J. Horgan: I certainly respect the minister's desire to protect privacy. That wasn't my intent in asking the question, nor was it my intent in making the comments in the media. What I wanted to do was to find a way to quickly get this information before the public so that we could decide what we do or have some debate and discussion about what we do with the funds that were identified in the Ready report and also with respect to what we were going to do with the funds that were saved.

The Premier had some questions on this issue yesterday in his estimates. We're very short on time, and I was hopeful I was going to be able to get a more fulsome question or two on this. But the issue is this: \$150 million ballparked as saved, and \$40 million of that is going to the LTD component. That leaves \$110 million, near as I can tell. The Premier was speaking about a \$70 million chunk that's left over. I'm wondering what happened to the other \$40 million.

If we don't have time to do this, hon. Chair, perhaps just a brief discussion off line would be sufficient.

Hon. S. Bond: When we look at the amount that will be available, the \$20 million.... First of all, coming out of the savings that were accrued during the illegal dispute, \$40 million goes to long-term disability, but \$20 million also goes to immediately address issues of class size and composition. In fact, that actually is coming out for this year — \$20 million. We said that from the very beginning. So \$60 million comes out of the balance of the dollars, and \$20 million will be discussed directly with the B.C. Teachers Federation, as a result of the Vince Ready recommendations. We've made that commitment, and I'm in the process of arranging a meeting to discuss that.

[1150]

The reason that the initial ballpark savings are looking like they will be less is.... In fact, we wanted to make sure that teachers were.... Because teachers are entitled to benefits that are not related to wages, those benefits were paid out and therefore not recognized as savings, so the savings amount will be less than anticipated. The balance will be reinvested, as the member knows, into the education system. So \$60 million out of whatever that eventual number will be has already been accounted for.

J. Horgan: I just want to conclude my remarks by saying that this has been an extraordinary six months for the minister, myself, her staff and, in fact, the entire education system. We have many challenges ahead. I'm hopeful that this estimates process has been helpful, and I look forward to a more fulsome discussion when we get back to a more traditional process here in this Legislature in February.

I want to thank the minister and her staff for the comprehensive work that they've done to keep me as informed as they can during this process, and I'm looking forward to more detailed discussions on a whole range of issues. I know that relationship is beginning to develop.

With that, the committee rises, reports resolution and completion of the estimates for the Ministry of Education.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 11:51 a.m.

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