



Second Session, 38th Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT OF  
DEBATES OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
(HANSARD)

Thursday, May 4, 2006  
Afternoon Sitting  
Volume 10, Number 9

THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

ISSN 0709-1281

**PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**  
(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

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

**SECOND SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT**

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Afternoon Sitting

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THURSDAY, MAY 4, 2006

The House met at 2:04 p.m.

### Introductions by Members

**Hon. L. Reid:** I have the absolute pleasure today to welcome to this chamber the members of the Provincial Child Care Council. This is a council that gives tremendously informed advice to the ministry in terms of how we proceed.

I'm delighted to welcome today Wendy Cooper as the chair from Coquitlam, Donna Chang from Vancouver, Coco Schau from Terrace, Bruce Hallsor from Victoria, Betty Cleland from Kelowna, Amy Collum from Nanaimo, Darcelle Cottons from Vancouver, Dr. Hillel Goelman from Vancouver, Dr. Paul Kershaw from UBC, Kristi Miller from Vancouver and Christine MacLeod from Delta. I'd ask the House to please make them incredibly welcome.

[1405]

**M. Karagianis:** Today in the House we actually have a special guest here from Australia. Sandra Moait is currently the president of the Unions of New South Wales and the vice-president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions. Sandra was the general secretary of the New South Wales Nurses Association until August of 2002. She was also elected president of the Labour Council in February 2000 — the first time a female was elected president since the Labour Council was formed in 1871. I'd like the chamber to make her welcome and say "g'day" from here in Canada.

**I. Black:** I want to add the greetings to that of the Minister of State for Childcare to Wendy Cooper. She's a good friend, she's a constituent, and I'm so pleased that she could be here today. I can also say from the hours I've spent with her on the issues of child care that she is one of the biggest advocates I have come across in the area and truly an expert, and we're lucky to have her in our midst.

**H. Bains:** In the House today visiting us from the U.K. are Harbinder Grewal, his brother Gurjeet Grewal and Amrik Sandhu, accompanied by Inderbir Dosanjh from Surrey. Will the House please extend them a warm welcome to this House.

**B. Lekstrom:** It's my privilege today to stand and welcome a number of guests to our precinct, if they're in the gallery or in the buildings. Today we had the privilege of declaring May as Motorcycle Awareness Month. This is an event that is hosted by the British Columbia Coalition of Motorcyclists here.

Today all of the MLAs and the staff had the opportunity to go out and speak with the riders, had the opportunity to get a ride around on a beautiful day. Motorcycle Awareness Month is about making sure motorists in our province understand to watch out for

motorcyclists. Many times a motorcyclist incurs an accident. The driver of another vehicle doesn't see them.

As well, they promote motorcycle safety in our province and do a wonderful job. Will the House please join me in welcoming all of the members here.

**D. Thorne:** Today I have the pleasure of welcoming a very good friend of mine and a very good friend of the official opposition to the House. Sharon Costello served as Emery Barnes's constituency assistant and ministerial assistant for many years when Emery was the MLA for Vancouver-Burrard and the Speaker of the House.

In that role, she and the late Emery Barnes provided a community-based office geared towards effectively serving the diversity of the constituents' issues and needs.

Sharon has with her today a friend from Australia. I guess this is the day for Australians visiting. We couldn't be offering a more beautiful day. I would like the House to welcome Sharon and Sam and give them our best.

**H. Bloy:** It gives me a privilege today to introduce a friend of mine from the riding of Burquitlam. He has been one of my best workers on my two elections, and he is a great community person. Would the House please join me in welcoming Joe Le Blanc.

**D. Routley:** Would the House help me welcome to our midst Dr. James Balderson and Mr. Rudy Eylmann, both members of COLCO, the Coalition of Leaky Condo Owners, who are tireless advocates for the rights of those who are experiencing the ongoing crisis of leaky condos in B.C.

**D. Hayer:** It gives me great pleasure to introduce 50 grade five students from Pacific Academy in my riding of Surrey-Tynehead. Half the class is sitting there; the other half is going to join us a little later on.

Joining are their teachers Mark Wirtz and Ms. Sharon Douglas, as well as many parent volunteers who have taken time out of their busy schedules to accompany these students. These students are here to learn how our government works and how our system works. Would the House please make them very welcome.

[1410]

**S. Hawkins:** Visiting the Legislature today is a dear friend of mine from Kelowna, Dani Eisler. Dani is a fellow graduate of the bone marrow transplant program in VGH. Her sister Shelley Eisler — her life-saver — works for the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

Also visiting with her today is her mother Elsie Eisler from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. I would ask everyone to make them welcome.

**Statements  
(Standing Order 25b)**

WINDERMERE COMMUNITY  
SECONDARY SCHOOL  
AND REACH FOR THE TOP

**A. Dix:** It is my honour to inform the House that Windermere Community Secondary School, a tremendous public school in my constituency of Vancouver-Kingsway located at 27th and Rupert — I know the Premier has been there — has won the provincial finals for Reach for the Top, defeating a school not in my constituency, called St. George's, in the final.

The team consists of George Hsi, Ricky Yap, Natasha D'Souza, Mo Chen, Phillip Jang, Andy Lei and Michelle Ta. Their coach and teacher Maggie Przyborowska — who has won, by the way, the Prime Minister's national award for teaching — said that in her years of coaching Reach for the Top, it is not only the best team she has ever coached but the best group of young people she has ever worked with. She says: "Coaching this team is truly a labour of love."

I think it shows the quality of education that many students receive in our public schools. Windermere Community Secondary School is proud of the more than 350 students every year who volunteer in neighbourhood elementary schools to support programs. They're proud because this year they organized a major beautification project in their community, and they were out this weekend planting trees and making a difference in their community.

This is an extraordinary school. I think it teaches us all a lesson to not rely on simplistic and poorly researched reports to judge the value of public schools, but to go to those schools to see the teachers and to see the students.

On behalf of the entire House, I want to congratulate this extraordinary team and wish them all the very best in Edmonton at the national finals.

INDO-CANADIAN COMMUNITY IN B.C.

**D. Hayer:** It is with sadness that I speak today on a dark period in the history of the South Asian community in British Columbia.

It was 92 years ago this month that the fateful decision was made to reject the landing in Vancouver of 376 South Asians, mostly Sikhs, from the Japanese freighter *Komagata Maru*. These people were seeking their hopes and dreams in a new homeland, and the freedom and success that Canada promised. Yet when the *Komagata Maru* reached our shores, those poor souls were rejected because of the racial prejudice that prevailed in British Columbia and Canada in 1914.

However, in the years since the widespread discrimination that cost the lives of so many passengers of the *Komagata Maru*, I am happy to say that such prejudice no longer exists in this province and in this country. Today British Columbians not only welcome new

immigrants from India and other parts of the world; our government is going to great lengths to encourage them to pursue their cherished dreams in our province.

When our Premier was the mayor of Vancouver, he led the way for the Indo-Canadian community to develop the Punjabi Market and to place signs in the Punjabi language throughout the Punjabi Market area — the first in North America. Under our Premier's leadership, B.C. was the only province in Canada to pass a proclamation recognizing 400 years of Guru Granth Sahib Ji in the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

We have expanded and fast-tracked the provincial nominee program for immigration. We have expedited the credentialing of foreign-trained workers. We are investing \$5 million to expand language training for Punjabi, Chinese, Korean and other languages. Through Skills Connect we are assisting with training and skills development.

Today British Columbia welcomes more than 30,000 immigrants each year. As an immigrant myself and as Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism and Immigration, it makes me very proud to see just how far we have come since those dark months of 1914.

[1415]

CENTRAL CITY  
COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER PATROL

**S. Hammell:** I'd like to talk about a group of people who work in my constituency for free and have saved literally tens of millions of dollars in auto crime costs, not to mention the human cost of stress, inconvenience and bodily harm these crimes engender. I'm referring to the dedicated volunteers of the Central City community volunteer patrol, who work under the direction of the Surrey Crime Prevention Society and today boast a staff of 57.

I'm bringing this wonderful group of volunteers to your attention because this May marks the tenth anniversary of the Central City CVP, originally a foot patrol. In 1999 the bike patrol was added, and together these volunteers patrol the 625,000-square-foot Central City Mall. These volunteers receive extensive training. The bike patrol completes a 20-hour Can-Bike course. The Central City CVP patrols in pairs, and their mandate is auto crime. But they are also the eyes and ears of the mall and observe and report any suspicious activity back to their base.

Many volunteers are university students looking towards a career in the criminal justice system, but there are also seniors, high schoolers and parents who all contribute a minimum of 16 hours a month to the patrol. It is truly a community-based crime prevention initiative with participation from the RCMP, ICBC, the Central City Mall, the city of Surrey and other local organizations and individuals.

So to Becky Hendriks and Kanwar Bal and to the members of the Central City community volunteer patrol, I'd like to say thank you on behalf of myself and my constituents.



## DOROTHY FLEMING

**I. Black:** I rise today to celebrate and pay tribute to a remarkable life. A few weeks ago British Columbia lost one of its great citizens when Coquitlam's Dorothy Fleming died unexpectedly at 80 years of age.

It is a distinct understatement to refer to Mrs. Fleming as a pillar of our community. She was devoted to Coquitlam and is duly credited with being one of the driving forces behind Coquitlam's request for city status. She was given the highest honour of the city on October 4, 2004. As only one of seven in history, she was bestowed with the Freedom of the City. But it is her volunteerism and her lifelong giving to her community that make me pause to reflect with respect on her life.

While I suspect her outlook had its roots in her training as a nurse, her empathy seemed to really take flight after the hospital shifts were over, for this warm and graceful woman was a formidable force in her community when it came to looking out for the less fortunate. For literally decades Mrs. Fleming's efforts were focused on Meals on Wheels, the Crossroads Hospice Society and the Walk for Sight.

She was a founding organizer and 34-year volunteer for the Jimmy Christmas Hamper fund and a founder and lifelong volunteer for the Burquitlam Seniors Housing Society, the L.J. Christmas Manor. She was highly involved for decades with the Burquitlam Lions Club, earning the rare Judge Brian Stevenson Award, the highest achievement for Lions in all of Canada — an honour which was also bestowed on her husband of 51 years, Larry, who I understand is also watching today.

It has been said that volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections but once a term. But when you volunteer, you vote every day about the type of community in which you want to live. Well, Dorothy Fleming voted every day for eight decades and, in doing so, exhibited not only extraordinary community leadership but also unwavering commitment to humanity itself. We need more Dorothy Flemings.

PORT COQUITLAM AND DISTRICT  
HUNTING AND FISHING CLUB

**M. Farnworth:** It's my pleasure to rise today and make a member's statement in this House concerning an organization that has celebrated 50 years this past weekend in my community. In fact, it is a resource for the entire lower mainland. That is the 50th anniversary of the Port Coquitlam and District Hunting and Fishing Club.

[1420]

It resides on the Burke Mountain part of my constituency, which 50 years ago was probably as remote an area as one could find in the lower mainland. Yet today it rapidly faces the encroachment of increasing development — a sign of the growing number of people living in our province.

The hunting and fishing club in Port Coquitlam has been there for 50 years. Its membership is now some 1,300 people. They are engaged in activities related to hunting and educating people on the responsible use of firearms. Its members are engaged in the preservation and fight to ensure that the Coquitlam River will continue to maintain stocks of steelhead trout and salmon and to ensure that they're there for future generations.

Its members participate in activities that our community believes in strongly. So it was a pleasure to be there Saturday night with the members to celebrate that 50th anniversary and to look forward with them to another 50 years and to recognize that they face challenges — challenges which I hope this government is aware of — in the next few years as their lease comes up for renewal. I hope we can get a speedy resolution on that.

Most importantly, it was an opportunity to enjoy the fellowship of a club whose members, for 50 years, have been dedicated to making the outdoors more accessible to British Columbians, to protecting and ensuring the enhancement of the fish in our streams, and to ensuring opportunities to participate in the sports of hunting and fishing.

## THANKS MOM MARROW DONOR DRIVE

**S. Hawkins:** As a former nurse who cared for patients with blood cancers and then recently in my own journey with leukemia, I've been touched by the efforts by individuals and groups to raise awareness and funds for cancer research and cancer care services. Together we have done a lot to save a lot of lives, but there's so much more to do.

In that light, the member for Vancouver-Burrard and I are starting the first annual Canadian Thanks Mom donor drive to help raise awareness of the need for bone marrow donors. We're working with Canadian Blood Services, the National Marrow Donor Program in the U.S.A. and Mr. Owen Wells from Milwaukee, the father of nine-year-old Kailee whose story will be profiled shortly in *People* magazine.

Kailee had a successful bone marrow transplant four months ago, after an international effort to find an unrelated donor to save her life. Kailee happily went back to school last week. The Thanks Mom donor drive event is in its fourth year in the U.S.A. and will be held in over 125 cities there.

The Premier and I are inviting all members, their families and friends, and all of our colleagues here in the House to join us on Sunday, May 14 in Stanley Park in Vancouver, next to the Vancouver Aquarium, to help raise awareness and to encourage many more people to become committed bone marrow donors. There will be music and entertainment and refreshments and, of course, lots of information on how you can become a bone marrow donor.

Why are we doing it on Mother's Day? Because all mothers want their children to live healthy, happy lives. This Mother's Day we're saying: instead of flowers or perfume or material gifts, let's honour all our

mothers by encouraging others to give the gift of life to another mother's child. What could possibly be more significant as a Mother's Day gift than the gift of life for another mother's child?

### Ministerial Statements

#### KELOWNA ACCORD

**Hon. G. Campbell:** I rise to present a ministerial statement.

We are privileged today to be joined by members of British Columbia's First Nations Leadership Council, the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, Chief Stewart Phillip, Chief Mike Retasket, the B.C. Assembly of First Nations, Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, and First Nations Summit Grand Chief Edward John and Grand Chief Doug Kelly.

On behalf on all members of the House, I want to thank the Leadership Council and first nations elders and chiefs in communities across B.C. for helping to forge a new relationship with our government for the benefit of all British Columbians. I want to thank the Leadership Council for its dedication, resolve and perseverance in working to build a better British Columbia for all of our citizens. Together we're committed to building a constructive, new government-to-government relationship based on mutual respect, recognition and reconciliation.

We are working to build a new, vital and modern British Columbia — one that sees its true potential in the strength of its people, cultural diversity, common heritage, land and resources. We are committed to pursuing new horizons of hope and opportunity by moving beyond the barriers that have held us back for far too long.

We're committed to opening up new dialogue, new understanding and new access to resources to close the gaps in health, education, housing and economic opportunity that have failed aboriginal people throughout Canada's history.

[1425]

This is my government's commitment to British Columbia's aboriginal people — indeed, to all British Columbians. It is also the government of Canada's solemn undertaking, as a signatory of the transformative change accord it signed last November with our province and the First Nations Leadership Council. That tripartite agreement stands as a binding declaration of governments' mutual resolve to act with vision and commitment on behalf of all first nations and national aboriginal leaders as we set out in Kelowna last November.

That document was the product of an unprecedented government-to-government collaboration. It was agreed to by the Prime Minister of Canada and all Premiers as an article of good faith and as a compact to restore trust, hope and confidence with aboriginal peoples across Canada. More importantly, it's a shared commitment to action by all parties, including the government of Canada, which speaks to a ten-year dedi-

cated effort to improve the quality of life of the aboriginal peoples of Canada.

On Tuesday the new federal government tabled its first budget since that historic agreement. This government recognizes and appreciates that that budget includes a considerable amount of new funding in each of the next two years for improvements to housing and other services for aboriginal people. Indeed, the amount set aside for new housing, water and other infrastructure over the next two years is nearly half the amount that was anticipated within the next five years under the Kelowna agreements. It is also noteworthy that the federal government has reiterated its commitment to close the gaps in education, health care and economic opportunity.

It is difficult at this point to precisely quantify how much new funding is being budgeted pursuant to the agreements that were made in Kelowna, because it's nowhere identified under that moniker. However, it is undeniable — undeniable — that this effort will take a multi-year commitment that stretches beyond the next two years.

I understand that the new government may well have its own ideas on how to best advance the objectives set out in that document. It must be stated unequivocally that this will require significant financial resources beyond what is being committed today. After an 18-month cross-Canada collaborative effort to identify the amount for the next five years, a sum of \$5 billion was arrived at.

The trust relationship that was the core of the Kelowna meeting demands decisive action and unflinching affirmation. As I said at that meeting, the honour of the Crown is at stake. The Crown, represented by its federal, provincial and territorial governments, must uphold that trust and act honourably. It must respect the letter, spirit and content of the undertaking of 14 of Canada's first ministers only five short months ago.

Today I want there to be no doubt where this Premier and this government stand. We stand behind our word. We stand firm on the commitment we made in Kelowna and to the transformative change accord we signed. We will stand up strongly to ensure that both of those documents are honoured in British Columbia.

We cannot stand passively by and let this product of unprecedented consensus and collaboration wither due to lack of long-term Crown commitments. This government will work with the federal government to achieve the goals set out in Kelowna. We will work with the Leadership Council and aboriginal people on and off reserve to ensure that the Crown's commitment of closing the gaps is met one way or another.

We know that will demand new approaches, new partnerships, new revenue-sharing and significant new, stable, long-term funding. I meant it when I said at the forum that our government will deliver on its promise to all British Columbians. While there may be disappointment in this particular part of the federal budget, there is significant room for hope.

The Prime Minister has reiterated his clear commitment to reform intergovernment fiscal relations that

will ensure stable, long-term funding for all levels of government — mechanisms that will better serve all citizens. Municipal and first nations governments will need to be considered as part of that undertaking.

[1430]

British Columbia will put that issue squarely on the table in addressing fiscal imbalance at the first ministers meeting later this year. It will pursue new vehicles that are less susceptible to the uncertain winds of political change. Treaties can be instrumental in this regard, and this government will pursue them with renewed vigour and with new flexibility.

The future of first nations as a true partner in Canada, with constitutionally protected rights and title, warrants a fundamental rethinking of Confederation. All governments, including first nations governments, need to know they can count on stable revenue streams to provide the services that the people they serve deserve. That was implicit in the five-year commitment made in Kelowna. Long-term funding must be found, focused and committed if we are to meet the goal of closing the gaps for aboriginal people within the next decade.

I characterize that agreement in Kelowna as Canada's moment of truth. It was time to do something that had eluded our grasp as a nation for 138 years. It was our chance to end the disparities in health, education, housing and economic opportunities. All first ministers rose to that moment of truth, alongside Canada's aboriginal leaders, to undertake that challenge. Having made that extraordinary national commitment, any unilateral reversal will invite consequences that only make us poorer as a nation.

We have seen the consequences of Canada's political failure with regard to our first nations in the lives of first nations, Métis and Inuit people in our country. We know the toll it has taken on aboriginal children and families, and there are no more excuses. We've seen the consequences of shattered hopes spawned by over a century of betrayal, denial and negligence by governments of every stripe. There are no more excuses. We have seen the consequences of confrontation, litigation and lost opportunities. We know too well the consequences of frustration, anger, mistrust and despair, and there are no more excuses.

I say to the federal government: this is Canada's moment of truth. I believe the Prime Minister and his government are committed to closing the gaps identified in health, education, housing and economic opportunity. The Prime Minister and his government have committed to the objectives and principles of the agreement reached in Kelowna, and hundreds of millions of dollars have been earmarked to advance them in the next two years.

Let us now confirm the new partnerships that were promised. Let us now confirm the long-term funding, and let us find the strength and commitment to meet this challenge on behalf of all Canadians. Let us talk about how to invest the money to maximize the benefits for aboriginal people. Let us talk about the results we will see in the lives of aboriginal children — in their

eyes, in their dreams — as they think about their future in Canada. Let us talk with aboriginal communities and with the federal government so that we can strengthen those communities and strengthen Canada in so doing.

In Kelowna first ministers from all the provinces, all the territories and the federal government came together. They lit a torch, and that was a torch of hope. It was a beacon that we should hold high. We should hold it together in our mutual commitment to making this country a better country for all Canadians in all parts of the country, aboriginal Canadians included.

[1435]

[Applause.]

**M. Farnworth:** I thank the Premier of British Columbia for his comments. He made some important remarks about what happened last November and what has happened since then and what must happen from now on forward. In November an agreement was signed between representatives of aboriginal people from across this country — ten provinces, three territories and one federal government. The entire people of our nation came together in what the Premier refers to as a moment of truth, and indeed it is. It was something that was supported by all of us in this chamber. Our leader, the member for Victoria-Beacon Hill, articulated our position as to how we as an opposition felt.

We look forward to seeing this agreement signed and implemented and to being able to address issues that have bedevilled and plagued this nation since its inception in 1867 and this province's entry into Confederation in 1871. It was seen as an opportunity to move forward, to deal with issues that had been outstanding, to ensure that aboriginal peoples fully participate in the nation of Canada that is home to all of us.

That's why the decisions that occurred yesterday give us great cause for concern. It is important that we in this province send a strong message to the federal government that it is the honour of Canada at stake, that it is the honour of ten provinces and three territories at stake, and that must not be allowed to fail. We must, as the Premier says, be unflagging in our affirmation in that regard.

For too long we have seen, in our province and our country, the disparity that first nations face — whether it's from life expectancy, where they can expect to live, on average, a decade less than non-aboriginal Canadians.... Native people not only die younger; they live with disabilities, on average, 12 years longer than other Canadians. The infant mortality rate is three times higher than for the rest of the population. In injuries and opportunity, they are at a significant disadvantage, and it will take the efforts of a tripartite agreement and the resources that came with that agreement to start to address that.

That was the hope of Kelowna, that was the substance of Kelowna, and that was the message of

Kelowna to this province, to aboriginal people and to the people of Canada. We are extremely concerned by what has happened.

We agree with the Premier's comments. We would ask the Premier to recognize that we need to speak with one voice in this province, and we are prepared to do that. We want to support him to do that.

[1440]

I am taking this opportunity to let the Premier know that after question period, under Standing Order 35, I will be tabling a motion that will allow us to take this unique opportunity to send a message to the federal government — a strong bipartisan message — that we believe in the Kelowna accord, that we believe that the honour of Canada is at stake and that we will be unflagging in our affirmation of this agreement — that it is too important to the people of this province, it is too important to the people of Canada and, most importantly, it is too important to the aboriginal peoples of our great country.

With that, hon. Speaker, I will finish my response to the Premier of British Columbia and ask him later to seriously consider our motion.

### Oral Questions

#### APPOINTMENTS TO AGRICULTURAL LAND COMMISSION

**B. Ralston:** When John Tomlinson was elected president of the Fort Langley–Aldergrove B.C. Liberal riding association, he told the *Aldergrove Star* newspaper that it was a privilege to lead that group of "deeply committed B.C. Liberals." This is the same John Tomlinson, of course, who appeared in the 2005 Liberal campaign video and, together with his wife, donated more than \$12,000 to the B.C. Liberal Party.

Now this deeply committed B.C. Liberal is the only current member of the agricultural land south coast panel. Can the Premier explain how Mr. Tomlinson's deeply committed Liberal pedigree and agriculturally skimpy résumé qualify him to make multimillion-dollar decisions about the long-term future of sensitive agricultural land in this province, such as Barnston Island?

**Hon. M. de Jong:** The member should just be upfront and clear. If it is his position, as apparently it is, that anyone who is politically supportive of the government that was re-elected to continue to make sure British Columbia was leading this country.... If he believes that disqualifies a member from making a contribution to public life, he should just say so.

We have a process in place that is the envy of governments across Canada. I could go through a list of appointments. I see there's one, a former member of the ALC. A Ms. Hunt, who I think works now with the NDP caucus, was a candidate for the NDP and was appointed to sit by a member of the present NDP opposition. Would I suggest that she was appointed because of some political connection as opposed to some

expertise that she brought to the position? Not on your life, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Surrey-Whalley has a supplemental.

**B. Ralston:** I'm glad to see I've drawn the minister responsible for patronage to his feet. As the minister knows, less than 1 percent of the population belongs to the B.C. Liberal Party — not 46 or 47 percent, as he cited. The act that governs the Land Commission states that commissioners must be "knowledgeable in matters relating to agriculture, land use planning, local government or first nation government" — not deeply committed B.C. Liberals.

The commission's governance policy states that appointments should possess the "capability for a wider perspective on issues." That's because the work done by the ALC must be impartial and must be seen to be impartial to ensure public confidence. A deeply committed B.C. Liberal will not be perceived as impartial or able to consider wide perspectives.

Will the Premier admit that his government is doing a disservice to the reputation and functions of the commission by appointing such blatant B.C. Liberal insiders?

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I just want to make sure I understand this. I just want to make sure I understand that the member and the opposition are criticizing a process that has received endorsement from the Auditor General and that has been viewed as a model that other governments should follow. I also want to make sure I understand that he is being critical of that process in the face of the model that the NDP followed.

[1445]

I don't know for sure whether the NDP, when they were in government, actually had someone called a patronage czar. I'm not sure, and I would never make that allegation in the chamber, but maybe the member would like to ask the member for Surrey-Tynehead whether they had a patronage czar.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Surrey-Whalley has a further supplemental.

**B. Ralston:** The future of places in British Columbia such as Barnston Island is at stake, and it's probably not a surprise...

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**B. Ralston:** ...that the minister mentions the member for Surrey-Tynehead. He has supported publicly the transition of this agricultural jewel in the Fraser River into an industrial park.

Earlier this week the minister bemoaned the fact that there wasn't a flood, at the Ministry of Agriculture

and Lands, of qualified applicants for the commission. Perhaps there's a reason for this. Since 2001 the Agricultural Land Commission has lost 45 percent of its staff, and it's been without a CEO for over a year. The new regional structure clearly has made it much more susceptible to local political and development pressure. The commission needs support and leadership, not deeply committed Liberal appointees.

Will the Premier admit it's time for his government to actually support the Agricultural Land Commission and its staff? Maybe then he won't have to rely on partisan Liberals with no agricultural experience to sit as commissioners.

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I'm still trying to come to terms with this analysis put forth before the House by this member, who says that somehow a process — that one which he defends and the one that we have created, which he criticizes — which gave rise to the NDP to release from the ALR far more land than is the case now.... Somehow that is a signal of a flawed system. In fact, this ALC structure has done far more to protect agricultural land than the one this member seeks to....

I know that those facts aren't helpful when the member is trying to spin this web of intrigue. Again, he can go to his colleague from Surrey-Green Timbers and get a primer on how the NDP did it when they were in government.

**M. Farnworth:** Perhaps I can give a primer to the member opposite on how the NDP did it. He just mentioned the name Christine Hunt. She was the first aboriginal person appointed to the Land Commission in British Columbia, and you — your government — fired her. Given the importance of the New Relationship to this government, can he inform this House when the next aboriginal person will be appointed to the Land Commission?

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Happily, we have an audience in this chamber today that is better positioned than that member or myself to pass judgment on the work this government, this Premier, has done to ensure that all British Columbians are treated with respect and dignity, and that historical injustices are corrected.

#### ROLE OF KATHRYN DAWSON IN APPOINTMENTS TO AGRICULTURAL LAND COMMISSION

**M. Karagianis:** Yesterday here in the chamber, the Minister of Citizens' Services celebrated the achievements of the board resourcing office. He didn't mention, however, that there's been a recent change in leadership.

[1450]

Let's talk about that change in leadership. Kathryn Dawson is a B.C. Liberal insider and a very, very political individual. She was the director of the Alberta government members' office. She's the former aide to

Stockwell Day, and she was personally recruited by the Premier to become the Liberal caucus director of operations and, more recently, the assistant deputy minister of cabinet support.

Tomlinson and Jones were vetted and approved under her watch. Can the Minister of Citizens' Services explain why Elizabeth Watson, a very highly respected former director, was replaced with this Liberal insider — with only one month into the job, filling the Land Commission with her Liberal crony friends?

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Well, history has been made on the floor of the B.C. Legislature. It's the first time I've heard anyone from Alberta referred to as a Liberal insider, but you never know what may happen.

Yesterday one of the members of the House referred to Ms. Dawson as the executive director of the B.C. Liberal Party. Incorrect. Wrong. Ms. Dawson has a record of public service in Alberta. She has come to British Columbia in recent years, worked with the government and worked with the caucus. Her performance as a dedicated public servant will withstand anyone's scrutiny anywhere, anytime, and she is doing a good job.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Esquimalt-Metchosin has a supplemental.

**M. Karagianis:** Well, let's be clear. The partisan patronage appointments to the Land Commission have occurred only since Kathryn Dawson took over. John Kendrew's questionable reappointment was also done after Elizabeth Watson's departure. If the minister is so proud of the resourcing office's performance, can he explain how deeply committed Liberals with no agricultural experience and development advocates are finding their way onto the Agricultural Land Commission?

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Well, far be it from me to be critical of the member's research. Ms. Dawson came to her present position only a matter of weeks ago. The member, before she and her colleagues malign an individual's character, might want to actually check their facts about when the appointment was made.

Ms. Watson left some time ago. I'm not going to sit in this House and comment on why an individual decided they wanted to seek additional challenges. But you know, this is not just about the games in here. We're talking about people who have dedicated themselves to public service. It may be a foreign notion to the New Democratic Party that people would acquire positions on the basis of merit, but that is the principle we have enshrined in a process that is the envy of governments across Canada.

#### CHILD CARE ACTION PLAN

**D. Thorne:** For months now we have all been listening to the Premier and the Minister of State for Childcare telling us that everything is just fine. They're

talking directly to the Prime Minister about the federal child care plan, and they just know it's all going to work out.

Well, guess what. We know now that everything is not going to work out. Two days ago we heard the federal budget and the Prime Minister's plans for Canada. Those plans don't include very much for our children, at least not for children who have two parents working outside the home. We know that B.C. has lost, definitely lost, \$463 million. Almost half a billion is gone — down the drain.

I would like to ask the Premier this afternoon if he is ready now to apologize to British Columbia families for not fighting harder for this child care plan that we so desperately needed.

[1455]

**Hon. L. Reid:** I'm pleased to respond to my reluctant questioner opposite. We expect to work with the federal government to have them deliver on the commitments they've made to this province. We are interested in deliverables. Indeed, there is \$250 million on the table for the creation of child care space. I intend to see — this administration intends to see — that that dollar comes to British Columbia.

Creation of child care space requires innovation. It requires partnership. We, today, are partnered with municipalities, with agencies, with school districts, with young parent programs — people who want to work with us to build child care space. I welcome anyone in British Columbia to make that contact with me and begin that discussion.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Coquitlam-Maillardville has a supplemental.

**D. Thorne:** I appreciate the comments from the minister, and I look forward to seeing how British Columbia is going to be able to make up this almost half a billion dollars.

My supplementary question is to the Finance Minister, who has been quoted as saying that the federal budget takes very positive first steps for child care. Yet B.C. has just lost, as I have just commented, almost half a billion dollars. There is a desperate shortage of child care in this province. Already many families are waiting years to get their child into day care. Despite this, our Finance Minister is praising the new plan.

My question to the Finance Minister is this. Does she really stand by her comments that this federal budget takes positive steps for child care in the face of such a magnificent loss?

**Hon. L. Reid:** I am pleased to put on the record the accomplishments of this government on the child care file. Indeed, 641 new spaces in the last round of capital — that's the January announcement. There was an announcement in November. There was one in August. There are applications that are receiving favourable response today to build child care with the government in British Columbia. That work is ongoing.

We do not accept for a second that this work can be done in isolation. We have extraordinary child care providers in British Columbia. We have an extraordinary set of communities who are prepared to work with us. That work is underway. There are bursaries available today; there are supports available today. That work will continue in British Columbia.

#### FUNDING FOR 2010 OLYMPIC GAMES

**H. Bains:** Earlier this week the Minister of Economic Development assured this House that the federal government will come up with \$55 million to cover half of the cost overrun for the Olympic venues. But when the budget was dropped, the Prime Minister snubbed this Premier and this government. There's no mention of this amount in that budget.

Will the minister assure B.C. taxpayers that they will not be on the hook for the entire Olympic cost overrun?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** The member is not correct. I never made such a statement. I am not in any position to assure anybody that the federal government is going to make future announcements or future commitments.

What I said at the time, and I'll say again now, is that we have had some very positive discussions with the federal government — whether it's official-to-official level or whether it's actually from minister to minister. There is every indication that the federal government will live up to the commitments that it has made. We all signed on to a multiparty agreement with regard to the Olympics, and the federal government have indicated that they will live up to their obligations.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member has a supplemental.

**H. Bains:** There's no clause in the multiparty agreement that binds Ottawa to pay an extra dime for the Olympic cost overrun. Yet this government signed an agreement that potentially puts B.C. taxpayers entirely on the hook for the Olympic cost overrun.

[1500]

My question to the minister: why won't the minister admit that B.C. taxpayers are on the hook for the entire cost overrun for the Olympics because this government was asleep at the switch and failed to protect the taxpayers in that agreement?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** The member is once again incorrect. The province is not on the hook for any increased costs. But let me just take us back a little ways. It was actually because of the leadership of the Premier of this province that we secured the right to host the Olympic Games in 2010. It's because of the leadership of the Premier that we put in place a \$600 million commitment for the province as their share of the cost of staging the 2010 Winter Games in this province.

I can assure the member that we are working closely with VANOC as they develop their plans over

these years. We are quite confident that with the obligations that are coming forward, the province will live within its \$600 million commitment.

EMERGENCY SERVICES  
AT RIDGE MEADOWS HOSPITAL

**M. Sather:** A recent revelation showed that the wait times at the emergency room at Ridge Meadows Hospital are among the longest in the Fraser Health Authority. Yet none of the money that the minister committed, the \$7 million, towards emergency rooms is going towards Ridge Meadows Hospital. Why not?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I thank the member for his question. In fact, I answered a very similar question from another member of the opposition last day or the day before with respect to this, so I'm glad to repeat that answer.

What we learn from the work that we are doing with emergency department representatives — doctors, nurses, paramedics, health employers, health unions — at 15 of British Columbia's largest and busiest emergency departments will be transformed into changes at all emergency departments in all hospitals across British Columbia.

What we learn through the leadership teams that have been created at those 15 hospitals will be best practices that will be in place in all hospitals, and what we learn in terms of a model that will build an even stronger culture of cooperation between doctors and nurses and paramedics and others who work in emergency departments will be translated into better care for all British Columbians in every hospital across the province.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows has a supplemental.

**M. Sather:** Well, we're still waiting for our transformation in Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows. Last fall it was shown that surgery wait times in Ridge Meadows were double most other cities in our region. Now the local doctors in Maple Ridge are saying that they're very frustrated, that the construction for the emergency room is still not underway.

Whether it's the emergency room waiting times, the wait-lists for surgery or the lousy food at our hospital, the citizens of Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows are left to twist in the wind by this government. I would like to ask the minister if he would commit to making sure that some of the money that is going to other parts of the Fraser Health Authority will be directed to our hospital so that we can address the emergency wait times and get some construction going.

[1505]

**Hon. G. Abbott:** Again, I thank the member for his questions. I can absolutely assure the member that the current initiative will benefit every hospital and every British Columbian as it comes into being.

I do want to advise the member of this, because this is critical, and this is a statistic that I have not provided to the House previously. I just received it yesterday. What this tells us is nurse vacancies in the health authorities. The member should know that the current nurse vacancy in the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority is 772; in the Fraser Health Authority, 321. That is a big part of the challenge that our hospitals face today.

Thank goodness that our government initiated an unprecedented investment in new nursing spaces in this province. After a decade of neglect by that member's government, we have increased the number of nursing spaces by 62 percent — 2,511 new nurses every year in British Columbia.

CRYSTAL METH PROTOCOL

**R. Fleming:** There are many gaps in our province's strategy to combat the effects of crystal meth in our communities. Concerns have been specifically raised by foster parents in Victoria as to the effects of crystal meth on children and babies who are coming into care and being removed from homes where parents use or in some cases cook crystal meth. On checking with ministry officials, there is no joint protocol yet in place when these children are removed by police and social workers from these homes. Can the Solicitor General tell us when the crystal meth secretariat will have these protocols in place and coordinate a cross-ministry response?

**Hon. J. Les:** I am pleased that the members opposite are starting to display an interest in this very important topic. As the campaign last year unwound, for example, not once did we hear anything at all from the members opposite about the issue of crystal meth, while our government had been working for years in addressing the crystal meth issue and, in fact, have been recognized as national leaders in addressing the crystal meth issue.

That was led by the Premier in discussion with other Premiers across the country. Commitments were made to various communities across the province and funding provided, for example, through the Union of B.C. Municipalities. A lot of that funding, I'm happy to say, is flowing through aboriginal communities in British Columbia as well, as we address this very serious issue.

We're also going to make resources available to the school system throughout British Columbia because prevention, frankly, is a very important aspect of the fight against crystal meth in British Columbia.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Victoria-Hillside has a supplemental.

**R. Fleming:** The Solicitor General should recall — back to the election almost a year ago — that this side of the House made a commitment five times in excess of the funding announcement that his government has

announced to date. His government has the weakest laws on meth precursors in the country now. Again, on the issue of joint protocols, we're far behind the States and other jurisdictions.

In the United States there are joint protocols in place. They have passed legislation. A drug screen is obtained within 12 hours, and a full medical examination and interview by social workers are conducted within 24 hours. That doesn't occur in British Columbia.

It's crucial that a joint protocol be developed around apprehension of these children so that they can be assessed and decontaminated when there is evidence that crystal meth is being cooked or used in a household.

B.C.'s community crystal meth task forces are asking for this. The Solicitor General would be aware of that. He's had a letter to this effect. Will the minister commit to mobilizing the proper resources to coordinate the proper meth-specific response for front-line workers in this province?

**Hon. J. Les:** It's rather rich that that member purports to preach to us about commitments to funding for crystal meth. He might want to check with the members on either side of him when their previous government — I believe it was in the year 2001 — made commitments around mental health and addiction services. I believe the figure was some \$125 million, and the then Minister of Health was finally forced to admit that not one dollar was actually funded of that commitment.

The programs we have in place today are in fact working well. This is a very serious challenge that affects every community in British Columbia, but today we have over \$1 billion worth of resources — funded resources — available for mental health and addiction services across British Columbia. We have over 1,000 beds available for treatment for people who are afflicted by these drugs, and we're committed to doing more as resources permit.

[1510]

**A. Dix:** You know, I say to the Solicitor General: he's zero for two. We've asked the question twice, and he's failed to answer it twice. It's a very serious question. It's something that communities are asking about.

I'd like to ask him the question. It's very simple, not in a partisan way. He's the minister responsible. Can the Solicitor General tell us when the crystal meth secretariat will put those protocols in place to coordinate a cross-ministry response on this question?

That's the question the member for Victoria-Hillside asked. It's a very important question. The minister, rather than going on and giving partisan responses.... Can he just give us a simple response about where he is at on this question?

**Hon. J. Les:** Well, I know that the member opposite finds it difficult to listen to an enumeration of the lack of accomplishment of his previous government. I can understand that. But our government has been taking a leadership role in identifying crystal meth in various

communities across the province. We have held community forums in I don't know how many communities so far, drawing hundreds of people to those evening forums. I am pleased to say that many of those attendees were, in fact, young people. I was really encouraged to see that.

Let there be no mistake. We are well aware that crystal meth is a challenge, and we are taking steps today to make sure that British Columbians are aware of this challenge and stop the use of crystal meth that is compromising their welfare.

[End of question period.]

### Standing Order 35

**M. Farnworth:** I rise under provisions of Standing Order 35. I wish to raise a motion of urgent public importance — namely:

[That this House do now adjourn to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely, the failure of the federal government to honour its commitment to the Transformative Change Accord, known as the Kelowna Accord, abandoning the tri-partite agreement and action plan to improve the socio-economic conditions of Canada's Aboriginal peoples and, as a result, putting the honour of the Crown into disrepute.]

I have a motion to move if the Speaker finds it in order.

Hon. Speaker, this is a matter of great importance to the people of this province and of this country on an agreement that was signed by ten provinces, three territories and one federal government. This is the motion.

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I wonder if I might suggest this. I'm obliged to the member. I've just now received the motion. I know that pursuant to subsection (3) of the standing order, there is a written statement that the member is obligated to provide to the Speaker as well. I've not seen that. But I am happy to, and the member may be indicating that this is it. That may be so.

So whilst I don't doubt for a moment the sincerity of the application, I'm wondering if we might do this. I note that pursuant to subsection (6) of the standing order, the ordinary course of events would see a debate — were it to occur — begin at 4:30 or at a time designated by the Speaker. In the time that we have, I wonder if my friend the Opposition House Leader and I might have a discussion about the motion itself.

Again, whilst I don't dispute the sincerity with which it is put forward, we need to be guided by the rules governing the standing orders. I would like an opportunity to canvass that with him, and we could perhaps come before you again in short order and present our views — either by consensus or opposing, as they might be.

**M. Farnworth:** This side of the House is quite prepared to take that time and do that with the Government House Leader.



[1515]

**Mr. Speaker:** Okay. Until such time as I hear from both the Opposition House Leader and the Government House Leader, I reserve my right. Then we'll make the decision.

### Orders of the Day

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I call in this chamber continued second reading debate on Bill 33, the Education (Learning Enhancement) Statutes Amendment Act — that's quite a title, Mr. Speaker — and in Committee A, continued debate on the estimates of the Ministry of Forests and Range.

### Second Reading of Bills

#### EDUCATION (LEARNING ENHANCEMENT) STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT, 2006 (continued)

**S. Simpson:** I'm pleased to have an opportunity to get back to this debate now that we're back.

What we've seen with this legislation is a number of very positive things. We saw the placement here of a hard cap on class size in grades four through seven. That is a positive. We know that it's an important decision for children in British Columbia, and we know that it's a decision that will help ensure the quality of education for children in our province. We know, in fact, that guaranteeing limits on class sizes goes a long way for us to be able to ensure that teachers have the capacity and the ability to do their jobs better than in instances with a large class.

Unfortunately, there is a bit of a sad tale behind how we got to where we are today with this legislation. What we know is that, in fact, the situation that we found ourselves in a number of months ago with the teachers dispute was a situation that was precipitated by this government's actions. It was a situation where this government absolutely refused to deal with the question of class size and refused to acknowledge the challenges and issues that we have around class size. That was a very significant determinant in the conflict that was had between teachers and this government.

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

Fortunately, the people of British Columbia.... Parents demanded that this government act responsibly and put pressure on. This opposition demanded it; teachers demanded it. Other educators demanded it. As a result, the government in fact came to its senses and did something on class size. The situation here is that it is important for the government to accept responsibility for that situation — responsibility for a situation that they very clearly created.

As we move past that, as we move on and engage in the discussion of the bill itself, let's talk a little bit about what these changes and what this bill will mean and what it actually does. What is key in this legisla-

tion is the support that does occur in grades four to seven. We do see that there is a consent requirement through grades four to seven for teachers. It is a requirement that will ensure that teachers, who are the key component in the education of our children, have some ability to protect the interests of those children in their classroom by schools being required to have their consent for adjustments around class size that go over and above 30.

Classroom teachers, we know, are those who best understand what's going on in our schools. They understand the educational system. They understand the delivery of learning, and they understand what's most important for our children when it comes to their education.

[1520]

Unfortunately, we're not going to see those same conditions in grades eight to 12. There isn't a consent requirement for teachers for these class sizes; rather, it is a condition of consultation. What we're going to see here is that teachers will be consulted, but there is no requirement in this legislation that teachers consent in grades eight to 12 on adjustments or changes in class size. What we see here is that we have one standard in grades four to seven; we have a very different standard in grades eight to 12.

One of the other things that the legislation does is acknowledge the linkage between class size and class composition. This is a good thing. While the legislation puts a limit of three children per class who require IEPs, it doesn't address the broader questions around special needs. There is no acknowledgment of the role and need for special education assistance in this legislation, and there certainly are no resources to ensure that those supports are in the classroom or that those supports will remain in the classroom after this legislation is passed.

There is no additional support to properly assess children to determine those kids who fall into that grey area, primarily around high-incidence. Those kids make up a significant part of the population of our schools. What we know is that the school system doesn't have the resources or the skills, necessarily, to do the assessments that need to be done.

We also know that because of the legislation, without additional resources here, there will be great pressures on those schools to make sure that, in fact, the number of kids in any given class with IEPs doesn't go over three. It could create great complications in our schools and great challenges for our schools and for our school districts. This is a very big concern.

We also know that the funding limits.... Well, an issue around that, which certainly is very large in my constituency of Vancouver-Hastings, is the question of English as a second language. English as a second language isn't discussed in a significant way in this legislation. It is an issue that is very important. It is an issue that can be just as challenging in our schools, without doubt, as questions around IEPs and schools that have significant numbers of children who have English limitations and who are learning English.

The most troubling piece of this legislation is the total lack of resources to ensure that the legislation can be implemented without significant negative impacts on other areas of our school districts and their budgets. It's unacceptable for us to see a piece of legislation put forward here by the ministry when there are no resources attached.

What's this going to mean in terms of non-enrolling teachers? Are we going to see those teachers being lost in our schools? What's it going to mean for counsellors and youth workers in inner-city schools, like the schools in my constituency? Does it mean that those services are going to have to be trimmed in order to make sure the dollars are there to meet the class size obligations? What will it mean for school support workers? What will it mean for special education assistance? We don't know.

What we do know is that school trustees in my district in Vancouver have been speaking to me. School districts from both sides of the political spectrum in Vancouver have been speaking to me and expressing a great degree of concern about what the impacts of this class size legislation will be without dollars and resources to support the legislation. They're concerned about whether they're going to be able to meet their legal obligations and, at the same time, deliver the breadth and the level of services and education that they desire to put in place.

[1525]

I've heard from parents who have had a chance to look at this, parents of special needs kids who are very concerned about the possibility that in school districts where the three IEPs in a classroom is the cap, there will be pressure where there are greater numbers of kids to in fact start to look again at warehousing kids with special needs. I don't think that's something that anybody wants to do, but it may very well be a result if we're not careful and if the resources aren't in place to ensure that we, in fact, can move forward with this legislation with a resource and a funding package behind it that allows it to be successful.

I pointed out that when we look at the dollars involved to meet the responsibilities of this legislation, the responsibilities this will put on school districts, we have issues around what happens when cuts have to be made. Is it non-enrolling teachers? Is it counsellors? Is it youth workers? Is it school support staff? Is it special education assistants who will fall by the wayside in order to meet budgetary responsibilities and to meet the terms of Bill 33? Will it mean that these positions will be sacrificed if necessary to meet those class size requirements? We don't know that, but should that occur, there is absolutely nothing positive about that circumstance.

We need to have funding in place to ensure that the conditions of Bill 33 can be met without substantive costs to other critical aspects of our public education system. This situation will be exacerbated even further when we look at the punitive powers of the special administrator who's identified in the legislation — an administrator who could have the ability to punish a

school board up to and including the dismissal of the board itself if a district isn't in compliance, if schools aren't in compliance.

Like in so many other areas of public policy that this government has a practice around, it puts in place conditions. It puts in place demands. It doesn't put in place resources and capacity to meet those conditions, and then it walks away from its responsibility to ensure that they can be achieved in a reasonable way. The concern here is that by not putting funding on the table as part of Bill 33, this government has put conditions on the table and then said to school districts: "You need to meet those conditions, but there is no money to support your doing that." That's just wrong.

This means the pressure is on districts to reduce costs, including the potential elimination of key staff — again, like special education assistants, youth counsellors. That's important business in inner-city schools. The other option is, of course, not to identify students who are high-incidence, low-impact students. Districts will be compelled to not identify those kids' needs.

Trustees in my district, again, have spoken to me about these issues. They've told me that they don't know how they're going to meet the challenges of this legislation without additional resources and funding. They've told me that the government is creating more problems, potentially, than they're solving if they don't provide resources to implement Bill 33.

Everyone wants to address the issues of class size. Everybody understands the importance of having class sizes that allow teachers to optimize their skills and their commitment to children and to do the best for our children. We all agree that a legislative resolve to this is important. We all agree that putting a hard cap in place, which clearly identifies what the appropriate number of children is in any given class, is a good way to go, but it has to be complete legislation. It has to be complete with the resources to allow the implementation to go ahead in a way that will make it successful. There is nothing here that says this legislation will be successful when there's no money to make it work.

Hopefully, the minister will further consult with districts and will consider these critical questions as this bill goes forward through committee stage. We'll see that happen over the next week or two. I would hope that the minister will take a little bit of that time, in fact, to be talking to some of those districts and talking to those trustees who are very concerned.

[1530]

Bill 33 has the potential to be an accomplishment that we could be very proud of in terms of how it deals with class size. It can be something that the minister and the government could be proud of in terms of how they deal with class size, but it will only be achieved if the strategy is complete. The strategy today in Bill 33, the comprehensiveness of this bill.... It fails in the class size component around the question of money.

It can't be complete without the money to make class size and class composition work. This is a challenge over the next stages of the bill. It's a challenge

that we'll get an opportunity to discuss in committee stage, which I know the critic will discuss. It's a challenge that we need to fix, and I hope the minister is serious about wanting to resolve this. I hope the minister is serious about finding a solution that works, and I hope the minister is open to a discussion around how to fix this problem that is being identified across the province by school districts.

There are a number of other issues in this bill that I hope we'll get a chance to talk about in committee stage. They are other issues that are significant. But with my time, I was looking forward to the opportunity to talk about this question of class size, to talk about the question of the special needs children who make up a significant portion of the population of the schools in my constituency.

I know those schools work very hard. I know those educators and those principals work very, very hard to meet those kids' needs. They're very cognizant about making sure the resources are available and doing what they can do to ensure the resources are available to meet those kids' needs. I would hope that Bill 33 can come forward as a very positive tool to help accomplish the objectives that they aspire to and the objectives that I would hope most of us, if not all of us, in this House aspire to. But it does require resources. It does require a commitment of resources by the government to make sure that those pieces can be put in place and they can move forward without jeopardizing many of the other critical services that are provided by our school districts across the province.

I do look forward to the discussion in committee stage. I'm hopeful that the minister will come to see the views that are being put forward from this side of the House on those questions around resources and around the question of consent, particularly in grades eight to 12, where we now have a consult model and not a consent model. I look forward to that discussion as we move ahead.

**D. Routley:** I rise to speak on Bill 33 out of a grave concern for teaching and learning conditions in our schools. Over the past four years, school districts across the province have reeled from the impact of Liberal cuts to public education funding and the inappropriateness of the per-student funding model in the B.C. public school system.

In the school district that I used to represent as a trustee, the current chair of that school district has written a letter. The letter goes out to all B.C. school boards. I'll read it into the record, if that's permissible.

To all B.C. school boards:

As school trustees, it is our right and our obligation to serve those we represent. At a regular board meeting held on March 29, 2006, Cowichan Valley school board passed the following motion: "that the trustees of school district 79, Cowichan Valley, move to challenge the funding formula that is responsible for the current underfunding of public education and urge the government to provide funding that addresses the needs of all students in the public education system."

In light of ongoing cuts that continue despite small increases in per-student funding, it is clear that the current method of financing our public education system is not meeting the requirements of those who rely on it. For example, small projected declines in enrolment are used to excuse funding cuts.

The time has come for our school communities, led by our school boards, to insist that the Ministry of Education revisit the per-student funding formula which has created underfunding in our public schools. If we cannot sustain necessary programs and provide for the needs of our students and school staff, then reason dictates that the formula is wrong. Without proper resources, the power to manage the direction of public education is greatly diminished. Please join us in leading our communities to demand better.

Yours truly,

Wilma Rowbottom,

Board chair, Cowichan Valley school district

[1535]

Wilma and I sat on a board together. I have a great respect for Wilma Rowbottom, although we share quite differing political viewpoints, but we share those viewpoints in respect for each other and for the people we serve. Ms. Rowbottom was recognized just this past week for her 27 years of service as a school trustee. I have undying respect for her and all the trustees of the province, and I have a deep compassion and empathy for their struggle.

This government's funding formula has devastated classrooms. Their legislation that ended the last labour disruption in the school system and then their failure to fund that agreement led to the deep cuts in the classrooms. School districts and school trustees across the province do not trust the government to follow through on their word. They do not trust the government to stand up for children and fund those programs that they dictate to school districts.

Now the latest incarnation of this is Bill 33 as we see a dictate to school districts on class size limits and on IEP students per class, but no promise of funding. Trustees, teachers, students, special needs students and their parents shudder in anticipation of the cuts that will be necessary to fund the requirements of this bill.

The province rose up in support of the teachers last year because they recognized that conditions for their children's learning and teachers' working conditions were untenable. They accepted and they realized that smaller class sizes and support for those students who need it the most are necessary for all of our students to succeed to their best. This government has designated literacy as one of its great goals, and yet we see a disinvestment. We see a refusal to invest and to stand behind the commitments that the government makes.

Those parents who supported that job action — not because they wanted to take care of their children during the day when they would otherwise have been at school, but because they realized that the classroom conditions were unconscionable — can celebrate a victory in forcing this government to acknowledge that class sizes are a problem in this province. The teachers can celebrate a great victory, not on behalf of them-

selves but on behalf of the children they serve, for forcing this government to realize its education policies and funding formula are flawed.

We as an opposition are happy to have stood by them and supported that effort to force the government to realize its inadequacies. But in that realization, the government has failed to do the most important thing, and that is to fund the necessary changes. The changes have been identified as necessary. The changes have now been accepted by the government as necessary. It would be cynical and inappropriate and hardly forthright for the government now to refuse to fund changes that they will dictate.

There is another aspect to this bill — the distributed learning that allows private schools to offer courses in public schools and vice versa. As a school trustee in Cowichan, we had pressure in certain courses — particularly physics 12 — to offer a full program to our graduating high school students. We were approached by a local college, and they offered to offer this course with joint college credits to those who completed.

[1540]

On the face of it, it might be a good thing that kids can advance quicker, that they can gain more credit for their effort. But how long would it be before our school district could no longer offer that course or any other course in which it's challenged by the funding formula of this government? How long will it be before those distributed learning courses take the place of core curriculum in rural schools?

These are the kinds of suspicions that people have. These are the kinds of cynicisms they hold of this government's promises because of its failure to fund its previous commitments. So we call on the government to stand up and fund what it promises; to stand up and be accountable for the conditions in the classroom; to not tell people that they have more when people know they have less; to not come to us and say: "Well, I know we put eight rocks in your shoes, but we're gonna take out four. Now shake our hand, because we're your best friend."

We know that's not true. We know that in our classrooms, the conditions have deteriorated. We know that special needs students' needs are going unmet.

I call on this government to stand up and fund its promises, live up to its commitments.

**D. Thorne:** I rise today in support of this bill in principle. I think this bill is a victory for students, for families and for teachers. I am very, very pleased that after years of denying that class size and class composition have an effect on learning conditions, this government has finally admitted that it made a mistake in removing limits, and they've re-established hard caps for all grade levels.

My biggest concern in this bill is the funding that is accompanying these limits. School boards may be forced to cut programs in order to meet these new caps. This government has a record of failing to fund important initiatives in education. Several years ago the biggest example, or the best example I can think of, was

when there was a rise in wages to the teachers' salaries. There were no corresponding financial resources given to the school boards, and they in fact had to absorb the loss.

The impact on that certainly in all school districts, I would assume.... I can only speak specifically, personally, for my school district — school district 43. I think this bill is an important step, and I hope that if there are any funding shortages, we will be able, as this bill goes through the process, to work on this area.

Now, the biggest problem in my district that I have been hearing from parents, who have been phoning my office and sending e-mails and letters, has been from parents of special needs children who are quite concerned that this bill will produce a feeling of discrimination — actual discrimination — for students. They're afraid that with the current funding — as I was just mentioning — that is in place, there is no funding, really, for aides in the classroom. That funding has been removed by this government in the past four years.

They're very afraid that their children will end up being moved not only out of their classroom but out of their schools and perhaps even into some warehouse kind of situation. I'm using that word quite broadly. I'm not using it, obviously, as a warehouse.

That's what parents are concerned about. I see the minister is smiling as I say that. I want to assure the minister that the parents who I have talked to are very, very concerned and see this as a very serious situation. Staffing ratios are a real issue for teachers and for parents. Teachers' rights were taken away by this ministry, taken out of the collective agreement and not enshrined in the School Act. That's another issue that is a problem.

[1545]

My school district let the minister know two weeks before this bill was introduced that it is very concerned about finances. I'm sure that with the introduction of this bill, I will be meeting with them in the coming weeks and getting an update on exactly where we stand now in the Coquitlam school district. This letter to Hon. Bond states that....

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, no proper names.

**D. Thorne:** Sorry. I apologize. I withdraw. The minister.

The Coquitlam school board, like most other school districts, was expecting that the planned \$20 million increase that was announced would result in an increase of about \$36 per student. However, only about \$13 million of the \$20 million increase, which worked out to \$24 a student, was allocated to all school districts for basic student allocation. The Coquitlam school district expected almost \$1.1 million and received just over \$700,000.

They have written to the minister saying that this is a very big problem in terms of class size and composition and that without any additional funding, any progress made in this area cannot continue. So the minister

is already well aware that in Coquitlam, we have a huge problem. I would just like to reiterate that without sufficient funding to look after the new expectations of Bill 33, we are in trouble in Coquitlam — which, as most of the members know, is the third-largest school district in British Columbia.

I wanted to say a few things about inclusion and special needs students to point out the concerns of the parents from my riding who have contacted me and, I'm sure, many who have not yet contacted me but who will in the future. One of the biggest problems with having a special needs child is getting an assessment done, and the whole assessment capacity in the province in general.

This is how a student gets assessed in British Columbia. The parent or teacher sees a need. The student's case is raised with the school-based team and referred to the district resource office. The student is put on a wait-list. It can sometimes take years for this student to work their way through, because a district has to send a psychologist to assess the child. There are not enough psychologists, and the rules are very strict around these assessments. Ordinary parents, working parents, parents who don't have high income are at the low end of the scale when it comes to getting these assessments done.

Wealthy parents can pay \$1,500. They can afford to do this. They can jump the queue, have their child assessed privately and get assessed as a special needs child, and have whatever comes after that done. For the ordinary child on this waiting list, sometimes up to three years is what I have been told. Eventually this child will get identified as a special needs student and will then qualify for ministry funding. Unfortunately, this funding is no longer targeted to the student, and school boards may or may not spend all of the money that the students need to generate services for that student. Unfortunately, this is what the ministry currently calls flexibility.

That, along with the fact that the teachers' collective agreements do not have the provisions for special needs students like having a cap, a formula for staffing and support. This bill has no provision for support, merely a cap. If we're not really, really careful and watch how we try and solve that problem, we could be creating another problem for school districts and for parents specifically of special needs children. If we're not careful, our whole ability to be inclusive could be at risk in British Columbia. I say that knowing that I will support this bill in principle at this reading. But I want us to be very, very careful that we're covering all of our bases in this area.

[1550]

I just wanted to also say something — it's been mentioned before, I think — about distributed learning. I find this a very interesting section of this bill. It's certainly an area that I had not given much thought to before — unlike special needs. I certainly have been involved with many special needs children, because I've worked in community social services for most of my life and feel very strongly about that area.

With the introduction of Bill 33, with the class size limits for grades four to 12, in the section that's included on distributed learning, references to distance education in the School Act have been removed and replaced with the term "distributed learning." The definition of distributed learning is a method of instruction that relies primarily on indirect communication between students and teachers, including Internet, other electronic-based delivery, teleconferencing and correspondence.

The minister must now approve distributed learning programs for public and independent schools. There is a section on sharing student records to facilitate students from public schools taking distributed learning courses at independent schools. The ability of public school students to take courses from other districts and from private schools could make it difficult for school boards to determine staffing needs.

I think this is a huge potential problem in this particular section of Bill 33, because there is no provision in the act to specify whether or how funding would move between public school districts or to and from independent schools. I hope that we will be discussing this further and that there will be more information forthcoming, because these changes are being introduced without any discussion with teachers. They leave a lot of questions unanswered for teachers as well as for members on this side of the House and, certainly, for parents.

I will watch the debate on this bill in the Legislature very closely, attempt to understand the implications of this legislation and see how we move through the committee stage of this bill with the concerns that I have stated.

**D. Chudnovsky:** I'm pleased to rise today to speak about Bill 33. I think there is good news in the province with respect to education this week, and I think that it's well worth our while to celebrate that good news.

The most important thing that we see in Bill 33 is a recognition that class sizes have to be limited in the province and that that limitation needs to be codified. There are those — among them, teachers — who think that that codification should be in collective agreements, but the teachers have compromised, the government has moved, and there will be a codification of class size limits in the act. That's useful and good, and it's good in several ways.

First, it's good news because it means that if the resources are available to school districts around the province, there will be hundreds and probably thousands of classes in schools across the province next September which will be smaller. That means tens of thousands of students in this province getting more individual attention from their teachers. That can only be good for the students and for our communities.

A second reason that we have good news is that we finally hear the government, this government, saying they will take responsibility for class sizes. They will step up to the plate. They will bring forward legislation that provides for class size limits at all levels in our

public schools. That's a good thing. There are those who would argue, I guess, that we should focus on the fact that the government didn't take responsibility for those issues from 2001 to 2006. I would rather look at it the other way — that it's good news for the province that the government now comes to the conclusion that it needs to be responsible in those areas.

Another piece of good news is that those tens of thousands of teachers, hundreds of thousands of parents and communities across the province who stood together last fall and said that we needed limits on class sizes and additional services for students with special needs.... Those people are vindicated. The courage of the teachers, the support of the parents, the support of the students, the support of communities and school trustees.... The vast majority of British Columbians last fall stood together and had the courage to say to this government: "Something needs to be done." They are vindicated today, and that's a good thing. That's good news.

[1555]

There's more good news. That good news is that those people who stood together in the winter of 2002, when Bills 27 and 28 were introduced and when the cutbacks — yes, cutbacks, despite the attempt of the government to deny there were cutbacks — were planned which stripped our ability to control class sizes in this province.... That resulted in 120 schools being closed, which resulted in fewer services for students with special needs, which resulted in programs across the province being reduced. The people who stood up in 2002 when a former Minister of Education was saying, "It's all about flexibility. It's all about choice. It's all about putting students first...." They don't say it anymore. That's good news, and those people who stood up against this government in 2002 are vindicated today as well.

There's good news. It's important that we look at the good news, and it's important that we be positive about what we can be positive about. But there are also concerns. We need to look at those concerns, and we need to look at them carefully.

First of all, we have a concern, and teachers have a concern, and we know we've begun to hear from parents about this concern — that the professional teachers in this province are being treated differently as a result of this bill. The professional teachers from kindergarten to grade seven will have to consent. If they believe that for educationally appropriate purposes, classes should be larger than the limits in the act, they will have to consent. The professional teachers from grades eight to 12 will only have to be consulted.

The question that needs to be asked of this government is.... Of course, the minister and others on the other side would like to ask a whole bunch of other questions, but we will ask the questions. We will stand for the children. We'll ask the questions that need to be asked in this House.

The question needs to be asked. Why is it that the professional prerogative, the professional responsibility, the professional ethics of K-to-seven teachers are

being recognized in this act and teachers from grades eight to 12 aren't being recognized in this act? It's an important question. We'll continue to ask it, and we'll look at it in some detail during the committee stage of this bill.

Another concern that we need to look at in the midst of the good news is a concern about safety of students. There are home economics classes, labs. There are science labs. There are shops and technical education classes in secondary schools in this province.

There was a time, before 2002, when this government took precipitous action, which they have now begun to move away from, when students in those classes were protected. The class size limits in collective agreements meant that the number of students in those classes were no larger, in most cases, than the safe number, the number that the laboratory was built for. We need to look at adding those kinds of protections to this bill so that the students in our schools who take those very important courses are protected and that we have safety in those classrooms.

Another concern that we need to look at has to do with the implementation of the class size limits, because this isn't all brand-new. We have had, over the last 15 years — almost 20 years — in this province situations in which we've codified class sizes. They were in collective agreements. The processes were well-used — complicated, difficult, tedious. People had to work hard on them. But together — school districts, teachers, parents, students — we found solutions to the staffing and implementation processes that are necessary when you're going to limit class sizes.

As I look in the bill that's proposed in this House today, in section 76 there's a process laid out which, frankly, gives me some concern, because the process begins in the fall. We who actually work in schools and worked in schools — the professionals, the administrators, the teachers, the other professionals who work in schools — whose responsibility it is to do planning and do implementation of class size limits know that you can't start in September.

[1600]

You can't start in September to set those class sizes. You can't start in September to fill those classes. You can't start in September to do that planning, because if you do, there'll be disruption for students, and the minister tells us over and over again that it's all about students — and she's right about that.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

We on this side certainly agree with that, and the parents, the teachers, the administrators and school trustees agree with that. If you care about the students, you can't be organizing classes and secondary blocks in September. You have to start way before that. You have to start in the spring.

There needs to be provision in the act. I think it's important that together we look for provisions and those provisions in the act that provide for processes that begin in the spring, so that the implementation of

class size limits is real and not illusory; so that there isn't disruption; so that schools run smoothly so the students, who we're all there working for, have the best experience they can have.

Another concern that we need to talk about has to do with non-enrolling teachers and the important services that they provide to our students — ESL teachers, counsellors, school librarians. I don't think there is a member in this House who would say that the educational services provided to students by those professionals are unimportant. They're critical. They're critical to the success of students in our schools. There is no mention of those non-enrolling teachers.

Again, this is not brand-new. There used to be a time when there were ratios for those non-enrolling teachers, and they were in the collective agreements. They provided a guarantee that these necessary services would be available to students in our schools. Not there. We need to have a look at that — in the midst of the good news, have a look at these concerns and see if we can improve what has been put before us by the government.

Another concern, and it's been spoken to by some of my colleagues previously, is very, very important. It has to do with students with special needs. The government has brought forward a bill which talks about a maximum of three students with individual education plans in any one class. What's important for us to realize is that there are 11,000 classes in the province with more than three students with IEPs in the class.

The resources necessary to provide appropriate placements for those kids.... They're our kids, students with special needs. They're not somewhere else. They're not somebody else's kids. They're our kids, the students with special needs, and we need to make sure that there are appropriate placements available for those students. That takes resources. The resources have to be there for appropriate placements, for supports, for a process, for making sure that there are appropriate placements, or else we run the risk of moving back to the bad old days.

When I went to school — that would be the early 1830s; no, it was later than that — there was a special class, and everybody was shy about the special class. There was a kind of stigma attached to the special class. It was off in a corner in the basement of the school that I went to. Thankfully, we've moved away from those days.

We have over the last 20 years begun a process of inclusion and integration of students with special needs that enriches the lives of those students with special needs and the lives of the other students in our classes. But without the resources committed for appropriate placements for those students with special needs, I fear that we're going to move back to the bad old days.

I think it is the responsibility of this government and this minister to commit to the students with special needs in this province, and to the parents of those students, that no special needs student will be in an inappropriate placement in this province because the re-

sources haven't been found to make sure they get the best education they can. That commitment has to come.

An additional concern that we have about this bill is that it sets up a dynamic which, I think, could be unhealthy in the schools, and it's this one. In looking at exceptions to the cap that has been put forward by the minister and this bill, the bill sets up a discussion between principals and teachers. Now, that's new and different.

In the days when class size limits were in the collective agreement, that was collective bargaining. It was a labour relations issue. If there was a situation in which a school district, a principal, a teacher believed that the limits should be exceeded, that was a labour relations issue. That was a good thing, because it took the discussion away from the individuals in the school. There is inevitable tension and conflict and complication around those issues.

[1605]

I believe that we move away from that situation at our peril. I think it's a mistake to set up a situation in schools where teachers and principals — who, after all, have to work together on a daily basis to do the best they can for students — are put into a situation where there's conflict and tension guaranteed. I think it's a mistake, and I think we can do better than what's in the act.

Let me conclude with a discussion of resources. I want to talk about resources. I think it's important that we not have a situation next fall as a result of this good news.... We've taken some steps together here and we need to be together — government, opposition, students, parents, teachers, school trustees. All of us need to look at this carefully and see that we've taken some steps together here. But we risk a situation in the fall where, if the proper resources are not available to implement appropriately the steps that have been taken in Bill 33, we're going to be in trouble.

I fear a chaotic situation in the fall. I fear a situation where, because there aren't the resources that there should be for implementation of these steps that we've taken, we'll have a chaotic situation, a situation which will not be good for kids, will not be good for their education. I think it's important that we say today that if that is the case, it won't be the fault of those who pressed for class size limits in the face of a government that for many, many years said no. It will be the responsibility of the government.

If there aren't the resources, and we have a situation where parents are complaining next fall that there is disruption as a result of Bill 33, it won't be those parents' fault — those parents who demanded improved learning conditions for their kids. It won't be their fault. It will be the responsibility of government if they don't provide the resources.

If we have a situation in the fall where there is disruption and lack of stability and tension in schools because the resources aren't there for implementation of Bill 33, don't blame the school trustees for that. Our school trustees are doing the best they can with the resources that have been made available. All of the

members in this House know there are school trustees with whom I disagree about a whole lot of stuff, and I have been not very shy about that over many years. Nevertheless, don't blame the school trustees in the fall if the resources haven't been made available for implementation of Bill 33 and there's tension and disruption and lack of stability.

I think we have to look carefully at what's liable to happen. We've been through this movie before. This is a nicer version of it, a better version of it, a version based on what the government has learned over the last five or six years. But we've been through this movie where the government brings in a law and downloads responsibility for the resources to somebody else. What were the results of it the last time? A hundred and twenty closed schools, cuts in programs across the province, larger class sizes across the province.

There were some other results that we don't talk about as much, but we'd better talk about them now. Art and music and drama classes were cut across the province as a result of the cuts that had to come with the decisions of this government in 2002. We don't want that again. Schools were closed. We don't want that again.

**An Hon. Member:** Thirty-eight thousand fewer students.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Well, I hear from a member of the government once again.... I guess maybe they haven't learned. Maybe there wasn't a problem with class size and composition. After all, it's the bill that came from the government. Maybe Bill 33 is an aberration, a mistake. Shouldn't have done it; there really wasn't a problem.

Perhaps the member of the government should talk to the minister. She and the Premier at least have come to the conclusion, after several years of denying it, that there is a problem with class size and composition. The member denies it. They've said that there is a problem. Bill 33 begins to deal with it. Good for them. They've begun to deal with it.

[1610]

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Let's not download the problem on our neighbours who clean the schools, who provide a healthy place for our students to go to learn in. Let's not download the problem onto the clerical support in the schools — those people who make sure that the schools run smoothly. Let's not download the problem onto the teacher assistants and educational assistants in the schools. Let's not close schools. Let's make sure that we provide the resources — that the government is responsible and accountable for providing the resources — that can make this beginning step a step that we can all be proud of.

**Hon. M. de Jong:** To members, with reference to the matter that was discussed just after question pe-

riod, I've had an opportunity to have a discussion with my friend, the Opposition House Leader, with respect to that proposal and that submission.

I can say to the House that as a result of that discussion, though I'm not entirely convinced that Standing Order 35 applies, that is perhaps moot, because the member and I have agreed that it is an important matter and that with the unanimous consent of the House, the matter could be put for and should be put for discussion and debate in this House at five to five for debate, to conclude at or prior to the time for adjournment today.

**Mr. Speaker:** Okay.

**A. Dix:** I think it is fair to say that I often rise to speak in this House with a song in my heart.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

But today, especially, I feel like it's a good day, because earlier today, as members of the House will know, the Attorney General introduced legislation that will restore an independent officer of the Legislature to deal with the important issues of children and family development in British Columbia.

This had been an issue that people had worked on for years — that members of this House have raised. After months and months and months of effort and debate, a major report by the hon. Ted Hughes, we had introduced in this House today Bill 34. We will be, I'm sure, debating that in the next couple of weeks.

I rise with a song in my heart, because we're also debating this bill. You'll recall it has some similarities with the process involved in the bill to create a children's representative in this sense. For years since this government got rid of limits on class size and the provisions of collective agreements on class composition, parents and children and young people and teachers and support workers and communities and school boards have fought to see those limits placed back in the law.

You know, last fall we had a major debate in this Legislature. There were two sides in the debate. There was one side, the opposition side, which advocated strongly for limits in class size — raised the issues of class composition. There was one side that supported that, and there was a government side that refused to listen, refused to deal with those important issues of class size and class composition, and voted down our efforts to hoist that legislation, Bill 12, last fall — refused, in fact, to negotiate or deal with those issues during that major disruption we had in our province with respect to teachers.

So I feel like we've come a long way. We've come a distance here. The government has finally recognized the strong arguments put forward, in particular, by my colleague the member for Malahat-Juan de Fuca, who has argued consistently in the last election campaign, prior to the election and since being named Education critic. He has put issues of class size and class composi-



tion to the forefront of debate in this House, and I want to congratulate the member for Malahat-Juan de Fuca for his extraordinary....

[1615]

Interjection.

**A. Dix:** The Minister of Education, because I wanted to also.... The Minister of Education had been distracted during my earlier remarks when I referred to the song in my heart, and when I praised the government for the legislation introduced today on a child representative, when I praised the fact that government has recognized the need for limits on class size and class composition. Our graciousness goes wide today. I am pleased and honoured....

Interjection.

**A. Dix:** The Minister of Children and Families thinks I haven't mentioned him today, so I want to thank him because he and I worked hard together over the past six months. We're making progress. He is coming on board. One day.... I want to tell him that in spite of all the things that have happened in the past, if he wants to come all the way over, he'd be welcomed over here, I'm sure.

**H. Bains:** He's starting.

**A. Dix:** He is starting; he wants to move.

The government on these vital questions of public policy has moved, and they're very seriously important questions. We had a disruption last fall, and I want to actually cite one other group which played a critical role in this and has fought for this, and that is the British Columbia Teachers Federation.

I think it's fair to say that the B.C. Teachers Federation and its courageous leadership have worked hard on these questions. Many of those efforts are reflected in some of the provisions of this bill. I think it is an important thing today to recognize the critical role that the trade union movement, in particular, and the B.C. Teachers Federation and their teachers and members have played in raising these issues in British Columbia. It shows the courage that people can show, and it shows the importance of opposition, the importance of an active citizenry, the importance of people who say: "It doesn't matter that the government has a majority in the Legislature. Other voices have to be heard, and you can convince by making a strong case."

Certainly, over the past several years, the leadership of the B.C. Teachers Federation, which has argued again and again and again for limits on class size and changes to the provision around class composition, deserve a great deal of credit for their efforts. I think they're well reflected in parts of this legislation.

Having said all of that, having expressed the positive wishes, I think we need to recognize, as well, the considerable victory that teachers have had in this province. I don't think.... You know, when I toured

around British Columbia when I was executive director of Canadian Parents for French.... I know that the Minister of Education shares this view that every day in classrooms across British Columbia teachers do extraordinary work, that students do extraordinary work.

I talked to Windermere School in my constituency today where students working with teachers have taken the lead. This year 350 of them are volunteering in elementary schools in their community, showing leadership to younger students — inspired by teachers, by principals, by the circumstances in the community they've developed at Windermere. A similar thing is happening in Gladstone School in my constituency. Sometimes as a society, we in our political debates get too personal, I think, and we don't recognize together the extraordinary things that are happening in our public schools.

I talked a little bit today in members' statements about students at Windermere School, about their extraordinary success at Reach for the Top where they defeated a team from St. George's and how important it is to recognize all of the work they've done.

The students at Windermere School have worked on a beautification project on 27th Avenue, supported by teachers. It is changing that neighbourhood, transforming that neighbourhood. Students are doing it, supported by teachers. It is an extraordinary thing.

One of the things it says to me is that efforts in this province by some groups.... If I might digress for a moment. In particular, the Fraser Institute, which has targeted schools like Windermere for criticism.... What it says to them is that they need to visit those schools. They need to see those teachers. They need to see those students before they draw conclusions poorly developed and researched, which lead to misleading conclusions and which have put a slur, frankly, on schools in my community and the east side of Vancouver.

[1620]

That's what it says. It says teachers and the work they do need to be respected and that their work for students will improve if there are fewer students in every classroom. That is the case that the British Columbia Teachers Federation, the official opposition, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, parents from across British Columbia and students have been making for years.

This legislation, after four years of wait, after four years since the dark days of 2002.... We're at the anniversary of those dark days, the dark days when the Children's Commission was eliminated, and the dark days when class size limits were eliminated in British Columbia. Those days are over. It's a tribute to the work of those people. I want to send my congratulations to Jinny Sims and all teachers in British Columbia for their extraordinary contribution.

I think sometimes when we debate bills in the House, we talk about what's in the legislation and then we talk about what's not in the legislation. I don't expect every bill to deal with every issue in a given area. The bill that was introduced today only deals with part of the problem, as the Minister of Children and Family

Development knows, in developing a truly outstanding system of protection of children and family services. It's not just about a children's representative; it is about many more things.

The challenges of our education system are not just about class size and class composition; they're about many other things. Some of the things that this bill doesn't deal with are the issues of non-enrolling teachers. There are schools in my constituency with more than 600 students that have a half-time teacher-librarian. That's not good enough. That is an issue of funding.

All of the schools in my constituency, all of them, have a significantly higher than average numbers of students who speak English as a second language, and for them there is very little in this. We need to do better. There is, I would argue, a funding cap on service for ESL. It used to be, you know....

I know a little bit about language education. I worked in this area for a while. We have what we call French immersion programs in British Columbia which we fund for 12 years, in fact for 13 years, from K-to-12, and which seek to develop fluency in the French language. You can see that fluency develop. I've visited and worked with students at every level, and you can see that fluency develop over time in the French language.

Yet for English as a second language, we have funding cuts that limit supports to five years. That was a cut from seven years. It seems to me that that was a downloading of responsibility on school boards and had a real impact. If you talk to principals and teachers in my riding, it had a real impact on those schools. It's not dealt with in this legislation, and it needs to be.

The fact of the matter is that under very special circumstances one can reach a functional level in a language in two to five years, but that's not the circumstance for everyone. That can be the circumstance when there are other advantages — such as parents who speak the language; good home conditions, economic conditions; coming to Canada from countries with an established education system, not ravaged by war. That's not the case for everybody, and that five-year limit has really presented an enormous challenge to teachers and schools across British Columbia.

I think this issue of ESL is fundamental to my constituency of Vancouver-Kingsway, fundamental to the constituency of the member for Vancouver-Kensington, fundamental to the constituency of the member for Surrey-Newton, and dare I say it, hon. Speaker, fundamental to your constituency. That issue of giving proper support to English as a second language in our province has been left undealt with in this bill, and we need to get there.

There is also, of course, the issue of students with special needs. This is an issue that goes across ministries of government and is a fundamental issue for our society. The Minister of Children and Families and I had discussed this many times, this issue. There is, in fact, a very significant wait-list for young children waiting for infant development programs that hope-

fully as a province we can address in the next number of years.

[1625]

We know from experience that investment in those programs for students from zero to three.... We know there are people in British Columbia who wait on those wait-lists from zero to three, and then there's another wait-list from three to five, and what they do is transfer from one wait-list to another.

We know that investment in that area pays enormous dividends for our entire system of public service — that if, in fact, we can eliminate that wait-list, we will see the benefits of it throughout the K-to-12 education system. We will see the benefits of it throughout our society. We will see the benefits of it for our community living sector. We need that investment.

Equally, the need to fund the changes being made here on the issue of.... Students with special needs need to be funded. People say that it costs money. People say that we always want to spend money. I know the Minister of Education agrees with this, because she, like I, has been in classrooms, and we know what can happen when students with special needs get the support they need in classrooms with active teachers and supports. Inside of the school population, we know what can happen, that positive things can happen in that environment when students are properly supported.

We know that if the government finds it in its heart to fund this legislation, to provide adequate funding for students with special needs, it will pay benefits for generations in this province. We will save money in this province. We will save it in public services later on if we provide the resources to students that they need right now. They don't have years to wait. You only get to go to public school once, and we need to get those resources in place for September 2006. We can't wait for September 2007.

As I say, I want to return to a positive note at the end of this speech. I think that this week.... Today has been a very positive day. These have been issues that the opposition has raised in British Columbia. There are some people who think, you know.... There is somebody else who represents a riding called Vancouver-Kingsway who has suggested that you can't get things done on the opposition side. I believe you can. I believe that if you fight and you have the arguments and you develop public support, you can make changes. We have seen that. We have seen it in the complete reversal of the government on this issue of class size and class composition. We have seen it on its complete reversal on the issues of children and family services, and so it gives me hope.

It gives me hope that in a whole myriad of other areas, when we argue that this bill should be funded, the government will listen. When parents argue that this bill should be funded, the government will listen. When students argue that this bill be fully funded, the government will listen. You cannot, by legislation, dictate improvements in the classroom. You need resources as well.

With the song in my heart that I spoke of at the beginning of the speech, I want to say that I believe the government should listen to the many voices in British Columbia who support this legislation but are calling on the government to give our classrooms the resources and the funding they need so that we can fully realize the benefits of smaller class size and better class composition arrangements.

**B. Ralston:** I rise in this debate to speak to Bill 33. Like my colleagues, I want to acknowledge the distance the government has moved on this particular issue. I would compare it, although other comparisons have been made, to the fundamental change that we saw in the Premier in dealing with first nations in this province from his time in opposition when the implementation of the Nisga'a treaty in this Legislature was bitterly contested and resisted, resulting in even the then Leader of the Opposition, now Premier, proceeding to court to institute litigation to have the legislation declared unconstitutional. It was a bitter, protracted and nasty fight.

However, fortunately, the legislation establishing the self-government regime for the Nisga'a people was implemented. I would expect that now, given the Premier's change of heart — I give him full credit for that, having perhaps studied the legislation and consulted more widely and examined his own views rationally and critically and changed his mind — he would acknowledge it as one of the triumphant achievements of this Legislature in the last 25 years, a major step forward in this province and in this country.

[1630]

Similarly, this particular piece of legislation is an acknowledgment by the government of a change of heart. Everyone perhaps knows intuitively that smaller class sizes mean that teachers have the opportunity to pay more attention to individual students, simply because there are fewer of them in the class. What I had the opportunity to do during the lengthy debates that took place here during the labour dispute in the fall of last year was to examine in a way I hadn't before, although I'd heard the arguments, but examine personally the arguments that are advanced by academic researchers about the importance of class size and its link with academic achievement and social well-being.

A plethora of academic research — United States, Canada and throughout the world — has, particularly in the elementary years and particularly in smaller and rural schools but also in urban centres and larger schools, demonstrated that there's a clear link between smaller class size and better academic and personal outcomes for all students involved in the education process.

It was that concern and that issue that motivated much of the debate here in the fall and, indeed, much of the debate in the province. I hope the Minister of Education will receive this tribute graciously, and I'm sure she will: I'm pleased that she was able to convince her cabinet colleagues to move in this direction. It is, indeed, a step forward and the province, the province's education system and students will be better for it.

Now no change comes without consequences. Like any other change, there are challenges of implementation. There are other aspects to the bill that I want to briefly touch upon. My colleague, the member for Vancouver-Kensington, has stressed — properly, in my view — the fact that the implementation of this legislation will require a lead-in time. I would invite the government to take that advice solemnly and seriously, and I'm sure they will, in order that the advance that's made with this legislation not be marred by difficulties in implementing it smoothly and efficiently.

Doubtlessly, it won't be entirely smooth and efficient, but a number of steps could be taken now that would ease the transition into this system in the fall. As the member for Vancouver-Kensington has pointed out, there were a series of procedures to deal with class size prior to 2002. The government, in its first term, stripped those limits out of contracts, but prior to that there was a system at the school level and at the district level that sought to implement those provisions in as efficient a way as possible and with the best educational outcomes of the students concerned in mind. Those steps, I would submit, need to be taken. I'm sure the government is going to consider that.

The other aspect of the legislation that I await, and perhaps we will debate this at the committee stage — that's the debate where we, in the Legislature, move from clause to clause, and there's opportunity for more specific debate on the specific provisions of the legislation — is the distinction that's drawn between the requirement for consent for grades four to seven to class size and to consult for grades eight to 12. Obviously, there's a distinction there. Arbiters and judges have often debated and written decisions about the meaning of those particular words and just how that will work. I'm sure that if there's a spirit of cooperation and goodwill, those difficulties can be overcome.

[1635]

Personally, I await some further clarification from the minister at the committee stage as to whether or not I'm convinced by the arguments that the minister advances in respect to how those clauses will work in practice. It's obviously a distinction drawn by the drafters and clearly a distinction in purpose. Just how that will take place, I await that debate at that stage.

The other issue that has been raised here, and I join with my colleagues in debating that, is the issue of what the implications will be for special needs students. During the British Columbia Teachers Federation lobby days I was invited to have lunch with a teacher who taught in Vancouver. Her specialty was dealing with special needs students.

She pointed out to me the concern of the school system — teachers; parents of these children; administrators; indeed, of the whole system — for students who are described as being in the grey area — in other words, not the most pronounced learning disabilities but difficulties that would perhaps require more attention and more encouragement to accomplish the educational objectives that the school, their teachers and their parents have in mind for them. It's not clear to me in

this legislation just how those children in that particular area will be assisted. Again, I await clarification from the minister.

I note, unless I'm incorrect on this, that no TA time is committed for special needs students in this legislative package, and there are, as has been pointed out by the member for Coquitlam-Maillardville, lengthy delays. Obviously, the system is strained, at this particular point of entry, in assessing those students with those different learning abilities in order to provide the best learning program for them.

I would say that those difficulties in implementation... Obviously, they pre-existed this legislation, but given this opportunity, given this advance that the government is making, and together with the teachers, the BCTF and parents, I would hope that the government would use this as an opportunity to use the same spirit of compromise and cooperation to bring some resources to bear on that particular problem, with an outcome that's better for the students involved.

Similarly, as has been stated by others, I'm particularly concerned in my riding of Surrey-Whalley about English as a second language and instruction in that area. The composition of my riding is as diverse as some of the others that were mentioned previously in the lower mainland. That is an issue that students in Surrey-Whalley and in the Surrey school district, which is the largest in the province, would wish addressed in this legislation as well.

The other area that is spoken of in the legislation is distributed learning. I'm not quite certain, from the way the bill is worded, how this will work and what the educational advantages are. I understand that it would enable private schools to distribute course and curriculum material electronically to public schools. Whether that's an advantage or something to be desired, I'm not sure. Again, I wait further elucidation from the minister on this particular point.

I wouldn't want to end my remarks on a negative note. I look forward to the day when the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands reconsiders the appointment process in the Agricultural Land Commission. There's no end of wonders that seem to be taking place on the opposite side of the House here when public pressure and public debate are brought to bear on a policy area and the government is prepared to listen. We're better for it.

[1640]

Certainly, when the Minister of Agriculture and Lands heeds the advice of concerned citizens, of policy groups, of the agricultural industry, we will be better for it and the long-term future of....

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, this is a different bill.

**B. Ralston:** The Speaker, quite rightly, chides me for straying from the topic of the bill. Perhaps I got a little bit carried away. I'm somewhat preoccupied with that issue these days.

I will conclude my remarks at that point and say that, with those comments, I support the bill.

**R. Hawes:** I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

### Introductions by Members

**R. Hawes:** Today in the precinct we have 55 grade seven French immersion students from École Christine Morrison Elementary in Mission. It's a combined class with École Saint-Antoine from Quebec. There are 18 students from Quebec on an exchange program with their teacher Bruno Tessier and a number of parent chaperones. Could the House please make them welcome.

### Debate Continued

**H. Bains:** I am, indeed, honoured and feel privileged to speak on this bill, which I believe is one of the key bills that we will be debating in this House in this session. I say that because I believe education is the key to the progress and future of any country, of any community. We are talking about defining the education future in this province by putting in those caps that we had such a debate over in the last few years.

Finally, I want to thank the minister for bringing this bill and recognizing that there was that need to put a cap on class size and for finally recognizing the need to deal with the issue of class composition.

I want to thank Jinny Sims and the BCTF for taking a stand for education, taking a stand for the children of this province and taking a stand for the future of this province. I might add that they took that stand, and they took huge risks when they took that stand. They took that, and then they put themselves in a position that not too many Canadians or individuals are prepared for. I think they did that because they believe in education, they believe in our children, and they believe in the future of this province. I applaud them for that.

I applaud Jinny Sims for taking that bold stand, and I applaud those thousands of teachers who took their stand and stood with Jinny Sims. They made their voices known, and they made known, to the rest of us, what the real issues in the classrooms were. They said to us, loud and clear, that they are willing to take their stand until the problems in the classroom and the education problems are fixed. I want to thank them for finally making this government understand that those issues were important issues, that the teachers were right, that the students were right and that the opposition was right.

They may disagree with me at this time, but I think the decisions that they made on the other side of this House were of a political nature. I believe that it was wrong. Finally, they have recognized that, and I want to thank them for that.

Having said that I agree with the intent of this bill about class size and class composition, there are concerns. In my particular constituency of Surrey-Newton — and Madam Speaker, in your constituency, Surrey-

Green Timbers, and in all other Surrey constituencies — we have a serious issue of English as a second language in the classrooms. In my constituency 54 percent of the population is made up of visible minorities. There's huge concern by those parents, and there's huge concern by those teachers who actually have to deal with those students on a day-to-day basis.

[1645]

As I said, I agree with the intent of the class size, but having seen no resources attached to this is a real concern to us. Are the resources from ESL to be converted over to this area? Resources aren't provided to deal with the issue that we are discussing here today. What about the school librarians? What about the custodians? What about the support staff? Are they going to pay in order to fix this problem? Are we saying here that we are fixing one problem and creating another problem in the system? If that's the case, it's a huge concern. It's a huge concern for me. I know it's a huge concern for the member from Whalley. It's a huge concern, I know, Madam Speaker, in your constituency of Surrey-Green Timbers. It's a huge concern in Surrey-Panorama Ridge, because that's where many of the students are English-as-a-second-language students.

So those are my serious concerns. Having seen nothing — no resources attached to that particular area — I am deeply concerned that some of those areas will be at risk. Some of those areas might lose out in this whole discussion that we are having here.

Now the other concern I have when we are talking about caps is consent versus consultation. I know that where I come from, I know what consultation means. I know that when management tells you that they will consult with the workers, when they tell you that they will consult with the so-and-so involved, I know what that means. In many cases what they will do is make their decision, go to them and tell them what they have done — and they call that consultation. If that happens, then there's bad intent behind this bill that we are discussing here today.

I'm deeply concerned. I hope that the Minister of Education is making note of these concerns. I hope that she would either address those issues at committee stage or, at her next opportunity, tell us what her position is on those issues.

I think the other area that I want to talk about is the consent part. I think it's clear, and we understand what that means. We understand that they need to sit down with the BCTF. We understand that they need to sit down with teachers. We understand clearly that they need to have their consent in order to increase in that particular area if they wish to do that. But on the other area, the classes from four to eight, there is a serious concern with the wording that is put in this bill — that they will consult. And I can only think that when you put those two different words, what that could mean.

I hope I'm wrong. I hope the people on this side are wrong. I hope that the minister will stand up and say that those concerns aren't serious concerns, that the minister could tell us that no class size will be in-

creased until there's agreement with BCTF, until there's agreement between the teachers and the school boards.

I think that will be the real assurance — if the minister can stand up and assure us that that's what would happen. If you don't have the resources attached to it, as I said earlier, what could happen is that the school boards will be left to deal with this issue, as they were put in this position last time around when this government downloaded many of its responsibilities. Teachers' salaries were negotiated, but the school boards were not compensated for it.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

When the price of energy went up and when the MSP premiums were raised by this government, those issues were downloaded, and the school boards ended up dealing with those and absorbing those issues.

[1650]

Then they ended up cutting in different areas in the school system. I hope that isn't going to happen with this bill. I hope that there will be resources attached. I hope that the school boards will not be put in the same position they were put in about a year or two ago.

Mr. Speaker, welcome.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you.

**H. Bains:** From Surrey-Newton I'd like to convey the message to the minister that ESL would be a serious issue. I know the issue would be the same in Surrey-Whalley. I know the issue would be the same in Green Timbers and Panorama Ridge. I hope that the ESL students will not suffer as a result of a lack of resources provided in this bill.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks, and I do feel honoured to speak on this bill. I will thank you and thank the House for listening.

**Mr. Speaker:** Seeing no further speakers, the Minister of Education closes debate.

**Hon. S. Bond:** I do appreciate many of the comments that were made by the members opposite, because if there's one thing we've learned, it's that education is important on both sides of this House. What the debate often centres around is actually how we get to the outcomes. None of us want anything different than the absolute best for the students of British Columbia.

However, I do want to say, and I want to make one thing perfectly clear: this government has always believed that class size is important. We believed it was so important that we enshrined it in legislation and took it out of contract negotiations, where often students became pawns at that table. We said, "It's so important, we're going to make it law in British Columbia," and we know that's important.

As we move forward, the debate about class size and composition doesn't end with Bill 33. In fact, Bill 33 brings a clause that says we will be required to review these amendments and other issues. The issues are not

simple. It's been interesting as I've listened to speaker after speaker bring the same issues to the floor of this House. Remarkably, they're very similar to one of the other voices that we hear in this debate regularly.

I would urge the members opposite to go back to the Roundtable minutes, to go back to the speakers who spoke on behalf of education across the sector. There wasn't unanimous agreement about class sizes. In fact, the grade eight-to-12 classes actually brought much debate and discussion.

It's not one voice we need to listen to. It's all of the people who are important in public education. That includes parents. It includes those people who are involved in meaningful discussion. This bill tries to bring to the floor of this House a balanced and reasonable approach based on all the voices we've heard at the provincial Learning Roundtable and as I've travelled across this province.

I move second reading of this bill.

[1655-1700]

Second reading of Bill 33 approved unanimously on a division. [See *Votes and Proceedings*.]

### Standing Order 35 (Speaker's Ruling)

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. members, I have been advised by both House Leaders that the motion tendered by the Opposition House Leader will, by consent, be debated until 5:55 p.m. this evening. As this is somewhat an unusual arrangement, I will ask whether the House gives unanimous consent to this procedure.

Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

### Debate under Standing Order 35

#### KELOWNA ACCORD

**M. Farnworth:** It's a pleasure to rise and speak on a matter of such importance to our province and to follow on the comments that I made earlier today regarding the Kelowna accord and how it is something that is of such importance to our province that it really does require us to speak with one voice, and that Ottawa — and the federal government and Prime Minister Harper, in his new administration — needs to understand the importance this province attaches to reconciliation with aboriginal peoples, to ensuring that agreements made between governments, at all levels, and aboriginal peoples are honoured.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

What happened in Kelowna in November was just such an effort to recognize that it is a tripartite agreement that's required to help address issues facing aboriginal people, the province and the federal government. What was required to deal with the issues facing

aboriginal people, not just in British Columbia but right across this country, is a commitment to resources, a commitment to political will and a commitment to the goodwill of the provinces, the territories, the federal government and aboriginal people.

That was achieved in Kelowna, and it was signed. A signature was put to a deal on behalf of British Columbia, nine other provinces, three territories and the federal government, and that should be respected.

The federal government is a making a grave mistake, in our opinion, by refusing to live up to and honour that signature, because what it does is send a signal to aboriginal people. It sends a signal to the provinces. It puts in doubt what it means when the federal government attaches its signature to a document. Is it worth the paper it's printed on? Or are we witnessing another — what many aboriginal people rightly feel is another — broken promise, another broken, not honoured, agreement?

[1705]

It is crucial that the federal government hear loud and clear that it is not acceptable, that agreements must be honoured, that commitments must be met. Because since 1871 in this province, we have been trying.... We have needed to ensure that aboriginal people can participate fully in the affairs of our province, in the affairs of our nation, and that we are able to deal with and resolve the disparities that exist between the aboriginal community and the non-aboriginal community.

There were 18 months of work and effort that went into the Kelowna accord; governments of different political stripes right across this country — Liberal, Conservative, New Democrat — territorial governments from the Yukon, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, and the federal government. It is not an easy feat to take such disparate views from provinces from the Atlantic to the Pacific to the Arctic and to come up with a comprehensive agreement and have people buy into it and attach their signature to it. It comes with a commitment to invest dollars — \$5 billion — which would have had a significant impact in British Columbia.

What happened yesterday in the budget is a black eye for the federal government. They need to know that in this province we feel so strongly on this, that this issue transcends political boundaries and that we are speaking with one voice. We have to send that message, and that's why I feel very strongly about standing and speaking to this motion today and, to quote the words of the Premier, our "unflagging affirmation" to ensure that the Kelowna accord is in place and continues.

With that, I will yield the floor to my colleagues to hear their views as well as the views from the government side on this important issue.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Thank you to the Opposition House Leader for his comments in support of the work that was done by aboriginal leaders across Canada, provincial Premiers, territorial Premiers and the federal government last fall.

I've had the incredible privilege — the days run together, but I think it's somewhere in the neighbourhood of ten months — to serve as the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation for British Columbia. One of the greatest privileges of that position has been the opportunity to meet and speak with aboriginal leaders, first nations citizens across British Columbia, about the challenges they face, the successes they are often experiencing and how we can find a path where we are working forward together — a new path where we're departing from the conflict of the past and truly working towards reconciliation of aboriginal rights and title interests in British Columbia and the interests of all British Columbians.

That work has been a particular privilege given the leadership role the Premier has taken both here in British Columbia and, in fact, across Canada in charting a new path forward in the relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal citizens in this province and this country.

It's only a year ago that we embarked upon the New Relationship, a new relationship with first nations based on mutual respect and on a recognition of aboriginal rights and title interests. As I think is clear from the record of this government, when we decide we're going to do something, we do it with vigour, we do it with leadership, and we pursue it relentlessly.

[1710]

Over the course of the last year we have had the opportunity to work closely with first nations leaders through the First Nations Leadership Council. The Premier took a significant leadership role across Canada, meeting with Premiers of every province and territory, meeting with provincial and national aboriginal leaders right across Canada, in the months and weeks leading up to the historic meeting of first ministers in Kelowna at the end of last November.

It is because of that leadership, the goodwill across this country and the recognition across this country by Premiers and other leaders of all political stripes that we needed to turn our backs on a tragic past in respect of the relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians and find a new way to work together moving forward to address the significant gaps that exist between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians when we look at educational outcomes, when we look at health care outcomes, when we look at opportunities to pursue economic development and when we look at housing standards.

There was unanimity across Canada that we had to work together collaboratively in a spirit of cooperation with a long-term plan that had commitment right across Canada, if we were going to in fact make progress.

Now the Opposition House Leader has put forward a motion that we ask the federal government to honour its commitment to the transformative change accord, known as the Kelowna accord, abandoning the tripartite agreement and action plan to improve the socio-economic conditions of Canada's aboriginal peoples and, as a result, putting the honour of the Crown into

disrepute. I appreciate the sentiment that the Opposition House Leader has put forward in the motion.

The government's had an opportunity to speak with members of the Leadership Council since first seeing the motion. I'm told that we're not in a position to amend the motion, but I do want to reflect on what the Leadership Council thought was the appropriate message that we as a House needed to be sending to our colleagues in Ottawa. That is that this House unanimously recommend the federal government reaffirm its commitment to the transformative change accord, a document signed by the federal government, the province of British Columbia and the B.C. First Nations Leadership Council; and further, to uphold the honour of the Crown by carrying through on the joint commitment reached by first ministers and national aboriginal leaders in November 2005 to close the gaps in education, housing, health and economic opportunity for Canada's aboriginal people within the next ten years.

It's been said many times before, but it is worth repeating that what happened in Kelowna last November was historical. For those of us who had the privilege to be in the room in Kelowna, to hear Premiers from across Canada speak, to hear national aboriginal leaders from across Canada speak, it was a very moving experience. It was a very uncommon coming together and broad recognition of the need to do better and, as the Premier has characterized it, a moment of truth for Canada in deciding: are we simply going to continue down the same old tired paths, not making any progress in bettering the lives of aboriginal Canadians, or are we truly going to commit ourselves to making a difference over the coming years, and finally, after decades of not doing it, allow aboriginal Canadians to experience the same quality of life that the rest of us often take for granted?

### Tabling Documents

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I want to table with the House the document that was the outcome of the first ministers' meetings in Kelowna. It's titled *First Ministers and National Aboriginal Leaders Strengthening Relationships and Closing the Gap*. I think it's important for the purposes of this discussion that we do table that document.

[1715]

Leave granted.

### Debate Continued

**Hon. T. Christensen:** That document sets out in broad terms what was agreed to in Kelowna. It reflects the discussion. It reflects the issues that were highlighted in the recognition that change needed to be made.

The government of British Columbia and the federal government and the First Nations Leadership Council were able in Kelowna to go one step further. We were able in Kelowna to sign an accord, a specific accord that commits British Columbia, Canada, and the

First Nations Leadership Council to pursuing the goals established in the agreement I have just tabled but setting out some principles that we would follow in doing that, setting out a time line to develop the specific strategies necessary to close the gaps in education, health care, housing and economic opportunities over the course of this next decade.

There was a strong recognition that we need to set specific goals, that we had to develop specific action plans, that we had to pursue implementation strategies and that we had to measure our progress as we moved forward, if in fact we were going to reach the goal of closing those shameful gaps. It was leadership displayed by British Columbia that allowed us to sign a specific document agreed to by first nations leaders, the federal government, and the province — to move forward on Kelowna in a very immediate way.

### Tabling Documents

**Hon. T. Christensen:** Again, I would seek leave to table the transformative change accord, to ensure we have the record of this document on the floor.

Leave granted.

### Debate Continued

**Hon. T. Christensen:** I do want to refer to some of the words in the transformative change accord. I think it's important to have those on the record in terms of what it is that we were trying to accomplish. I'm certainly not going to read the whole of the document into the record, but there are some relevant parts in the introduction that I think are critical.

The transformative change accord states that:

The purpose of this accord is to bring together the government of British Columbia, first nations and the government of Canada to achieve the goals of closing the social and economic gap between first nations and other British Columbians over the next ten years, of reconciling aboriginal rights and title with those of the Crown and of establishing a new relationship based upon mutual respect and recognition.

First nations, Canada, and British Columbia recognized the need to pursue those purposes.

The transformative change accord also states that "the parties understand that new resources will be required to close the gaps, and federal and provincial investments on and off reserve will be made available."

The parties also recognize the need to examine how existing resources are expended with the view that transformative change will require different funding approaches. The province of British Columbia, the government of Canada, and the first nations of British Columbia agree to establish a ten-year plan to bridge the differences in socioeconomic standards between first nations citizens and other British Columbians. It is understood a ten-year plan must by necessity evolve over time and that concrete actions are required at its outset to build the relationships and momentum to achieve the desired outcomes.

The accord then goes on to set out some specific actions that will be taken to improve relationships, to

close the gap in education, to close the gap in housing and infrastructure, to close the gap in health and to close the gap in economic opportunity and that the parties agree that by December of this year a detailed tripartite implementation strategy will be developed so that we can move forward.

[1720]

I am pleased to tell the House that, in meetings and in conversations with the federal minister, the federal minister has assured British Columbia of Canada's desire to work with us. I think that is part of why, perhaps, we are so disappointed that we don't have greater definition as to how the federal government is going to commit resources over the long term to meeting the objectives set out in the accord.

I've had the opportunity to speak with the federal minister in the last couple of days, and he reassures me of the federal government's strong commitment to the transformative change accord and the desire to work with British Columbia and first nations and the recognition that financial commitments are going to be required.

It is incredibly important, given the legacy of failure of governments of all political stripes to uphold their commitments to first nations and aboriginal people across Canada since this country was founded, that there be an unequivocal statement of recognition, of support for the objectives set out in Kelowna, the objectives reflected by the transformative change accord, and a recognition by the federal government that it must be there as a full partner in applying the financial resources to pursue the transformative change accord.

With that, I will sit down.

**J. Horgan:** It is truly a pleasure to participate in this debate today. It's a sad day, though, as the Premier commented before question period and as the Opposition House Leader did in his response. I think, after listening to the Minister of Reconciliation, that his job is a lot more difficult today than it was yesterday.

We have been making incremental progress over the past decade or two on this file in British Columbia. We had, in the 1990s, a recognition and an establishment of the treaty commission process, which was working well. We had the conclusion of the Nisga'a treaty, a proud moment for all British Columbians in the 1990s. We had the negotiation and implementation of interim measures agreements across British Columbia so that aboriginal people could benefit from resource extraction in their communities. Those were all good things.

There has been progress on the watch of the current government as well. I rise to acknowledge that today. However, as I do so, it's with a heavy heart, as our federal colleagues have once again made it more difficult for us to look in the eyes of our brothers and sisters in aboriginal communities across this province and say: "Trust us. We understand the challenges you face, and we're going to do something about it."

I visited first nations communities in my riding: the Sooke Nation, the Pacheedaht Nation, the Beecher Bay band, the Malahat band, the Cowichan tribes. I visited



with friends, who I played with as a child, who are now representatives of their communities on the Saanich Peninsula: the Tseycum band, the Pauquachin, the Tsartlip and the Tsawout.

I said to those people that this would be different — that I would make a personal commitment to them to work with the government, that I would help to implement programs and policies that would improve their lives and recognize the rights and obligations that we had to acknowledge what had been taken away from them and to acknowledge the mutual respect and the recognition of rights that the minister just spoke about. It is a lot more difficult to do that today than it was at the start of the week. That is a challenge for all of us. It's a challenge for British Columbians, and it's a challenge for Canadians.

I had the honour yesterday to attend a moving ceremony, with the Premier and with my colleague from Esquimalt-Metchosin, for Myles Mansell, who passed away defending this country and defending the privileges that we have to be in this place. It was a proud day for me. It was a sombre day. I felt a proud Canadian to watch the thousands of people who attended that ceremony — to be a part of that, to be a Canadian. It was a good day. The sacrifice that one man and one family made so that we could do what we're doing here today.

[1725]

With the stroke of a pen the Conservative government in Ottawa diminished me as a Canadian, diminished all of us as Canadians. The Premier of this province, the Premiers of nine other provinces, the leaders of three territories and the Prime Minister of Canada sat down with first nation leaders and solemnly committed to meet objectives, and that was taken away within five months — tragic, absolutely tragic.

Now, how do we go to the members of aboriginal communities on southern Vancouver Island, who were fleeced by the Douglas treaties 150 years ago, and say: "It's going to be better. Trust us. All you have to do is trust us"?

We've all been diminished by this. The Premier acknowledged that today. The Opposition House Leader, on behalf of the official opposition, did so. I'm proud to stand here today and join with them in condemning the federal government for abdicating their responsibility as representatives of the Crown to fulfil the signed obligations to the people of this country. It's a tragedy.

I was in the Port Renfrew area of my constituency. The Pacheedaht people live there, and for 100 years they have been watching timber, big timber, come out of their community with not one scrap of that staying there — not one job, not one bit of resource rent going to that proud nation in Port Renfrew.

There have been some improvements. The Government House Leader, when he was the Minister of Forests, signed an agreement with the Pacheedaht, and they are now seeing some benefit from those resources. The trees are half the size they were before, but nonetheless, there is some potential, some opportunity for

economic development in the far outpost of the west coast of my constituency.

We have been making progress. It's been slow; it's been steady. It's been going on for, certainly, the past 15 years.

Having worked in Ottawa and having had to endure the Meech Lake process, which ignored — again under a Conservative government, I have to say — the rights of first nations people in this country and now to see the resurrection of a Conservative government in Ottawa, once again turning their back on first nations people....

It makes the job of the minister on the other side very difficult. He has my sympathy, but I want him to know that he also has my full support. If there is anything I can do to assist him in advancing the cause and in advancing the transformational agreements that were concluded with the Kelowna accord, he has my full support — unreserved and unequivocal.

I want to say to him that the people in my community — the bands and the nations that I have just articulated — have serious reservations. I went to them. I promised them. I appealed to them. I said that I would represent their interests, and that's why I'm standing here today. I know that with the assistance of those on the other side, we can turn this around. I support the motion brought forward by my House leader, and I encourage all other members to do the same.

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Thanks to the members who have thus far contributed and will, I'm sure, contribute to the discussion we're having this afternoon.

It is odd, you know. This place, amongst the drudgery of the daily debate and the partisan barbs that flow back and forth across the chamber.... As we've commented in the past, remarkably, there are times when, perhaps because it is outside of the norm, this chamber can still have something of an impact in terms of focusing discussion and thought around an issue that is in the minds of people. It may not be in the minds of people to the extent that it should be, yet by virtue of the fact that members, for a period of time, are able to discard some of those more traditional tools of debate in this chamber, it is noticeable.

This is, perhaps, one of those times. It is at such times that I feel a particular pride in having the honour to be here in the chamber with my colleagues on both sides of the House.

I was thinking that even today during question period, which is perhaps not the best time of day to draw conclusions about how this chamber functions or doesn't.... I thought about how we often characterize our government, your government, the B.C. Liberal government, the NDP government, the Conservative government.

[1730]

It occurred to me that those of us who are involved in this on an ongoing basis frequently do that, but for the majority of people it's: the government. From time to time they may think about the different prefix, but it is the government. That is important, I think, because

of a phrase that the Premier included in his remarks. The Opposition House Leader included it in his remarks in reply and in the statement he has tabled in the House here and when he spoke, and the minister mentioned it. That is this notion of the honour of the Crown.

The honour of the Crown, which I think goes to the heart of the discussion we are having now and urging upon the federal government, is not tied to any one government of any particular partisan persuasion. The honour of the Crown extends beyond an NDP or B.C. Liberal or Conservative government.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

It speaks to something that the citizens need to be able to rely upon, notwithstanding the results that occur every four years provincially and every four months, it seems, federally — or something like that. That is what I think is frustrating for a lot of people when they see what's happened here, because it was a special moment. It was a special time in Kelowna, as the minister has reminded the House, when the stars aligned in a way where Premiers....

Imagine that. Imagine, in Canada, first ministers from across the country, from sea to sea to sea, agreeing on anything. We have spent decades in this country seeking to achieve that nirvana of consensus at the first ministers level, and yet here it was. So those who say, as I think people in this chamber are saying today, that we discard or ignore that remarkable alignment of political will.... We really do so at our peril.

I think we are, in this chamber, also cognizant of the fact that new governments face many challenges — new minority governments, even more so — and there are difficult choices to be made. We take some solace from the fact that there is a significant envelope of funding but, as the minister and Premier have said, one that falls short of the commitments that were made by the federal government of the day in Kelowna not so long ago.

We have a choice now, and the government in Ottawa has a choice. I think what this chamber is saying is that we want the federal government to have no doubt about what the position is of the British Columbia government and, today, of the British Columbia Legislature — with the need, the advantages, the importance associated with standing behind that remarkable display of consensus, which does not emerge all that frequently but did emerge in Kelowna not so long ago.

I thought it was interesting that in the exchanges that took place in the immediate aftermath this afternoon when the Opposition House Leader stood up and presented his statement, we were able to have some discussions very quickly thereafter. I believe the minister or staff were able to have some discussion with members of the leadership council, who obviously were aware that the motion.... They were in the chamber — I think, most of them — when the motion or statement was tabled.

## Tabling Documents

**Hon. M. de Jong:** It's interesting that we have great flexibility in this discussion. We don't have to worry about procedural matters like motions and amendments and troublesome things like voting and all of those sorts of things. But it's remarkable how similar the language is and how the sentiments they were trying to convey, I think, are reflective of what's being said here in the chamber:

[That this House unanimously recommend the federal government reaffirm its commitment to the Transformative Change Accord, a document signed by the federal government, the Province of British Columbia and the BC First Nations Leadership Council; and further, to uphold the honour of the Crown by carrying through on the joint commitment reached by First Ministers and national Aboriginal leaders in November 2005 to close the gaps in education, housing, health and economic opportunity for Canada's aboriginal people within the next ten years.]

[1735]

I think, if it hasn't been done, it is worth perhaps having a record of that language, since it did, as I mentioned earlier, emerge from some quick discussions with the leadership council, so whatever the procedure is in terms of tabling that, I'd seek leave to do so.

## Debate Continued

**Hon. M. de Jong:** There again, the presence of the phrase "honour of the Crown...." People want to know that when they reach an accord, when they reach an agreement, when they reach an understanding with the government, that is an understanding and an accord that will withstand the inevitable changes that take place as a result of our democratic process.

I understand and appreciate the anxiety that people feel and the uncertainty if significant, momentous agreements are, moving forward, going to be compromised or their survival cast into doubt because of what may take place on the electoral stage. That, I think, is a theme I hope those at the federal level, who I'm certain are watching and listening — I hope — to what's taking place here, will understand we are trying to convey the importance of, particularly with a group of Canadians who have had much to doubt in the realm of honour of the Crown.

It is a phrase that has legal significance, but for many people, it is a phrase that has a very practical application and a very practical and commonsense meaning. I hope today that in conveying this feeling within the chamber, officials at the federal level will understand the importance we attach to ensuring that governments at all levels do the appropriate thing in preserving and protecting the honour of the Crown.

A unique time, a unique event, a unique coming together of people of goodwill, leaders of goodwill from aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities and, again, a unique opportunity, as the Premier said.

The government, I'm happy to say, with the support of all members of this chamber, whilst recognizing

the initial steps that the new federal government has taken to respond to the need and to the challenge, will continue to forcefully and passionately impress upon the federal government our belief that the spirit and the details of the agreements that have been reached, particularly at Kelowna, need to be upheld, need to be acted upon and, in so doing, provide all of us with an opportunity to realize an opportunity that has not come our way before.

Whilst we can focus on the challenges associated with finding the resources, I — and, I think, most members of this chamber — prefer to focus on the remarkable opportunities that can flow from an event, from an agreement, from, dare I say it, a new relationship that is emerging between Canada's aboriginal peoples and British Columbia's aboriginal peoples and the rest of Canadians.

[1740]

I say bravo. I say bravo to this chamber for being able to speak as it is today with, I believe, a single voice in impressing that point upon our colleagues at the federal level and impressing upon them the importance we attach to ensuring that the honour of the Crown is upheld in every respect.

**D. Routley:** I rise to support this motion because, as the previous speaker indicated, the honour of the Crown is indeed at stake. The honour of our communities, and the honour of Canadians and British Columbians one to another, is at stake. We have witnessed the leaders of ten provinces, the federal government and the three territories come together in a historic fashion to sign an agreement.

The people in my riding who live on the many reserves saw it as the light at the end of the tunnel — a door that was opening, but only partway. For us all to pass through that door together, we have to open it all the way, and that means that all the partners have to be hand in hand, elbow to elbow and firmly committed to one another. That, evidently, is not the case.

The Premier assured us before the federal election that this agreement was one of those things.... I'd like to quote: "It's going to be one of those things that we have to keep pushing and building the momentum to. That includes making sure the federal government, whoever leads it, finds the money for the commitment." That didn't happen.

We were assured that back-corridor politics, back-channel politics, would ensure the success and survival of the deal, but that didn't happen. Not only is the honour of the Crown at stake, but the future of the relationship with our first nations people.

In Cowichan we have the largest population living in one band in the province. Those people have waited proudly on the shores of my riding, waiting for a partner that has never arrived. They've heard the promises; they've seen their land privatized without their voice in the E&N land grant; they've seen the loss of their capacity in their communities. This was a brief flirting but hopeful opportunity. We cannot allow it to be an opportunity lost.

British Columbians celebrate cooperation; they celebrate positive efforts at resolving conflict and resolving the past. It's up to us to provide that to them. So I call on all the members to do whatever it takes to lobby the federal government to live up to its commitment.

I call on the Premier to go to Ottawa to tell Stephen Harper that it's not good enough to step back from a commitment to people who have been betrayed so many times. We are lucky, as a people, that our aboriginal people are still prepared to sit at a table with us and discuss these issues. I can't think of another place on this earth where that could happen after what they have lived through. And yet still they have the goodwill and the capacity to sit with us at a table. And yet still they appear to have been betrayed. That is a tragedy, and it can't stand.

I'm sure this side of the House is committed to seeing this through. I hope that the Premier, although he didn't indicate so in his speech today, will go to Ottawa and lobby hard for the federal government to live up to its obligation, because that's what's necessary here to rebuild that trust and to grasp that straw that's been offered by our first nations friends. We owe it to them, we owe it to ourselves, and we owe it to our children.

**C. Evans:** In the interests of time I'm going to try to do this real quickly. Quite a few people want to talk, and we're running out of time.

#### Introductions by Members

**C. Evans:** Firstly, I would like to introduce a couple of my dear friends. Bob and Anne Collins came here; they're farmers in Port Alberni. They were supposed to visit me at five o'clock. Bob and Anne and everybody at home, I think, could be forgiven if it is difficult for them to understand what's going on here.

[1745]

#### Debate Continued

**C. Evans:** We're all speaking sort of quietly about an event which is difficult to fathom, so in their interest and for anybody watching, the gist of it is this. The various governments in Canada.... If we have anything to live down with first nations people of this country, it's the notion that governments lie or make treaties or deals and don't keep our word. We were making great progress here in British Columbia and, I think, in Canada in that direction five months ago. We made an agreement that said there would be an investment in capacity-building and first nations housing, health and education to get us to the place where we were operating as cultures of equals. Then we had an election, and a new government took office. Two days ago they brought in a budget, and they abrogated the deal.

Governments of Canada are covered with humiliation, because we're going back to the days where people outside the room look at us and say: "You can't

keep your word." I think this matters hugely in British Columbia — the only province in Canada that in the main never signed treaties. With the exception of the Douglas treaty, Treaty 8 and the Nisga'a treaty, in the main the people that live in this province do not know who owns the land because we didn't get to the place of signing treaties.

You can get people to sign treaties if you make war, regardless of the difference in power between the various parties. But if you try to make treaties at peace, you have to make treaties between equals. You can't make treaties between equals when one culture is dominant over the other. So it matters in British Columbia that we build the capacity and bring peoples together more than anywhere else in Canada.

The agreement that said we would resolve the differences in cultures didn't get settled in Ottawa or the big smoke of Toronto. It didn't happen in Manitoba or Saskatchewan. It got settled in Kelowna. Why is that? Because it matters in British Columbia more than anywhere else. This province needs treaties, and to make treaties, we need to bring the cultures more in line.

We on this side of the House are social democrats. Social democrats don't believe in equality of outcome; we believe in equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity is insulted in this province because of the treatment of first nations people.

I take the job of opposing the government really seriously. I am honoured that people pay me wages to oppose the folks on the other side. I consider it a really good day if something that I do or my colleagues do tears down something they do. That's how democracy works. But this day I'm honoured to support the people in the government.

I saw my team give a standing ovation to the Premier of the province. Now, I never thought I'd do that in my life. This is not something that happens on a regular basis. I am going to go home and explain that I gave a standing ovation to the Premier because I agreed with him.

Then I saw the folks over there give a standing ovation to my House Leader for bringing in a motion that said we all oppose the colonial deed that Ottawa just did to squash down British Columbia again. We don't care if we're Liberals or New Democrats. We stand up for British Columbia, which has been insulted by this deal. In our province we made a deal, which is now made to look like a lie, and we don't lie.

I would work to oppose that government until I'm too old to work here. But when some bigger powers in a colonial town with pointy buildings that think they're kings living in a castle in Ottawa decide to shove down our throats their power to make liars out of us, we stand together, and we say we will live in a country of democracy, not in a colonial nation where Ottawa runs our lives, and we will create equality between provinces, between levels of government and between provinces and first nations governments.

We all need that. We cannot generate wealth and benefit from wealth that we earn because somebody's below us or our own freedom is robbed because it ac-

cepts somebody above us. I ain't gonna do that. So I support those folks over there supporting these folks over here to fight Ottawa until Ottawa realizes that its arrogance is not acceptable in Canada.

We are honourable people. We keep our word. We'll start saying it right here. Tomorrow I'm gonna oppose you all I can, but today — right on. Let's do it together, because we've got to fight the man who thinks he's smarter than the rest of us.

[1750]

**G. Hogg:** Much comment has been made with respect to the honour that we have to hold as individuals, as a province and as a country, and I think that's all true. But more importantly, I think this is about the future of a civil society, about social justice and about a responsibility for each of us.

Individually, if I can be anecdotal for a moment, I have a very personal commitment to this as a former foster parent of an aboriginal boy; as a student who graduated from Semiahmoo high school and was very proud to have the very first aboriginal president of the student council at the school I graduated from; as someone who spent a lot of time on the Semiahmoo First Nation reserve, as I was growing up, and still number them amongst my very best friends. I think that when members from the opposite side have talked about that honour as an individual, it is really an important part of a visceral, emotional connectedness that happens in terms of the decision-making that must go on.

The aboriginal people of this province have done things that haven't been achieved in any other province in Canada. We've seen the off-reserve, the Métis, and the on-reserve aboriginal people come together in a way that hasn't happened in any other province in Canada. They've come together in a way to say: "We need to work for, support and be a part of what's happening for the future of our children." That means across the full spectrum of services and opportunities that exist.

Because they've been able to do that and because it has been so well documented — the problems that we have.... Despite having the lowest number of aboriginal youth incarcerated in Canada as a rate in B.C., they're still 6.6 times more likely to be incarcerated than a non-aboriginal. We've seen reductions in actual numbers and reductions in rates, but it has still become problematic for us. The litany goes on and on with respect to the issues.

I think we as a provincial government.... The federal government is way better at this than we are. They're really good at tearing communities apart. The federal government and us put out funding, and we say: "Here's what we're going to fund this year. Which are we going to fund next year?" And aboriginal communities never get a chance to say: "Here's what we want to do. Here's our social program. Here's what we want to develop, and here's our future." Instead, they're consistently being responded to and pulled apart by the federal government and, to some degree, by the provincial government as well.

Yet they've been coming together in an unprecedented way to say: "This is what our future should be. Here's what we want to do." We have to provide that opportunity. I thought, in a way, that for the first time we as governments — federal and provincial governments — were coming together — that the aboriginal communities have been leaders to show that we can do that. I think the Kelowna agreement really solidified that notion, that vision, that ability for us to talk proudly about what our future can be as a country.

I wholly support the notion that we must do that. If our future is going to be that of a civil society, that of a society built upon the notions of social justice, then we have to make these changes, because we haven't been able to do it with just relationships, and we haven't been able to do it just within the context of our province. We have to be able to be coordinated with the aboriginal community in a way that we thought we were moving to — the way that the Kelowna agreement was going to lead us.

Therefore, I wholly support the notion put forward by the opposition in our efforts to provide a better country for all of us, where we have equal opportunity for the growth and opportunities that exist here.

**S. Simpson:** I just want to briefly add my voice to the comments of the many members here on both sides of this House.

The Kelowna accord was a remarkable agreement. It was, as the Government House Leader said, a remarkable agreement that brought together the ten provinces, the territories, the federal government and the first nations people in a way that we have not seen in this country. We found the unanimity around that voice in Kelowna. I believe we found that because everybody from governments across this country realized the inequalities that our first nations people face and realized the challenge and obligation we all have to step up and begin to provide the tools and opportunities for first nations to be able to deal with those issues.

As the Government House Leader said, we do have a question of the honour of the Crown. We've seen a breach of trust here in the decision of the federal government to not honour this agreement — an agreement that was built by a true partnership. This clearly is a disappointment to first nations, to provincial governments and to the territories. It's a disappointment that leaves first nations with questions, many questions but not very many answers.

I want to say that I'm pleased and proud that we are standing together here in solidarity on both sides of this Legislature today. I expect it will be a unanimous decision. I'm very hopeful and expectant of that.

[1755]

I do want to thank the Premier for his comments earlier on today, when he spoke of this. I think he made a very impassioned presentation as the leader of this province.

I look forward to us taking that position and to supporting the Premier and the government as they strongly represent British Columbia and this Legislature as we take our voice back to Ottawa and tell Ottawa that this isn't good enough. They have a responsibility. They have the honour of the Crown. They have to stand up. They have to honour this agreement that was made and move forward and create those opportunities that we all know need to be there for our first nations.

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

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Mr. Speaker, I wish all members, when we get to it, a good weekend and move the House do now adjourn.

Hon. M. de Jong moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

**Mr. Speaker:** This House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. Monday.

The House adjourned at 5:57 p.m.

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## PROCEEDINGS IN THE DOUGLAS FIR ROOM

### Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF FORESTS  
AND RANGE AND MINISTER  
RESPONSIBLE FOR HOUSING  
*(continued)*

The House in Committee of Supply (Section A); R. Cantelon in the chair.

The committee met at 3:21 p.m.

On Vote 32: ministry operations, \$473,203,000 *(continued)*.

**D. Routley:** I will be taking leave to attend debate in the other House, and my colleague will resume the questioning in estimates debate.

**M. Karagianis:** I would like to ask the minister, first, if he can perhaps give us an overview of his views on the current issue around the home warranty insurance.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** The home warranty is a third-party provider through four insurers: St. Paul Guarantee, Lombard, Royal and Sun Alliance. Royal and Sun Alliance also have brokers in National and Willis.

**M. Karagianis:** At this point the minister is aware of the current bankruptcy issue around one of the insurance carriers. Is he?

[1525]

**Hon. R. Coleman:** That, I believe, would be Residential Warranty, which was a broker, not an insurer. They were ordered to cease business in British Columbia by the Insurance Council. Subsequently they went bankrupt. The policies, though, are still held by the main insurer.

**M. Karagianis:** I'm not sure if the minister is aware of the litigation in this that has currently tied up literally millions of dollars of homebuilders' and contractors' fees. I think, at this point, that I would like to know whether the minister sees that there's some responsibility by this government in protecting these homebuilders and contractors.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Insurance is a third-party operation, so it's not government. They underwrite the deal through a broker. The broker has subsequently got into financial trouble because they were made to cease business. Now there's a legal process undergoing. The trustee in bankruptcy will make the determination on the division of the assets of the broker, which is the company that went broke. We have no involvement in that.

**M. Karagianis:** I'll speak on behalf of one of my constituents specifically on this, but I do know that this involves citizens all over British Columbia. I have a constituent who's a homebuilder who was required under the residential warranty regulations or legislation — I'm not sure whether it's policy or whether it's legislation — to guarantee a \$10,000 fee that was to be held by the residential warranty office and returned to him two years after completion of his project. The insurer has now gone into bankruptcy, and the office has been closed.

My constituent has got \$10,000 that's now being held by Deloitte and Touche, which is handling the bankruptcy. Deloitte and Touche have taken it upon themselves to hold back a percentage of that \$10,000 fee as part of their fee structure or their earnings on the bankruptcy, and now my constituent is being forced to join either a class action suit or personal litigation in order to try and reclaim his money.

This is actually occurring with builders all across the province. I've seen evidence of the numbers of dollars tied up in this and the numbers of individual companies or homebuilders that are thinking about launching a class action suit. My constituent argues, I think very logically, that when a \$10,000 bond is required for a home warranty, that money should sit in an account and remain untouched until the two-year expiry date on his warranty coverage as the builder and then be returned to him. He did understand at the time that certainly that \$10,000 would have no interest accrued, but he fully expected that the \$10,000 was sitting

somewhere in a protected account. That was his understanding of the whole program.

[1530]

He is — as I'm sure you can understand, as I'm sure everyone here can understand — considerably disenchanted with the fact that a bankruptcy that occurred completely beyond his control has now tied up his money, part of which is now being used to pay fees of a bankruptcy overseer. He and all the other builders — some major contractors, some individual homebuilders like himself — have literally got millions of dollars tied up.

His question to me and, consequently, mine through to the minister is: where is government responsible in any way, or what kind of oversight can government provide? In fact, what kind of advocacy is government able to provide? It is our requirement, I understand, that this residential warranty fee be secured before builders get permission to go ahead. They're required by our policies or legislation.... I'd appreciate if the minister can qualify exactly whether it's legislated or policy. I'm here to ask what role government takes in the responsibility for this course of events.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** I'll try and help the member out. First of all, I don't have responsibility for the bankruptcy legislation, so I don't have that in front of me.

I've been on the other end of a bankruptcy in business before, where I didn't get all my money back and I saw how the trustee was doing. They do get fees. There's no doubt about that, but the law allows that.

On the other, we don't require the \$10,000 deposit; the insurance company does. What happens is that the insurance company is basically underwriting a risk. They decide what the policy amount is, what the risk is by applicant, just like any other insurance transaction. So we're not involved in the case. We're not involved in the bankruptcy.

Warranty providers can extract security from builders, and the ability to recover depends on the paperwork that it has in place. So if your constituent has a paper trail — and some businesses evidently don't have that good a paper trail on this file, which surprises me, but it never ceases to surprise me how some businesses do business — they have to apply to the trustee to get back whatever portion of the money is available when the trustee deals with it.

I don't know anything about a class action suit. Anytime I dealt with a bankruptcy, either for a client or for my own business, I always dealt with the trustee. I didn't have to go to some class action suit, so I don't know what the class action suit would be about, and it would be unfair for me to comment on it anyway.

I understand the insurance company is tightening up the rules about deposit. The Insurance Council is doing that. I don't know if that's going to be recommended back to us in legislation or not. Basically, we have a bankruptcy situation here that happens in a commercial enterprise between commercial parties, and we're not party to it.

**M. Karagianis:** Is it possible for government to see a role in advocating on behalf of these builders across the province, because this certainly is not a matter of a constituent here or there across B.C.? This is builders everywhere. Anybody who's building right now is required to go through this process and to put moneys into these bonds. We're talking about literally millions of dollars now tied up in this current lawsuit. I'm sure that impact has got to be coming back on other MLAs. There have to be some complaints being lodged with government around how these people are protected from this situation.

I realize that the bankruptcy legislation.... The minister has mentioned that before, but I would think that there must be some responsibility we have here around protecting this kind of consumer bankruptcy result. You know, the fact that we've got all of these contractors now with millions of dollars tied up because of....

[1535]

Whose requirement is it, then, that the residential warranty is put in place? If it's just the insurers, then why would these contractors be voluntarily going to a group of insurers? Is there no requirement anywhere within government for this action? I'd like to know whose requirement it is, at this point, to have this warranty in place.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** It's the Homeowner Protection Act, which requires the warranty because of the leaky-condo crisis back many years. The program was put in place a number of years ago, even before this government came in. It was the right move, in my opinion, to strengthen the warranty. We had a home warranty for many years. It continues to be, but what we have in this case is a company that was in the business, licensed, which is governed by a licensing protocol. That is the Insurance Council of B.C., which has the ability to make and enforce the rules.

It's a commercial venture where I have a requirement to have a certain type of insurance in place, so I go to an insurance company and buy the insurance. That's what happens in this case. It's no different than if I were to buy car insurance from Canadian Direct. If Canadian Direct went bankrupt and I lost six months of my insurance, I would have to go claim it from the trustee if I was no longer insured. Not that Canadian Direct is going to go bankrupt, but the broker in this case has.

It has happened in the past, but it is not government's role to go in and advocate in a bankruptcy. There are operating requirements in all kinds of aspects in business in B.C. For instance, real estate agents have to have errors and omissions insurance. They have to carry that insurance. They place that insurance with a third-party provider. If that provider ever got into financial difficulty, it would reflect back on an action from those people.

There are all kinds of aspects, but what we have, clear and simple, is a commercial bankruptcy, not an insurance. It's not the responsibility of the government to go in and advocate with regard to how that bank-

ruptcy would be managed — not at all. That's what the courts are for. That's what the Bankruptcy Act is. That's why there's a trustee. That's why, if someone wants to sue somebody, they have access to the courts. It's not government.

Just because an operation of government requires a certain type of insurance for you to get a licence to build — because that was the whole aspect that came out from many reports way back in the late 1990s — that doesn't mean it's our responsibility to run the insurance business.

It's our responsibility to say you need to be insured. The Insurance Council and the other folks decide what that insurance is, and the insurance company gets to make the choice of how much insurance you are.... If you're a high-risk builder or if you're a company that's had a lot of claims, chances are they going to want a bond or some additional premium to cover their risk.

If you're a low-risk builder, chances are you'll pay a lower premium, just like you do for car insurance. This is not our responsibility to either enjoin ourselves in a bankruptcy or participate in this. The Insurance Council deals with the enforcement of the rules. The Financial Institutions Act takes care of the financial side, which is with the Ministry of Finance. The laws that govern bankruptcy allow for the trustee and all that to take place. But we're not advocating for anybody on this, because it's not our role.

**M. Karagianis:** I appreciate the minister laying out very succinctly how this insurance works. I do realize that the whole purpose behind this was as a response to the leaky-condo situation and that the HPO was formed basically to find ways to ensure against liabilities coming out of that.

My concern here is that at this point, the bond that the homebuilders and other contractors are giving to these insurance companies seems not to be secured. The fact that the money is now tied up in bankruptcy or that the bankruptcy trustee can take a percentage of that would seem to me to be something that the government and the Homeowner Protection Office may wish to actually have an opinion on and perhaps have some requirement on.

[1540]

It seems to me that all of these contractors then could be subject to any kind of changing situations with insurance companies. You know, insurance companies get bought and sold and change names and morph into other things every day of the week. If, in fact, government is requiring these warranties as a result of leaky condos, then is there not the possibility that government can dictate that that money is secured and can be protected from this kind of bankruptcy and trustee takeover?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** I'm going to try and shorten this up, simply because this has nothing to do with the estimates of this ministry. The main thing the member should understand: an insurance program is to protect the consumer. In this situation all the consumers are

still insured. The parent insurance company, which is the main company, is standing behind the policies that were issued to insure the homes, the homeowner. The gap that the member is talking about is money that is on deposit with the broker by the person that's bought the premium for the home, for the homeowner. That's in bankruptcy.

The Insurance Council is looking at tightening up some rules around this, as I understand it, as a result of this. The only way anybody's getting any money back that has money in that transition area where the broker has the money and the insurance, the policy — they're holding a deposit of some kind — is that they're going to go through the bankruptcy proceedings. That's a commercial transaction.

The actual side of it... Brokers may change hands, but major insurance companies — like Sun and Royal and Guaranty and those — have been around forever, it seems. They're the underwriter that writes the insurance policy. The broker actually sells a policy to the consumer in this case, which is the homeowner. The broker sells it to the builder, who then passes the policy on to the homeowner. It is really not a function of this ministry to be involved in that commercial operation.

**M. Karagianis:** I appreciate the fact that the minister clearly has no responsibility over the insurance and that he has stated that this is not anything that should be discussed here in estimates, but the minister is responsible for the Homeowner Protection Office. It is my understanding that that is part of the responsibilities here. So I would say, on behalf of my constituent and all those others currently caught up in this bankruptcy litigation, that I would hope that the Homeowner Protection Office and government, as the overseer of that, would find a way to secure the money so that it is not lost. I mean, the minister himself commented on the unpleasanties he has experienced by how trustees can... A lot of money can stick to trustees' fingers along the way.

I would just say that I think that part of the homeowner protection responsibilities is to ensure that even the homebuilders and contractors who are having to put forward these warranties are somehow protected. Perhaps the minister could just agree that it's something they may look into or explore, because I think consumers throughout British Columbia need this kind of protection.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** No, it isn't something we're going to explore. We're not going to create the ICBC of homeowner insurance. We're not doing that. It's just not going to happen. We have insurance. We have bankruptcy.

The Bankruptcy Act specifies the order in which proceeds are distributed to those that are owed. There are secured and unsecured creditors when a commercial transaction takes place. The homeowner in this situation is still insured, so the consumer hasn't been hurt by this; it's the person that purchased it through the broker. That is a commercial transaction.

They made the choice. The company could have gone to that company or any one of six or seven other companies to buy their insurance. They made the choice based on that. They either made it on price or whatever the case may be, but the reality is that they bought something. They paid for it. The company went broke. There's a Bankruptcy Act that takes care of that as far as what can be distributed back.

The professional insurance people in B.C., through their act, are looking at tightening... The Insurance Council, which is the disciplinary and sort of regulatory body that oversees this, is looking at this situation to tighten rules for the future, as I understand it — rules about deposits — which is their role to do. But we're not getting in.

[1545]

The Homeowner Protection Office is there to license builders, to help us see how we can build buildings better, to help us see how we can manage the building in British Columbia. It's not an insurance agency, and it's not about to become one. Even when this was done under the previous government, the recommendation was not to bring the insurance inside the house but to let the marketplace deliver the insurance and have third-party insurers so that there would be competition for that insurance, so that people could make their choices where they bought it.

What we have here is a bankruptcy of a broker, as I understand it, which is really a commercial situation between buyers and sellers. We have legislation and legal processes that are followed by law when those things happen, and that's going through the courts now.

**The Chair:** Member, I'm just going to say, if I may, that this is a debate on the estimates, and while there's a wide latitude, if we could move on to another topic.

**M. Karagianis:** Absolutely.

I only have one short additional question here. Does the minister not see that, in fact, contractors and homebuilders, after this kind of experience, will be adding these costs onto the costs of building homes and selling homes? I know that the homebuilders I've talked to, had they known that they would be losing that \$10,000 deposit, would have added that onto the price of the sale of that home when they sold it.

That is now going to be passed on to the consumer. Contractors may be leery, given this particular case, of not adding that warranty cost onto every single home they sell. Is the minister concerned in any way about that?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Actually, they already add the premium onto the purchase price, as it is. It's only the deposit, depending on the risk management of the insurance company, that's at risk. They already get it back. They already put that in the price, at least the insurance premium part of it.

I just hope that in the future... We have caveat emptor, buyer beware, on where you're placing your



insurance. We're going to have the Insurance Council tighten up some rules, as I understand it, which is important. We can always get better at it, and that's what we'll make sure our regulatory bodies do.

**D. Routley:** I'd like to move on to the issue of homelessness, if that is okay, and ask the minister if he accepts as accurate the numbers that we see in homeless counts throughout the province, where we see a doubling amongst the homeless, a tripling amongst the seniors who are homeless and a highly disproportionate representation of aboriginal peoples in those numbers.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We accept the fact that homelessness is up in all of those categories that the member has described.

**D. Routley:** Nearly 60 percent of aboriginal people in Canada now live in urban areas, and aboriginal people do continue to make up a highly disproportionate number amongst our homeless. Is the government prepared to direct resources to existing aboriginal organizations managing housing, including the Lu'ma organization, which currently, with its partners, manages over 60 percent of the aboriginal social housing stock in B.C. in terms of urban aboriginal people?

[1550]

**Hon. R. Coleman:** As a matter of fact, we're waiting for this devolution of CMHC stock to take place, as the member is probably aware. It's only been in negotiation with the federal government for eight and a half years, I think it is, through three or four different governments. Within that, there's actually a large amount of first nations stock, off- and on-reserve stock, which we believe an organization like that should be managing. We are working with them to.... As we come through, we'll look to how we can do that.

As the member is aware, there were also additional funds in the federal budget yesterday for first nations housing. We don't know how they're going to apply that yet. We have a sense that it's about \$50 million over three years, but whether it's going to go directly to first nations or come to the province for us to work with a group like that or not, we're not sure yet. Certainly, our preference would be that we would be in a position to flow it through to an organization like that to set the priorities for that community and to run that housing on behalf of that community.

**D. Routley:** This is a complex issue, and developing different strategies is important. How will the minister involve first nations in the decision-making process around that funding? And will first nations people have input into the housing strategy that the minister has announced repeatedly?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We were the first government in Canada, in July of 2004, to transfer the portfolio administration of 189 aboriginal social housing units to

AHMA. An interim transfer agreement was formally signed in October 2004. AHMA represents 15 aboriginal housing associations in B.C. B.C. Housing currently disburses annual operating subsidies to them of approximately \$2.4 million a year.

Should the devolution agreement be completed between the provincial and federal governments, the portfolio management for off-reserve urban native and rural native aboriginal housing would also be transferred to AHMA. That's 2,500 additional units.

We don't believe, hon. member, that we should involve them in talking to us about housing. We believe we should give them the ownership and the management so they can do it. We will actually transfer those units with titles to those groups so that they can make their own decisions on their management and operation. I don't believe they need to have us tell them how, because they've already proven in a track record that they can do it.

**D. Routley:** I would agree with the statement that the minister just made, but in fact, urban aboriginal housing organizations do not receive funding on a proportionate level to other service groups for non-aboriginals. I also believe that urban governance for aboriginal people needs to be controlled by aboriginal people. If that is what I heard from the minister, then he and I agree.

My question would be: would the government commit to fund the capital construction, the operating costs and the enhancement of organizational capacity for a barrier-free emergency shelter directly to an aboriginal non-profit organization?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We're already doing that. We're already looking at it. We have a comprehensive review underway right now with regards to that — and with the disproportionate mix. I will be receiving recommendations from that work in early fall, and then we will sit down with first nations groups and begin to implement.

[1555]

**D. Routley:** Currently, there is not one emergency shelter in B.C. that is managed and operated by aboriginal peoples or, additionally, culturally appropriate for aboriginal peoples. What I have heard from these organizations — Lu'ma, AHMA and others — is that many first nations people will not enter a shelter that is not operated by aboriginal peoples. They feel uncomfortable, and they all roundly identify the need for aboriginal management of that system. So is the minister committing to transfer funds, resources and premises to urban aboriginal organizations?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We've already done one in the Prince George Native Friendship Centre, the Prince George AIDS shelter and 13 transitional housing units for first nations. We are aware of the issue. We're working with them on proposals.

The member asked if we would transfer facilities. We don't actually own the facilities, so we can't do that.

We find that most of our service providers and shelters are a lot of faith-based organizations like the Salvation Army and the Union Gospel Mission. Those types of folks are very much involved.

As we go through this review on emergency housing resources across the province, we're including in that review the need for individual housing of that kind, as well, for aboriginal people. We'll work through with first nations on that, because we do see it as something that we need to get to. We'd like to.... If we are actually in a position to have the devolution done and transfer that large portfolio, we probably might be able to find something in that portfolio that could be adapted as well. We're waiting for this thing to all come together, including this review of emergency shelters.

**D. Routley:** In my visit to the Prince George Friendship Centre, they expressed great frustration in dealing with the ministry in terms of ongoing funding. They have difficulty retaining staff, continuing programs. I think it's commendable, the job they do in delivering over 30 different social programs for the people they serve, including dental programs, but their continuation is put at risk and challenged absolutely every year.

Realizing that there needs to be accountability in the process but realizing, also, that stopping the 100-metre dash in the middle to ask the racers how well they're doing is not beneficial to the outcome of the race, perhaps the minister could commit to continued funding or core funding for services to aboriginal homeless people rather than one-year projects that need to be renewed, that cause the organizations to devote a large degree of their administrative capacities to funding proposal-writing each year — which, by the way, they call silly season.

[1600]

**Hon. R. Coleman:** I think we all have definitions of silly season.

That's why we've committed to this extensive review of emergency housing resources across the province, including the need for aboriginal housing, because we need to transform some things here. I mean, that's why we even have the Premier's Task Force on Homelessness. The challenge we face is this....

That's why my first comment to the new federal minister of housing is (a) that I would like to make sure that if you're doing something in housing in B.C., you don't do it unilaterally, but you do it with a bilateral agreement so that we know what the shared funding is and what the time frame and length of the funding is, because that in itself can issue challenges; and (b) that we'd like a commitment where it's not about just cutting the ribbon and saying: "Thank you very much. We put in the capital. We're gone."

The other challenge that happens, of course, as the member knows.... In housing we fund the shelter side, because that's the portfolio and that's what the mandate for the budget is for this portion of the ministry.

Then throughout government you've got the minister of employment and investment putting money into certain services within those, relative to the social assistance side of things. You've got Children and Families that are putting money into this thing.

[L. Mayencourt in the chair.]

I do think at times that maybe there's an awful lot of paperwork for non-profits. When I was Solicitor General, I made a number of changes on the grant program even for the direct access stuff, because it was almost cumbersome for these groups. At one time, under previous governments, if a non-profit raised money through gaming, every time they spent over a thousand dollars, they had to write and ask for permission to give it to a certain group or not. We put them all through this huge administrative process.

I think there's something to be said for government at some point in time.... I'll actually take this up with my colleagues, because it reminds me of a discussion I had with them earlier this year on how we streamline that application process for our non-profits so they can access, without having to go through a number of ministries, the services that funding is there for on a grant basis.

That seems to be the way a lot of this money flows, and that includes, on top of us, of course.... You've got the federal government, too, who have grants and operating grants and different processes that these guys go through. So I do think we put a bit — well, not a lot — of an administrative burden on some of these people.

I think, from our end, that we're pretty simplistic once we get into a project on our operating funding. It's put together. It's based on a certain type of budget. The budget is given annually to the society, and we fund it. But there is some argument that some of the other services the member mentions in some of these centres could be streamlined from a grant to an application process.

**D. Routley:** I'm pleased to hear the minister endorse the importance of projects that aren't ribbon-cutting projects. One of those is operated through Haven House: the Willow WAI project, which helps homeless women and women at risk of homelessness find ways to improve their employability and improve their circumstances.

I'm also pleased to hear the minister refer to a multiministry approach, particularly with the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance, because this program in particular, I think, is a great success: 19 of its 20 grads are still off the street and in housing. It gives flexible support, up to a thousand dollars per family, for moving expenses, settling old bills in order to move them on. In fact, the program has reconnected seven women with children that had been apprehended from them.

I think it's a great success, but it also is not one that has a ribbon that needs to be cut, and that tends to dis-

appear from the radar screens. I think they have a great concern over whether there is sustainability to their program and whether the ministry is prepared to make the multi-year commitment to make that program or keep that program a success. Is the minister prepared to make that commitment?

[1605]

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Actually, this Willow WAI project in Nanaimo is a very good project. It's what we call a SCPI project, which is supporting communities partnership initiative. The funding may be in jeopardy after SCPI funding expires next March. We're working with the group now to find them long-term funding. We have a year to do it. We're looking at the option of leasing versus purchase, and those types of things, to lower their cost, to work with them through this problem.

This is the classic example of how not to, from a federal perspective, enter partnerships on housing with provinces. This is the classic. It is a program where a minister and his ministry had this idea of community partners initiatives, came in and said, "We all announce this project" — because they applied. They say, "We've got funding here for a couple of years," and leave. Then we have a very successful, very good project in a community that's left in jeopardy after it gets up and running. That's not the relationship I want on housing with the federal government.

The previous minister and I actually had some rather pointed discussions with regards to that when I became the minister, because I don't believe that there should be that unilateral move in housing. It creates this situation. But we're working with this group and all the other groups on SCPI, looking for ways to get them long-term funding, and I think we'll be successful with that.

Certainly for us, as we move forward with the housing strategy, it's the reason we're going to be adaptable and why we're doing it. That Willow WAI project is on our radar screen, we're working with them, and we're going to find the solutions.

**D. Routley:** I agree. It is an excellent program. I'm pleased to hear that it is on the radar screen and is a priority. I'm sure they'll be glad to hear that as well.

Another concern I have would be with the Lookout shelter on the North Shore, which as of May 1, the other day, was set to become overnight-only. This is a minimal-barrier shelter, which accepts people who are clearly addicted and clearly intoxicated but provides a great service in keeping them off the street and out of the circumstances that cause them to abuse.

If this shelter is overnight-only, the clients they serve will be out on the street, and we will put community safety and community comfort at risk. Can the minister commit to finding funding to keep the Lookout shelter open 24 hours a day?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** This is another SCPI project — same thing as the one in Nanaimo where the feds came in and did something. SCPI funding, again, created this

problem. B.C. Housing is actually today paying the operating expenses of this particular project and working with them and the Coastal Health Authority to find long-term funding for them as well.

**D. Routley:** Three years ago the Vancouver homeless count found that approximately 15 percent of the people who they sampled, who filled out their survey, were receiving no income assistance. Almost two years later at the next count, that number had risen to over 50 percent. Then another count six months later showed that number at 75 percent — 75 percent of the people who they surveyed had no income support.

[1610]

Is the minister working with the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance to address the issue of barriers to income assistance and the effect that is having on our homeless population and the homeless shelters which he administers?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** I'm proud to tell the member that in this year's budget we specifically went after funding for outreach workers with regards to connecting them to housing and connecting them to assistance. We're spending \$1.2 million this year in the 2006 budget to put those folks out on the street to connect with the very people the member describes, help them do their application process, walk them through it and all the rest of it.

We saw that as an issue as we came through the task force stuff, and we've acted on it. Of course, we'll be tying in with MEL, the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance, because we will then work with their assistance workers to make sure those people get processed.

**D. Routley:** It's obvious that barriers to shelter don't help the problem, but shelters by themselves can't fix the problem. The problem is clearly a shortage of affordable housing. When the minister speaks of a continuum of housing, where is the continuum? Where are the transitional beds? How many transitional beds are there for people transitioning from shelter towards market rent, and where are they located?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** There are 533 new approved to date. There are 450 additional beds in Budget 2006. There's a 40-percent increase in shelter beds on top of that. They're located in places like Vancouver, Nanaimo, Surrey, Victoria, New Westminster, Prince George, Terrace and Fort St. John. We're continuing to add. We have put more units out there in the last few years than were put out there in the previous ten.

**D. Routley:** The minister is funding homeless outreach teams, which are meant to reconnect homeless people with the welfare system, while the income assistance or welfare system is apparently putting up barriers that have caused these people not to be able to access income assistance in the first place. One of those barriers is their requirement for two years' independ-

ence from their parents. Well, some people I have spoken to in shelters, who are 50 years old but have had a disrupted working life, can't provide the documentation to prove that they have been independent from their parents for two years and are denied assistance.

[1615]

Is the minister working with the Minister of Employment and Income Assistance to address these barriers and thereby address the draw on resources in the ministry of housing caused by having to accommodate in shelters people who should otherwise be able to be accommodated with income assistance and shelter assistance?

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Just for the information of members, to close the loop on the discussion that took place in the chamber. The Opposition House Leader and I have had the discussions we spoke of. I've advised the House that though I'm not convinced Standing Order 35 applies, we have agreed by consent that the discussion or debate around the motion presented by the Opposition House Leader would commence at ten to five or five to five in the chamber for conclusion at or prior to adjournment this evening.

Interjection.

**Hon. M. de Jong:** No. I am advised, for the information of members, that subject to the committee's wishes, this body may continue to perform its obviously engaging and insightful discussions.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** I wonder if the member could give me an example, if you have the exact example, of the 50-year-old person. If you could get me the information on the individual, I'd actually like to walk that through MEIA. I'd like to see how that actually happens, because that's the first I've heard that one.

Of course, it's not my ministry, but the objective of our outreach workers is to help these folks connect so they connect into where we can get them into some shelter assistance and connect into where we can get them on social assistance. The reason we've got the aid worker out there is because we want to be able to help them keep appointments and that sort of thing and follow through, because that's one of the challenges they have.

There are also some challenges, in many cases — everything from literacy skills to other types of skills — that are affecting their ability to actually access the system. That's why we're putting the \$1.2 million into the outreach workers. We think it's going to have good success.

In a pilot project in Vancouver it had very good success, so we know that it has the ability to work. Actually, the homeless outreach program reached about 150 homeless people and got them onto employment assistance and income and in housing in 24 hours in the pilot project in Vancouver the first time we hit the streets with it. I think it's a good project and a good plan, and we've got to continue to push to have it work.

**D. Routley:** In fact, the example came to me in a visit to the Prince George shelter — not the friendship centre, but the shelter in town. I'll try to provide the minister with a name, but I actually didn't get the name of the person.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Maybe I can just get the description straight, and then I can check it out with the minister. What we have is a 50-year-old homeless person in Prince George who is not being allowed to access social assistance because they can't prove that they've been independent of their parents for two years. Is that how I understood that?

**D. Routley:** Correct. The person failed the independence test and was denied coverage. I'll endeavour to bring a better description to you.

The homeless outreach teams — could the minister describe how they will carry out their work and how their success will be judged and how results will be measured by the ministry?

[1620]

**Hon. R. Coleman:** These workers will be out around the province working with community groups. They're actually going to work with the people who deliver on-the-street services to the homeless. It's going to be based on the very successful outreach program pilot project we did in Vancouver.

They will be in communities throughout the province, so they're going to be in major centres for the most part — Kelowna, Kamloops, Prince George, places like that — as well as the lower mainland and Vancouver Island. There will be a minimum of 12 workers out there, and their sole job will be to do this.

As we go through it, we're going to start to measure outcomes on this. What we'll do is measure how many people we actually find and can put into the system for assistance and how many we can get off the streets and out of the homelessness side. We're also going to try and measure their health outcomes so that we know that their health improves because of nutrition and getting them assistance, and because they have some income to buy food and what have you.

It's actually a very good initiative. We're ahead of the curve on most of the rest of the country on this, which I find is as usual with B.C. Housing Management Commission and with the housing department of this ministry and with government. I think we've got some pretty innovative thinkers.

We will watch. We will actually measure this program, and a year from now we'll probably be able to tell the member how many people are off the street, how many got improved health outcomes, how many we got into shelter, and the value of this investment in the homeless strategy.

**D. Routley:** Recently the level of competency for the mentally handicapped coming into shelters was reduced from an IQ of 70 to 65. I've heard from shelter operators that these people sometimes present well but

aren't able to function or be properly cared for in a shelter environment. What can the minister offer to those people?

[1625]

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We received the emergency shelter program in this ministry last fall. To date we've approved, as I said, 533 second-stage shelters plus an additional 450 in Budget 2006. Now, the critical part about that is what the member describes. We're trying to educate not just the public and not just communities on the issues in and around housing and homelessness; we're also educating government and people within government.

We're starting to connect more and more, and our intent is to continue with our health authorities to connect as we come through these to get the mental health assessments done, to be able to have the medical assistance for them, to be able to put them into housing appropriate for them. That's not ever been connected before. There's always this disjoint between housing and other aspects of society, and yet housing can actually be very much a health care issue. It can actually help people's health a great deal if you connect them to the appropriate services so that they can have that connection in that whole continuum of housing as it goes across the spectrum from homelessness through to shelter to where you own your own home.

All that in between, that whole continuum of housing, is very critical, and so is the continuum of services for those folks. So when they come into a shelter, the assessment — not just of IQ — is done. We move them into our assistance and our group homes in our mental health system, which is part of our continuum of housing so that we can move them from there into better outcomes as a strong plan to show that the whole continuum works very well.

**D. Routley:** That was pretty good.

Right across the province we see this doubling in homeless numbers, and we see an increasing gap between those who have wealth and those who don't, and this during a period of expansion of the economy. We're seeing benefits flow to some but flow away from others. This is represented in those numbers on the sidewalks in its most graphic form.

When we address the issue of homelessness, what do we call success? The ministry service plan measures its performance in homelessness by the number of nights that shelters are at full occupancy. Does the minister feel this is an adequate measurement of success in dealing with the issue of homelessness?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We inherited that measure. That was the only measurement we had, so we put it in the service plan. But we intend, as we come through the new 105, 133 units and the additional 450 in Budget '06, to add a number of measurements to that. We want to get to where we don't have repeat customers so much as we get people into more stable housing. We want to measure their health outcomes to see how they're do-

ing on the health outcomes. We want to be able to assist in looking for solutions for those people with multiple barriers and all of those sorts of things.

That's why, actually, when I became the minister — and of course, I'd done debates in opposition years ago as a critic — I was really pleased to be inheriting a pretty strong infrastructure from the standpoint of the innovation that comes from the people in this ministry, from the associate deputy minister and the CEO of B.C. Housing on down.

I was also very gratified to finish the first year of the Premier's Task Force on Homelessness at UBCM and then move it out to the regional things that are taking place now. The real critical part of this is not just the units and not just the measurement of the outcomes and the funds that we put into it. That's a very important part of it. But, as the member knows, it takes leadership. It takes leadership at a municipal level for people like the mayor of Nanaimo, Gary Korpan, to stand up and say we're going to fight through a public hearing, even though we've got the NIMBYs at the door, and we're going to actually build something in this community for people who we care about.

[1630]

We're going to take that leadership — the people like Walter Gray in Kelowna, who stood pat and said that we have to bring this issue to the forefront of discussion, and even the member himself in Duncan and the good work he's doing in his own community with regards to that whole homeless issue and the groups you brought together there. That's what it's going to take. We have to be able to not be afraid anymore to stand up and say that we have the issue.

You know what? I think one of the biggest aspects of the task force was that we actually said: "We're not going to sort of say: 'Oh, gee, we have an issue, and we'll sort of add something over here and see if we can keep it down and forget about it.'" We've actually put it out in the open and said: "You know what? We're going to work together for the solutions." Those solutions include better health outcomes for folks. They include better services for the people with multiple barriers. They include using certain types of housing stock better for people that are at risk. They include modernizing some stock for seniors to be able to age in place.

What it does is lead us through to a real discussion about housing and a real discussion about homelessness. I think we'll get momentum now through some of these communities. Kelowna has finally made the decision on where they're going to put their shelter — only took two and a half years. It seemed to go on forever. It was here and there, and every time they tried to do it, there was a big public hearing of people saying, "No, no, not in my back yard," or "Not there; it will affect my business," and all of that.

The whole aspect of the whole homeless strategy for B.C. can't just be the units. The units are important. What we're going to do with what we've done with our review and how we're going to add services in and measure the outcomes for health and all that is critically important, because these people need assistance

not just with shelter. They need assistance to be able to get assistance from employment and investment through our streetworkers who can go out there and do that. Then once they're there, they may need assistance with regards to hygiene or health outcomes or even food, their diet. All of these things, to me as the minister for housing, are real cost-saving drivers in our society.

In actual fact, I keep trying to engage Health more and more and say: "You know what? We can save you a lot of money if we do the housing piece right." The housing piece will actually take the pressure off the health care system for a number of these clients who end up in emergency rooms, etc.

The reason I bring up the member's involvement is because I think that's good leadership — what you're doing in your community with regards to raising the issue in your community and that sort of thing. I think we all have to do it.

This is a long answer to probably a short question, but I really think that, now that we've got the genie out of the bottle, we can't let it get away from us, and we have to continue to build a very strong continuum of support for our client base within the housing structure.

**D. Routley:** Thank you to the minister for acknowledging the work that the people in my community are doing to address the issue of homelessness. I'll have to defer credit from myself, because we are lucky in our positions to be able to focus public attention merely by pointing towards issues, and there are other people who do the real work of coping with problems, including the staff who are here today, who I respect greatly, and the people in the communities who come together to deal with the issues. My role is a diminished role, in actual fact.

With respect, I would encourage the minister to embrace those words and acknowledge.... The minister is right. British Columbia is coming together to acknowledge the issue, to acknowledge that the issue is real and that these people are indeed our neighbours, our brothers, our sisters, and that the only thing that separates us from these circumstances is a severe loss in our life or perhaps a head injury — who knows what?

But we need to do more than embrace that reality. We need to put the resources where they need to be to accommodate the needs of these people. The Lookout Emergency Aid Society reports an increase of 160 per cent in the number of turnaways from their downtown shelter in '02-03 compared with 2000 and 2001. That represents almost 5,000 turnaways in their two shelters. There just aren't enough spaces.

[1635]

I wonder if the minister can commit the adequate resources to fund the beds that are necessary, because that turnaway rate is echoed right across the province. I see, you know, in reading some quotes from the minister of First United Church on the downtown east side, Rev. Ruth Wright, who said:

For years if we had 15 people sleeping in the pews, we thought that we were really busy, but now 80 or 90 peo-

ple sleeping in the sanctuary is not uncommon at all, and more and more of them are not the kind of people we would see before.

Now we're seeing the unemployed looking for work — a lot of forestry people, for example, whose jobs don't exist anymore and who have lost their jobs to mechanization; people who have low-level paying jobs who can't afford rent in a city like Vancouver and are sleeping here while they try to get on their feet; people who come to Vancouver thinking there's lots of work, but can't get their tickets — and we're seeing more women.

Added to that, the church recorded a \$260,000 deficit and is predicting a similar deficit this year in trying to cope with this overflow of homelessness.

Can the minister commit to an increase in funding that would accommodate the numbers of turnaways that we see at shelters right around the province?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We have a network of shelter providers that work together to help ensure that if there isn't space in one location, for instance, they can be accommodated in others. We have committed record levels of funding for this particular issue in the last couple of years. There are more shelters in B.C. than ever before. There are more cold-wet weather beds in B.C. than ever before. There are more extreme-weather beds than there ever have been before.

That doesn't mean we're there yet. A review with our service providers across the province that's going on now will drive into our next budget cycle, going into the fall, with regard to additional beds and needs. We'll continue to work to make sure that this is an important part of the continuum of housing.

**D. Routley:** Amongst male participants in the homeless counts and clients of homeless shelters — in most of the counts and data that have been recorded and that I've seen — the male participants tended to be more chronic and to report more drug-related behaviour, whereas female participants in the surveys and shelter clients tend to come, I think, from what I've read, from troubled family circumstances.

Often the shelters aren't safe for women, and the shelter operators refer to numerous cases that they name one by one — everywhere that I've gone, and I'm sure the minister has encountered this — where women are being forced to make choices in order to have a roof over their head even for a night, and survival sex is a common resort that women are driven to choose over raw homelessness.

[1640]

I think it's a tragedy, and I'm sure the minister shares that opinion. I am sure from knowing him — as briefly as I have, but from the discussions we've had — that he would agree that that is an absolute tragedy. Is there any plan in the ministry to address shelter space specifically designed to meet the needs of women in the province?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We're aware of that, and I share the member's concern and, frankly, disgust that those circumstances occur. That's why today all these units

I've been talking about, all our new spaces, are designed with appropriate separation for security for women. That's the way we're designing them, going forward, because we've identified that as an issue, and we'll continue to make sure that those appropriate security measures are designed into our units.

**D. Routley:** As they say, acknowledging the problem is the first step to solving it, and the minister has acknowledged the problem. The minister has acknowledged the degree of the problem in terms of the numbers and the horrible circumstances that people are driven to in coping with these challenges, but the next step, I would suggest, is acknowledging one's own responsibility for a problem.

I think it's time for this government to acknowledge its role in these increasing numbers of homeless people. The disruptions to people's working lives, be it forest workers or others, disruptions in people's assistance and their access to assistance have greatly contributed to this increase in numbers. Is the minister working with other ministers and taking to his cabinet table the reality of the responsibility that the government holds for its acts, which have led to some of these people being dislocated?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Let's be clear about one thing as we go down this road. There have been more units developed and put in place in British Columbia for the homeless in the last five years than were put in under ten years of an NDP government. Let's be clear about that. The member has to also take some responsibility for the vacated 90s, where housing, homelessness and that didn't get the priority it did.

Now, the members.... I'm not going to get into a political discussion here, but I can tell you that if you've already raised substantially the numbers: 40 percent increase in shelter; emergency shelter program, 533 units approved, 450 new units in Budget 2006.... All of those things are part of the package, as is the Premier's Task Force on Homelessness, as is the fact that we've actually got communities engaged and looking at opportunities for partnerships — not just with us, but also with faith-based organizations and others — to create shelters in their communities and work with us on funding those things.

[1645]

I think it's a slippery slope to go down and try and blame everything on government. I think it's also a slippery slope to go down and say, "You're doing nothing about it," especially when the numbers actually tell another story.

They tell the story of the largest increase of investment in homelessness in B.C.'s history. They tell the story of the most beds being developed in B.C. in a five-year period, compared to the previous ten. It tells the story of a homeless strategy, including a Premier's Task Force on Homelessness that's engaged UBCM at a level never before engaged. It tells the story of communities today saying: "We want to work with governments and work with communities to take the leader-

ship to solve some of these problems and recognize them."

You know what? It will take everybody in cooperation to be successful. Even at that, we'll still have some challenges. I believe that we can get there. I believe that we can make a huge difference. That's why we're actually, for the first time, doing that level of review with regards to homelessness in B.C. so that we can build the plan going forward in the future.

I think that we're on the right track. There are a lot of things that are very good happening in this particular edge of the file, today, and will continue in the future.

**D. Routley:** I think that it tells a different story. I think that during the '90s the NDP government and the provincial government of Quebec were the only two governments that continued to build social housing, despite the absence of the federal government from a funding role. That is truly the way we will address homelessness.

In fact, the exploding numbers of homelessness in this province tell a story of failed policy — failed social policy from the government and a failed approach to housing, especially in the early days of this government where so many projects were cancelled. That's the story that it tells me.

I think that measuring success in dealing with homelessness as the number of new beds that we put in shelters is the dangerous and slippery slope — the dangerous dead-end street that we go down in debate. In fact, measuring success in homelessness ought to be an eradication of homelessness and a provision of housing.

I would suggest that the ministry would do better to measure its success with homelessness by a decrease in the appearance of homeless people at shelters, and that they would measure success in dealing with homelessness as a decrease in the number of emergency bed stays of homeless people.

To that end, is the ministry, in conjunction with the Health ministry, tracking the number of homeless people who present in emergency rooms, and also, minister, the number of homeless people who die in our emergency rooms?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** A provocative question which will not get a provocative answer. The reality, hon. member, is that homelessness has been an issue in British Columbia for some time. The reality is that in the 1990s people were moving out of British Columbia, not moving into British Columbia. Today we have population in-migration, not out-migration. You can't compare one generation to another. That's why I've been very careful to not try and go back in my discussions with regards to this.

You talked about them building social housing in the 1990s. What good did that do to an emergency shelter program when none were built? So you built some social housing. What did you do for the homeless at risk? What did you do for those people with multiple barriers? What did you do for mental illness?

Those were critical aspects of a housing continuum that weren't addressed and left a deficit on the landscape with regards to cutting ribbons and forgetting about people. That deficit was left on the landscape, and it wasn't just the policies of that government.

There were policies of previous governments, too, that had the inability to say: "Let's go have a homeless strategy. Let's actually bring together every municipality in B.C. and talk about this. Let's actually get some discussion going. Now can we find the solutions? Let's actually go get some realistic numbers as to what we need to do by doing a review of our emergency shelter program and our homeless strategy program and the numbers that we need."

[1650]

That's what we're doing. The comment that "just by providing some beds is like vacating the field" or whatever was intimated there — that it doesn't solve the homeless issue. You're right. But at the same time, while you're working for the long-term solutions, you've got to have some interim supply.

I go through the list. Does the member want to drive into Nanaimo and say to Nanaimo Youth Services Association, Columbian Centre and Nanaimo Affordable Housing Society that the 21 and the 24 hard-to-house beds they've been given are no good?

Does the member want to go into Victoria and talk to the people at Johnson Manor, the Victoria Cool Aid Society, the Medewiwin Apartments, Pacifica Housing Advisory Association, the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Victoria — that those hard-to-house units weren't any good?

Do you want to go into Kamloops and talk to the people with the John Howard Society at the Victory Inn, the NOW Place apartments in Kelowna? Do you want to go see the east Kootenays? They're all new, all completed, all added to — right? Not in the '90s. They've been added to.

Interjections.

**The Chair:** Members. The minister has the floor.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Frankly, Reid's Corner, Penticton and District Society for Community Living. One of the members from the Okanagan is here. I'll bet you he's happy it's there. I'll bet you the people that are being served there every day are happy that it's there. Same thing in Kelowna and the First Nations Friendship Centre in Vernon. Also, the Active Support Against Poverty housing society. That's in Prince George. All of those have been done. That's the stuff we've done in the last five years — and more.

Those are important pieces of a package to start to deal with the issues of homelessness, because the first thing you want to do is get them some shelter aid. Then you want to be able to assess them for their health needs and their other needs and get them into the system so we can give them the system of supports. Then maybe we can move them into a continuum of other forms of housing, where we add services into our

social housing packages, where we actually say to a housing society: "Can you give us ten beds for people that have some mental or physical disabilities that we can put some additional money and training in to help those folks that are hard to house." Then you can maybe move them into other areas of society and give them the quality of life they deserve.

It's not a simple little thing of saying that one thing fixes all. That's why you need a strategy to go across the continuum, and you better integrate it. You better integrate it from housing into mental health, addiction services, health care, dental care, hygiene — all of those things — in order to be successful, because if you don't, what you're going to end up doing is having a partial housing strategy and a partial housing idea. We're not going partial.

We're prepared to put those emergency shelter beds, the extra beds, in place so that we can pick up the slack there. As we do that, we want a continuum of opportunity for those people to be in the stream to do better than just having to be in a shelter on any individual night.

**D. Routley:** The minister asked me what I did for the homeless in those years. In fact, I didn't do much for them. I wasn't here. Those were different people. But they certainly, as far as I can remember, didn't cut people off income assistance the way this government has, didn't disrupt the lives of lower-income people to the point where we see an explosion in number amongst the working poor showing up at our shelters.

[The bells were rung.]

**The Chair:** Division has been called. We'll recess for 15 minutes.

The committee recessed from 4:54 p.m. to 5:07 p.m.

[A. Horning in the chair.]

On Vote 32 (*continued*).

**D. Routley:** I'd like to ask the minister a few questions about the leaky-condo crisis and what steps are being taken to assist those owners who are still struggling with the burden of repairing their units.

Interjection.

**D. Routley:** In that case, I would give the floor to my colleague and wait for the staff person.

**J. Kwan:** I'm going to ask some questions that relate to specific projects in my riding. First of all, I'm going to ask about Stamp's Place Residents Association, who's written a letter to B.C. Housing, and they have also copied me on the letter. I'd like to actually put the letter on the record, if I may.



Dear Sir:

The Stamp's Place Residents Association is requesting a meeting with you to address several issues and concerns that have arisen from a meeting called by Jody Puff, Stamp's property manager, on March 23, 2006.

In the meeting of March 23, 2006, the Stamp's Place Residents Association was informed that they would no longer be able to use a storage area that has been provided through a consultative process in agreement with BCHMC that spans several years and were further informed of changes to long-standing arrangements regarding tenant common space usage.

The Stamp's tenants association executive feel that the resulting March 24 order to give up storage space was not in keeping with the spirit of previous agreements and also feel that a commitment made to tenants regarding a consultative process has changed.

Since the inception of Stamp's Place Residents Association in 1984 there has always been an open partnership with all levels of B.C. Housing, and the tenants association has always been treated with respect. B.C. Housing Management Commission has worked with the tenants association to support and promote tenant involvement, social activities, safety and to reduce vandalism.

In 1996 several meetings occurred regarding the intended use of the 400 Campbell lounge. In 1997 an agreement was reached between the Stamp's Place Residents Association and B.C. Housing. In a letter dated January 27 from portfolio manager Steven Bibby that was addressed to Vi Smith, president of the residents association, Mr. Bibby reaffirmed the commitment from B.C. Housing that priority use of lounge space would be given to the resident association once the adult day care centre has vacated the lounge.

With the arrival of two new property managers within the same year — Ms. Sheila Folkman, February '97, and Ms. Diana Van De Camp, October '97 — both managers recognized priority lounge use for the association. A B.C. Housing letter dated November 23, 1998, from Sheila Folkman concluded: "The residents association will be consulted regarding matters which affect use of 400 Lounge."

[1710]

In the March 23, 2006 meeting, the Stamp's Place Residents Association was also informed that B.C. Housing is proposing to use this tenants lounge and bring in new sponsors and new programs. The residents association would expect that they would be part of that discussion. However, it has not been explained who these new groups will be serving.

The Stamp's Place Residents Association follows the tenant activity grant guideline closely, promoting activities only to tenants. An example is that the lounge is rented out free of charge to all tenants for birthday parties, weddings and family celebrations. The Stamp's Place Residents Association, in addition to several other program activities, has organized two annual summer events for adults and families: Family Day in 2004 and Berry Summer in 2005. Each event involves more than 120 tenants. These events are volunteer-intensive, with tenants coming forward to plan and lead and run the many activities.

In the summer of August 2005 B.C. Housing allocated the 400 Lounge to the Union Gospel Mission. The Stamp's Place Residents Association was not responsive toward this lounge use allocation. The residents association restricts its activity to tenant activities and ensures these activities are not political or religious in nature. The

Stamp's Place Residents Association must not rent the lounge out to external groups that promote other activities. The Stamp's Place Residents Association has always understood that new proposed lounge use and programs run by B.C. Housing would be done in consultation with the tenants association, a group that B.C. Housing has agreed to recognize as the valid and legal tenant group of Stamp's.

Further, the tenants association understood that activities operated from tenant common areas were to be ones that provide priority to tenant needs and interests. The residents association has always been supportive of new sponsors and programs as well. They have worked with groups like MOSAIC, the safety office and others to deliver special supports and programs to residents.

In the proposed meeting the Stamp's Place Residents Association is requesting clarification of the previous agreements and understandings. Specifically, we would ask: has the BCHMC policy and practice of working with and respecting tenant associations changed? If so, can we be provided with a copy of the new relationship and expectations? Has there been a change of priority use as what was built as tenant common space amenities?

Since storage was raised as part of the March 23, 2006 meeting agenda, the Stamp's Place Residents Association is also requesting an independent review of storage issues in the 400 building, not only for the Stamp's Place Residents Association storage of program equipment but for all the 400 building tenants.

In summary, the Stamp's Place Residents Association has laboured to create understandings and agreements that assist in our working relationship. We're very disturbed by the meeting of March 23, 2006; in particular, by the manner in which the meeting was conducted and concluded.

The Stamp's Place Residents Association desires that understandings and agreements that are negotiated not be subject to personality, individual bias of BCHMC staff or be at risk of unilateral cancellation each time a new property manager is assigned. We're, therefore, asking you to meet with our residents association and help us understand what is happening and to forge a better way to work out such issues.

It's signed by the president of the Stamp's Place Residents Association.

I wanted to put this letter on the record just so that the minister understands what I'm talking about and to also get the minister's response to the issue around whether or not BCHMC has changed its policy and its practice around tenancy associations when it comes to dealing with common space, and whether or not there are new expectations of the tenants in these arrangements. If the minister could respond to that, I would be very grateful.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** I don't have enough detail here to respond to the letter in its specifics, but my CEO has advised me that he will go and meet with this organization and sit down and try and work out their issues.

[1715]

**J. Kwan:** Thank you very much. I would appreciate it. What I'll also do is make a copy of this letter and make sure that the minister gets a copy of it. I would ask that BCHMC advise me of the progress and the end

result of this issue. I would certainly appreciate it for the meetings to take place and, hopefully, for the issues and the respect that is needed to be shown to the residents association to resolve the matter.

I think my colleague is going to ask about leaky-condo issues, and then I'll follow with some leaky co-op issues.

**D. Routley:** Before my colleague took the floor and before the staff had reassembled for this phase of the estimates, I asked some questions about what the government and the ministry were doing in order to help the owners of leaky condos who continue to struggle with the issues.

We see an increase in the average repair costs from somewhere under \$20,000 to an average that's over \$50,000 currently. We also see unsettling signs that consumers, during this increase in real estate activity, by a measure of three-quarters are choosing not to have their units inspected. That would obviously lead one to the assumption that there may be an increase in the size of the problem, the scope of the problem, and in the difficulty in addressing it, since it appears to be continuing.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** I'll give you sort of a broad scope here. We've done 14,000 loans, a total of \$550 million, since the program was put in place. Under the financial assistance, people can apply for a reconstruction loan — and there's no limit to the amount of that loan — and for a provincial sales tax relief grant. Under non-financial assistance, building envelope renovation regulations, repair contractor licensing and mandatory home warranty insurance are applicable on all repairs.

In the Notice to Mediate (Residential Construction) Regulation, any party to a residential construction dispute already filed in the Supreme Court can compel the other parties to a residential construction dispute to have a structured mediation session. HPO on-site evening strata meetings to explain financial assistance plans are available to any strata corporation that wants to have somebody come and explain the plan to them.

There's free information to assist in the repair progress. There's information for managing major repairs and options for resolving residential construction disputes, etc., that we provide, and that is available to strata corporations and those affected. The Homeowner Protection Office has ongoing research and education on building science and on best practices for residential construction and building envelope renovations.

You know, it's been around a long time, because I can remember talking about this in estimates from the other side of the House back as early as 1996, I guess it was.

**D. Routley:** I agree with the minister. There's no doubt that the problem pre-existed the current government. There is a huge difficulty in the province monitoring the issues, since municipalities are responsible for inspection. But the problem is here now, and it continues.

I wonder whether the minister is considering any compensation for owners of leaky condos, since many, many owners are terrifically burdened by the debt of the reconstruction loans and aren't able to qualify. Many don't qualify.

[1720]

The federal government partnered with the provincial government of Quebec to address the foundation issues in Quebec when many homeowners found the values of their homes undermined by poor construction methods. Is the ministry considering a compensation package in partnership with the federal government? Prime Minister Stephen Harper has indicated a willingness to consider a compensation package. Is the minister negotiating that?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We haven't had any indication from the federal government that they actually want to participate in anything. That may have been a statement made in a public debate or something somewhere — I don't know. There's been no interest that we've seen with regard to this over the last number of years from this government or the previous government that I know of.

No, we're not putting another program in place, in actual fact. You know, people can get a loan from us, and really the only criteria is to have less than \$10,000 in savings in the bank, so it's a pretty loose eligibility requirement to get a loan. One of the things that a lot of people felt back at the beginning of this thing is that if you could insure loans to let people get the repairs done early — it was one of the recommendations that wasn't implemented by the government of the time, and no criticism of that, it just wasn't — at a lower price, that the market and inflation would take care of the balance. That's actually proven to be true, as far as one of the recommendations that was made way back when they did the Barrett report and that sort of thing.

So, no, we don't anticipate doing any more than we're already doing. Our loan program will continue. It's available for people who are dealing with leaky condos. We have a different building envelope now, which is about five or six years old, so the buildings are being built with a different rain-screen and separation, and we should see some balance there. I'm told 90 percent of the units have recovered the value of the remediation. I actually live in a remediated building in Victoria now, that building had repairs, but the market is certainly taking care of that cost for that particular unit.

What we have to be is vigilant, going forward, that the repairs that are being done are now being warranted so there's insurance backing it up. We've improved the warranty and insurance program for new construction. We've improved our construction in the rain-screen technology that we use. I think we have to be smart going forward and vigilant with our building code and harmonization projects and things to make sure we have a way for new products so that when they do come into the system they match the climatic area they're coming into.

There were some real challenges with some of the products that were put on units. There were also problems.... I won't actually go into the whole description of what my opinion is of where all the problems were because they were cross-everybody. There was nobody in that era that didn't have some part of this problem.

The previous government and ours have continued this program, and that was probably the best initiative and leadership that was taken with regards to this. I think the second initiative has been the warranty on the new repairs and some standards put in place.

[1725]

**D. Routley:** My last question before passing off to my colleague will be: has the ministry or the office considered registering or naming principals in companies, versus companies only, when builders are licensed? The perception out there, whether it's real or not, is that people just merely fold up their tent and reopen another one under another number or another name and engage in the same practices that might have created issues in the first place. Has there been any consideration of registering and licensing the principals of companies?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** The companies are now required to identify a director nominee on their application. The most important aspect of this now, frankly, to me, is an improved insurance program, where you have a warranty of the different levels for years that are actually backed up by an insurance program and warranty.

I can tell you that the insurance companies don't like companies that disappear and come back. If the claims start coming back on them and they don't get to do business with them and they can't get insurance, they're not allowed to build. The biggest part of the way things are today is that the consumer is protected way better than they were in the early 1990s when this started to evolve, and that's only because the system wasn't geared to this type of situation.

**D. Routley:** I'll end my comments now by thanking the minister and say that I'm happy to end that discussion on a less controversial tone than sometimes occurs across the table.

Interjection.

**D. Routley:** I appreciate that. I would also want to thank the minister and B.C. Housing staff for their interest in my community in Duncan and for their investment in our temporary homeless shelter after the unfortunate death of a homeless person in a fire. The community responded and came together around that effort, and the minister and his staff have been very supportive. I'd like to acknowledge that and give them my personal thanks for that and my personal thanks for this opportunity to ask the questions I think needed to be asked but also to learn, on my behalf, from their experience — just basically to say thank you, and pass to my colleague.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Thanks to the member as well. Earlier the member gave credit to the people in his community with regards to what's happening on the homeless side in Duncan, but the member should know that in public life, even if we just show up and say we're supportive of something, we can make a huge difference.

You know what? In many cases that takes as much guts as anything else, because that's the leadership side, where you're actually sometimes rolling uphill, against the flow. People are always.... Especially the NIMBY thing. So I think you're to be congratulated for the leadership. I wouldn't, in your case, sort of demean your involvement. I think your involvement is a very big part of that.

**R. Fleming:** I want to ask the minister some questions that are fairly specific to Victoria just to start off with. Maybe the CEO wants to switch seats for a second. They're B.C. Housing-related.

Just maybe to start with some residential care, assisted-living projects that have been zoned and approved, as far as municipal government is concerned, for several years in my riding and are awaiting approval from the health authority and B.C. Housing. Before shovels get in the ground, I wonder if I could maybe ask the minister for an update over his three-year plan: whether there will likely be an approval at the Selkirk site and at the Gorge Road Hospital site in Victoria for mixed projects of residential care and assisted living.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** First, a quick comment and then a question to the member.

Both of those projects may have been submitted under the most recent proposal call. I don't know if he knows that. That's what we would like to know. If they were, then the answer is that the review is still ongoing, and the approvals haven't been done. We're not sure if they were submitted under that proposal call. If the member knows, then what we can do is let him know when the proposal call is going to be released as to what's been approved.

[1730]

**R. Fleming:** I think what has been approved — and this is sort of at the level of the rumour mill, because that's sometimes how you get information in the community — is the Carey Road site. I think the Baptist Housing Society has quite an advanced proposal there. Maybe I'll leave aside the Gorge Road Hospital question, because I think that one has been, in fairness, the least likely to be developed in the foreseeable future.

The one that has been zoned for several years — and this is a constituent of mine who owns this site and is interested, as part of a comprehensive development there, to just know and get a signal from government whether there is a chance that it will proceed — is the Selkirk Waterfront site. That's one that the Capital Region Housing Corp. has been advocating for, for many years, and it is zoned and approved and ready to go. He has held on to that site for many years and is basi-

cally saying: "Should I develop this commercially or another way, or does the government still wish to do a good thing and have affordable seniors housing there?"

**Hon. R. Coleman:** I think what we'll do for the member is we'll go check. It's not a case of whether the government is interested. We have our proposal call periods, where you can submit a proposal call with a design to say you want to do a project, and then it goes through our request-for-proposal process. If it gets approved, then we fund the project.

The one that we do know that is submitted in this proposal call is Carey Road. I don't know if these ones are actually submitted. If they haven't come into the process, if they haven't actually made a decision to submit, then they wouldn't be anywhere in the process unless we talk to them. So what we'll do is check that and get back to the member.

**R. Fleming:** Yeah, there have been a number of sort of start-stops, I think, of proposal calls that have in some cases been abandoned, so I don't know the current status either on my side.

I will move to a question on the Premier's homelessness task force. I'm just curious to know and non-profit housing providers in my community are curious to know: is there a situation where there's an open proposal call, or is there an upcoming proposal call? Is there a budget for the homeless populations now that these agencies can pursue and bring to the minister's attention from my community?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We've committed to 450 new units in 2006. We're engaged with a process with local governments and service providers that we'll be going through in the next couple of months. In some communities we may end up with a proposal call, or we may end up with existing service providers who have additional space that they want to develop, who need the funding and who we have a longstanding working relationship with. It'll go both ways.

The other thing is that our analysis isn't done, of course, because we don't know.... That's our commitment. When we see what the federal government's recent announcements on funding for housing are and what flexibility we have to use it — because sometimes there are enough strings attached to this stuff that it doesn't really meet the needs, and sometimes it's got enough flexibility that you can tie it into your existing program....

[1735]

We don't know whether we're going to have any additional stuff from them, but our commitment is to raise it by 450 new ones in 2006. We're going to engage at that local level through our task force and through our service providers. In some cases, we'll do some awards directly — because people may have something ready to go — or in some cases, we'll do a proposal call.

**R. Fleming:** I want to ask a specific question about another social housing property in my constituency:

Blanshard Court, or Evergreen Terrace as it's sometimes known. Are there active discussions or plans to redevelop all or part of that site in the near future?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** I guess the short answer is no. We've worked to improve the site with the tenant association and even had a renaming ceremony or something a year or two ago, so it's not in any primary development stuff for us right now. That can change obviously, as markets change and the needs change, but at this point in time there are no plans.

**R. Fleming:** Okay, thank you. I'll be sure to bring that to the mayor's attention. He seems to think there is active discussion underway.

I wanted to ask a question, just sort of a contemplative one, for the minister. One thing that Victoria has is a lot of above-store suites in its downtown. People, developers, community activists and municipal planners have been trying for years to utilize that space. They did a survey, and they found that there was something like 200,000 square feet of vacant available space in the downtown.

The problem always comes back to the cost of redevelopment. These are often heritage buildings in commercial districts. There are seismic and other building code issues that make it very expensive, and the private owners are discouraged from doing so. They can get some grants from CMHC — RRAP program grants. They can get municipal tax incentives — tax relief programs from the local government.

What you often hear said is that if the third partner — i.e., the provincial government — would come in, we could have perhaps 500 to 1,000 suites in the downtown of Victoria. These wouldn't all necessarily be affordable ones. They might be market rents, but there could be a mix of all of that to make downtown healthier. I know that's the same story in many communities across B.C.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We call that the existing buildings project. We're actually working with guidelines, particularly with Vancouver, which would be suitable and applicable, we think, to other jurisdictions across the province. As the member has articulated, there's oftentimes a huge amount of expense applied to renovations of buildings. It can be sprinkler systems, structural and all sorts of things.

We're actually working to establish some suitable guidelines that could be applicable. Vancouver is working with us on that now, I understand. We would be sharing that with the municipalities across the jurisdictions that are looking at these sorts of things. I would imagine, now that this has been said in estimates, we will hear from Victoria to sort of get an update on what the existing buildings project is. We'll provide them with information.

**R. Fleming:** Thank you for the answer. It's encouraging to hear that it's at least being contemplated.

I want to ask a question about the property transfer tax. It's now some \$800 million of revenue to the prov-

ince that sits in general revenue. It exceeds oil and gas, it exceeds mining, and it exceeds gaming in terms of its importance to the provincial treasury. Have there ever been any discussions in your ministry about trying to link in some way a percentage or some kind of benefit — linking it to housing programs or tying that revenue to expenditure in the area of housing?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** No, there hasn't, hon. Chair. It is Finance, and one thing I've learned as a minister is that I can get my budget. But even if I increase revenues, I never get the revenues. They all go to general revenue, which takes care of the priorities of government.

[1740]

There's been no discussion about that, and I don't think there has been one contemplated either. The challenge is that if you start to try and stream revenue streams, you can stream them away from priorities that need to be dealt with in other ministries.

The budgeting preparation process takes into account all revenues of government, and those revenues are then appropriately applied across government. The Minister of Finance and Treasury Board staff would probably not want me to be even contemplating that discussion, because they take that into general revenue. They're relatively protective of their revenues over there, actually.

**R. Fleming:** I'm certain they are. I think it's sort of a trend you see in other areas of government — you know, transportation linking with gas taxes and those kinds of things — with the federal government now devolving to the municipal government.

Just a different type of question, then — a straight-up one. This was left by the member for Powell River-Sunshine Coast, who is away from the House on other business today. He wanted to ask if the Minister Responsible for Housing is encouraging the Minister of Employment and Income Assistance to raise the shelter portion of income assistance to ensure that citizens on assistance are not reduced to using their food and clothing funds to pay for housing.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Not specifically, because that's actually a larger government caucus cabinet discussion. It's not something that we do — step into another ministry and do that. That's through the priority-setting through the budget process in the fall of each year.

**R. Fleming:** Sure. Nevertheless, average rents are now greatly exceeding the minimal allocation for shelter provided to income assistance recipients. Surely those discussions do happen in terms of that huge gap that has opened up. Is that not the case?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We actually canvassed this with the critic earlier. Yes. But that's part of a different strategy on housing with regards to looking at that gap and how we can move through some supplement programs to assist people who are paying certain percentages of

their income — over and above — for rent. That work is ongoing now. We're just identifying where the budgetary items will come from and finalizing the package so that we can roll it out and then move it forward. That part is definitely live in this ministry from that standpoint.

**R. Fleming:** I'll just ask a final question here before turning it over to another member who wishes to ask some questions, I think, about where he left off with the leaky buildings.

This one comes, again, from colleagues in Cariboo South and Vancouver-Fairview. It's about Hampton Court, which is an 11-member group home for the mentally ill.

It's slated to close in 2007, and the reasons given have varied to date from this ministry and the Ministry of Health on why the closure is scheduled to occur. First, they were told that residents weren't happy there and that they were surveyed. Then it was discovered that in fact there was no survey performed. The next reason given was that the facility wasn't modern enough, and then the third reason was that it was a budgetary decision.

I understand there are two persons to a room in this 30-year-old facility. The owner has offered to remodel the facility, yet closure is still scheduled for 2007. I know that apparently residents, quite understandably, are not happy about the prospect of being separated and moved. My question really is: why is this being allowed to proceed, especially given the shortage?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** If the member would provide us with the information he has, we'll look into it. It may not even be in this ministry. It's certainly not something that's familiar to the CEO of B.C. Housing. We'll go check it out for him and try and suss out his questions for him with the other ministry, if it is in Health. If it's with us, we'll get them from here.

[1745]

**J. Kwan:** A co-op in my riding called Paloma. I was just there on Sunday, actually, celebrating their 20th anniversary. Unfortunately, that co-op is a leaky co-op, and they're in quite a state. On one floor there was an incident where somebody actually put their foot through the floor because of the leaks around the co-op. They have actually managed to cobble up enough funds to do some temporary repairs for about a year. That's only temporary, just to hold the building together. Of course, they obviously need permanent repairs.

The problem with Paloma is that it is on city land. However, they receive subsidies from the federal government because it's a co-op, and it's a co-op program. But they're having great difficulties in actually getting the federal government to give them a second mortgage, if you will, so that they can actually do the repairs, because it is on city land. That's a big issue for this co-op, and there are others like it.

It's very detailed in terms of many of the issues associated with it. I wonder whether or not — just in

recognition of the time pressures that we have — the minister would perhaps give me a brief comment and also make a commitment to ensure that staff meet with people from Paloma to see whether or not, and how, the province could assist them in this regard.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** It would appear to me — and I've got the short history here — that this needs somebody to say to CMHC: "We need you to move on an approval."

One of my first questions was: is this a lease? If the lease isn't extended, then it may not be bankable. But the city has evidently agreed to extend the lease here to permit financing, so that should be the major hurdle.

This is administered by CMHC, and the issue of approval by CMHC is probably to ensure the loan. I think what we'll do is collect the information, and then we'll have a chat with CMHC and see if we can get the parties together, which is probably what needs to be done here. If we can do that, then maybe we can close that loop of what appears to be one group saying that they're not paying enough attention to the interest of maybe wanting to insure a loan. Then they can't get it financed, and so it's like that endless circle for people.

**J. Kwan:** I would appreciate that very much. The short version of the history is correct, because the city did actually extend their lease and so on. But it's just not getting the kind of resolution that I think it needs and should receive. I know that Paloma is not the only one. There are many other co-ops in that situation. If the minister could facilitate a meeting first with his staff and Paloma, and then later on facilitate a meeting with the federal side and advocate on behalf of Paloma, I would appreciate it very much.

On another leaky co-op problem I had actually written to the minister about back in November of 2005. The minister had responded back at that time, and he stated that he had asked the staff to gather more information on the issue and to possibly have a discussion with the then minister Joe Fontana at the next meeting. This is with regards to Rising Star co-op.

The cooperative there is having great difficulties, because they are losing the federal subsidies more and more over time. Part of the issue is that the federal government is saying to Rising Star that in order for them to maintain their subsidy, they have to give up their autonomy within the co-op and pretty well hand over the decisions around the co-op to the federal government.

Of course, the co-op board is not prepared to do that. The whole reason for the co-op and its board to exist is to ensure there is autonomy and democratic membership control. To give that up to the government in exchange for a subsidy was too much in terms of what the federal government was asking. Actually, the situation reached a bit of a crisis back in December where they lost about \$19,000 in subsidies. As a result of that, they lost a significant number of their subsidized housing units in that co-op, to the point where I think they only have nine now.

[1750]

It's really just very unfortunate. Obviously, we have this housing stock. I don't know why the federal government is doing this. We have an increase in homelessness, and the federal government is not helping make sure that this existing housing stock, which it was built for, continues to provide housing options for people.

I wonder whether or not the minister had the opportunity to meet with the then minister — now that there's been an election, maybe that doesn't matter anymore, because there is a new government — and whether or not the minister.... Maybe the minister can just update me in terms of what's going on with this.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** I'll talk to CMHC about this one too.

The challenge here, of course, is that CHMC has to start taking a more creative approach to co-ops — as to their stock — even if we do get the devolution done, which we thought we were going to get done before the change of government.

Of course, the member is familiar with that file because she was the minister at one time. We're still trying to devolve it. We've only been trying to do the devolution for.... I think we're at about eight and a half years now. We were hoping we'd have it done.

The co-ops won't be coming with that, but I think we have to raise these issues with the federal minister and with CMHC, actually, regionally. I think that would be more appropriate.

**J. Kwan:** I am noting the time, and I would appreciate the minister taking that up.

I'll also just copy these letters as well. They're old letters, and the minister probably has them in his file somewhere. But I know how it is sometimes. It's easier to have this stuff, and you don't have to sort of dig around for it. If the minister could advise me of any progress or even lack of progress with respect to this file and also advise what we can do to help put the pressure on the government to do the right thing here.

The last question that I have for the minister is this. I have in my riding a significant situation whereby a lot of constituents come around asking for assistance for affordable housing. We know the situation is such that there are 14,000 people on the wait-list. I'm sure that number is now actually bigger than that.

Oftentimes people come in a crisis situation. Some of them have been evicted from their current residence. Some of them are on the verge of being evicted. Some of them are living in such substandard housing that it really is very inappropriate. But we have no way of really doing anything, other than to write a letter to B.C. Housing to urge consideration, and it just gets on a list.

However, I do note that there is a priority set of considerations that B.C. Housing will make. In the interests of time, I wonder if the minister could just commit to asking his staff to provide me with that information so I can understand how the priority system

works and then how I could best assist my constituents as they come through the door.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Sure, we'll do that, and happy to. In addition to that, I think that some of those issues might even get addressed as we move through the housing strategy in the fall. There are some things we're going to try and do.

You've got one more?

**J. Kwan:** Actually, I do have one more.

This ties into the average wait or even the median wait. I actually phoned B.C. Housing just to find out how long a wait might be once someone gets on the list, so I can better advise my constituents. I was told that in the Vancouver area it's about 19 months. But a lot of constituents come, and they tell me.... In fact, today I just ran into another one who told me that she's been on the list since 2002 and still had not been able to get into a housing project in the area that she was interested in. Clearly, the wait is more than 19 months. Certainly, it's been my experience everywhere that I've come across.

I wonder if the minister can also commit to providing information to me around the median wait time, because that's a better reflection of what the average wait time is in terms of people who signed on.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We'll provide you with that, and we'll provide you with how we're handling trying to coordinate with the non-profits for their wait-lists as well, so that you could have that information.

[1755]

Vote 32: ministry operations, \$473,203,000 — approved.

Vote 49: Forest Practices Board, \$3,637,000 — approved.

Vote 33: direct fire, \$55,511,000 — approved.

Vote 34: housing and homelessness, \$209,702,000 — approved.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Hon. Chair, I move that the committee rise, report resolutions and completion of the Ministry of Forests and Range and Minister Responsible for Housing and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 5:57 p.m.





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Published by British Columbia Hansard Services, and printed under the authority of the Speaker by the Queen's Printer, Victoria. Rates: single issue, \$2.85; per calendar year, mailed daily, \$298. GST extra. Agent: Crown Publications Inc., 521 Fort St., Victoria, B.C. V8W 1E7. Telephone: (250) 386-4636. Fax: 386-0221.

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