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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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SECOND SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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Honourable Bill Barisoff

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THURSDAY, MAY 11, 2006

The House met at 10:02 a.m.

Prayers.

Introductions by Members

Hon. W. Oppal: In the gallery today is Alix Campbell, who is the director for judicial administration in the superior courts. She's had a remarkable career. She's worked in government, and she's managed to straighten out a number of different ministries over her career.

She was a great help to me when we did the Commission of Inquiry into Policing. She came in and straightened out the whole organization, and at the end of the day, the report, which is said to be the last word on policing in Canada, turned out to be a remarkable success. The success is largely attributable to Alix Campbell. Would the House please welcome her.

Orders of the Day

Hon. C. Richmond: I call committee on Bill 33.

Mr. Speaker: And in the small House?

Hon. C. Richmond: In Section A, in the small House, continued estimates debate on the Ministry of Health.

[1005]

Committee of the Whole House

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

The House in Committee of the Whole (Section B) on Bill 33; H. Bloy in the chair.

The committee met at 10:08 a.m.

On section 11 as amended (continued).

C. Wyse: It's my first opportunity to speak, and I would like to acknowledge to the Chair the wisdom being shown here with the general intent contained within Bill 33.

To begin my discussion with you, minister, the bill apparently starts off with a recognition that the teacher is the appropriate person to know the effect of change in a class with regards to the size and the composition that is contained in it. By that, I refer to the start-off, using consent of the teacher in certain grades before there is a change in the number of the class. Then, as we move on in the school system, there seems to be a change in the philosophy and it moves from consent to consult. That shows a marked change in direction and intent of the decisions being made here.

Where I'm from in Cariboo South, though I have three school districts that run through it, there are pre-

dominantly two of those school districts that are rural in nature. I'm sure the minister is aware that in these two school districts — at least one, for sure — there are rural class situations, as well as rural secondary class situations, in which there are multigrades contained in the compositions of those, whether they be elementary or secondary. Likewise, with the multigrade aspect of it, they need to adjust for the gifted student, who is excluded within the legislation. There's also a need to deal with safety issues around those classes of home economics, science, and the shop situation.

[1010]

My question, minister, is: what is the reason the teacher consents in grades four to seven and you change the situation to only consults in grades eight to 12, when in actual fact there is much evidence to support that the teacher is the individual who's in the better position to judge what changes will have an adverse or positive effect upon the learning situation in the classroom?

Hon. S. Bond: We spent considerable time yesterday having this very discussion, but I will be happy to repeat the answer that I gave yesterday. We spent a long time at the Learning Roundtable, which includes all of our provincial partners that are at that table. There was much discussion about how to deal with the issue of class size and composition.

The member opposite accurately points out that I'm well aware of the circumstances that rural schools face. I live in northern British Columbia, and in my own riding we have very small and very large schools. That's actually the whole point. There isn't a magic formula. There is not a specific number, and there is not a particular set of circumstances that would dictate that a classroom should look in a particular fashion.

We believe, and this bill reflects our belief, that there are professionals at schools across this province, including teachers, principals and administrators. Our view, and certainly the view shared at the provincial roundtable, was that the area we needed the most degree of flexibility in was the secondary school area. The language in the bill actually captures the fact that we want to be able to have the flexibility at those levels to focus on student choice and that we want our students to have as many options as possible. The member opposite, being from a rural riding, would know that is challenging in some of the parts of the province that we live in.

We want to leave every opportunity for there to be discussion with professionals, which is meaningful and thorough, but at the end of the day the consensus at the roundtable was that there were pressure points in grades four to seven — and the bill addresses that issue — and also that we wanted flexibility and choice to be the key factors in the decision-making in grades eight to 12.

C. Wyse: On the issue around flexibility and whether flexibility provides the better, improved learning situation versus a variety of other aspects that come

into play, there are other ways of addressing this flexibility issue than centring in upon the consult aspect within the classroom situation.

What I would ask the minister is: what other considerations have been given, other than simply this flexibility? For example, had the ministry considered changing the funding formula for the rural ridings so that there were increased resources available to deal with the complexity that faces the school boards and their representatives in the rural situation?

Hon. S. Bond: In fact, our primary consideration has always been: what are the best possible learning outcomes for students in the province? That's actually the predominant view that the Learning Roundtable took. There are always a number of factors that are considered. The member opposite would know that the funding formula is reviewed on a regular basis and does reflect and capture unique characteristics such as dispersion. It includes climate and a number of other things in recognition of the challenges that rural and remote districts face, but the whole principle that we're trying to capture in this bill is the fact that people do need to talk to one another. Professionals at the school level closest to that classroom need to actually have a process in place.

[1015]

The great news is that in many, many school districts across this province that already occurs. I'm sure the member opposite, as I have, has visited those classrooms and those schools, where the collaboration is extraordinary. Students benefit as a result of that every day. But in fact we were told at the Learning Roundtable — we heard at the Learning Roundtable — that there wasn't consistent consultation taking place across the province. That was disappointing. But, obviously, this bill moves to address that very specific concern.

J. Horgan: The minister just said there wasn't consistent consultation across the board. We've been discussing on this side of the House and raising questions about what consistency would look like. The minister has said that there is no one-size-fits-all, and we acknowledge and accept that. What we've been trying to get to with respect to the consultation component is.... It's a nebulous phrase, a nebulous term. The minister is seeking consistency; we're seeking consistency. I'm wondering: what is consistency in the minister's mind with respect to consultation?

Hon. S. Bond: I think the bill clearly outlines that principals will now be required to talk to their professionals, their teachers, about the class that they're about to put children and professionals into. The whole issue of consistency wasn't the format. The consistency issue was that it didn't occur, according to the B.C. Teachers Federation, in many places across this province.

We're simply saying that is not acceptable. Actually, best practice would dictate that principals would talk to teachers. I've been reassured by principals across this province and superintendents as recently as

this morning that in fact the vast majority of places across the province do have consultation take place. This bill simply reflects the concern that we've heard. Principals will be held accountable for that now, as will superintendents.

Ultimately, there is a section in this bill that would.... The accountability could result in having someone sent to the district to make sure that those sections of the bill are adhered to.

J. Horgan: I accept the minister's answer that there is a provision in the act, and we'll get to that section as we proceed through committee stage with respect to remedies, with respect to interpretation of consent and consult. Perhaps I'll leave that for the moment and pick up where we were last evening with respect to the concerns that the minister will have been aware of with respect to special needs students.

I left off last night asking the minister if she had a plan to ease the fears and concerns. We've had discussions. I've spoken with representatives of the special needs community. I've spoken with numerous people on this question, trying to assure them that this is the beginning, not the end. The minister said that as well.

That's a starting point. But I think that if we're at the beginning, we need to look to how we get to an end. I'm concerned that the configuration of the round table — and we had this discussion in estimates — may not be the most appropriate for addressing this important question of composition. That's why I again raise the option for the minister to perhaps broaden, with respect to this critical section, and include other groups and individuals such as CUPE, who have a particular interest and day-to-day understanding of the concerns and needs of students that have physical or emotional challenges; also, parent groups who are very active throughout the province at DPACs and beyond; and the B.C. Association for Community Living, who also spend all of their time trying to advance the interests of groups and individuals in society and remove obstacles.

Would the minister consider, as we move from this beginning to a positive end, broadening those participants at the round table with respect to this issue?

Hon. S. Bond: Well, in fact we've made a commitment at the round table to review the membership after a year. The reason we did that and remain committed to that.... There are numerous groups that would like to be represented at the provincial round table. Certainly, CUPE and support staff workers have made that clear to me in my visits in school districts and certainly to other members of the round table.

We remain committed to reviewing the membership, as we said that we would. We agreed to that. There was a consensus at the round table that it would be appropriate to do that. We remain committed to that.

[1020]

In the meantime, as I visit across the province and also meet with partner groups on a regular basis, I would welcome the opportunity to meet with support

staff workers in a venue that would be appropriate for them. I also look forward to meeting with parents of special needs students across the province. I have met with groups of parents in each district that I have visited. I look forward to that opportunity and would be more than pleased to continue to have a very open and broad discussion about how we better serve special needs students in this province.

J. Horgan: In this minister's consultation with special needs parents, have they raised with her concerns about the cap of three and the narrowing of the definition to only include those with individual education plans? Have members of the community raised those issues with her?

Hon. S. Bond: As the member opposite would know, the bill was only brought to the floor of the House, I think, about two weeks ago, so I have not, since that time, met specifically with special needs parents. I'm happy to do that. But I need to continue to clarify for the member opposite and for others in the province — and we will continue to do this — that the bill is about the best placement for students in this province, whether they are typical or special needs students.

If, in the opinion of those professionals who work in a school setting, there is a more appropriate number of students, such as four or five, that will be completely acceptable and appropriate under this bill. We were very careful, when we were looking at the issue of special education students, as to how we reflected that in this bill. It is clear, by reading the legislation that is presented here, that districts will make the decision, with their principals and teachers, on how many special education students are in any classroom.

J. Horgan: I was at the BCCPAC last weekend. I know the minister was there. I talked to parents of children with special needs. They expressed their concerns to me. I saw them speaking to the minister. I know they expressed their concerns to her.

A commitment to review membership down the road, in the future — is there a date that the minister has in mind? Is there some certainty?

This is the challenge to the minister. I don't doubt her sincerity on this question, but I continue to get e-mails — as recently as this morning, based on the discussions we were having yesterday — from concerned parents who want some certainty that this issue will not be left to those who don't have a personal commitment to the outcome. That means those that are dealing with special needs kids on a daily basis. Those are the parents, those are the CUPE members, and those are teachers.

Can the minister give us some indication at what point in time the round table will make a determination on broadening the scope of the membership and on broadening the outcomes that we want to see with respect to composition in classrooms across British Columbia?

Hon. S. Bond: In fact, I made that deadline clear. The round table, I think, was formed in November or October of last year. The consensus of the members at the round table, which is actually part of listening and working together, was that we would review the membership after a year. I would make the commitment that by October or whatever the date was that we created the round table, that discussion will take place.

The other issue that the round table agreed on was the fact that there are numerous groups of people, including specialist teacher groups, the francophone parents.... There are numbers of groups that want to actually participate in the round table process. We agreed at the Learning Roundtable that opportunities would be made for representations to the round table by those organizations. I look forward to having the opportunity to have both support staff workers and parents of special needs students in a position to present to the Learning Roundtable. That's important.

Let's go back to the whole genesis of this clause and all of the bill that is laid before the House today. It was brought to the table as a result of a dialogue with the partner groups that are represented at the Learning Roundtable. The member opposite, I'm sure, has also had correspondence from the B.C. Teachers Federation and knows well that the proposal that was brought to the table around special education students was actually a smaller number than this, with no flexibility in terms of decision-making.

Our attempt was to take the views of that organization and other representatives and try to find some balance. This particular section is before the House because it reflected what best we could get as a sense of a balanced approach to this. Parents of special needs children need to be reminded that this piece of legislation says this: that if in the opinion of those experts that are at the school level — which includes a discussion with the teacher, the principal and, ultimately, the superintendent and board of trustees — there is a reasonable expectation that children will do well with more than three special needs students in a classroom, that is absolutely permissible.

[1025]

J. Horgan: I'd like to move now to a discussion that some other members have been raising, and I touched upon it briefly yesterday. That is class size with respect to shop classes, to labs, to home economics and to other courses offered in schools across British Columbia.

Again, in correspondence from educators, parents and others, it has certainly come to my attention and to members on this side and, I'm sure, to members on the other side of the House that there is a concern with respect to safety.

I heard the minister clearly yesterday. If there are unsafe classrooms, she wants to hear about it. I acknowledge that. I know some members have some data they're going to present to her in the coming moments. But if we look at class sizes in terms of square footage, in institutions constructed ten, 15, 20 or 30 years ago, shop classes were not always built for 30 students. In

fact, many of them were built for 20 students or 16 students, and so we've got a size challenge even with 30.

With that in mind — and I provided a copy of this amendment to the Clerks, and I have made it available to the minister — I would move that we amend section 11 by adding the following:

[SECTION 11, by adding, after 2.4 the text shown as underlined:

Class size for shops, laboratories and home economics classes, or similar hands-on classes, shall not exceed 24 students.]

Hon. S. Bond: Following the same line of discussion that we had yesterday, which caused a great deal of reaction from the other side of the House, any time we move to an amendment such as this, it has the potential for an additional obligation to the Crown. It has an additional possibility of charge and cost to the Crown.

So, hon. Chair, I would ask that you consider whether or not this particular amendment is in order. Again, it follows the same pattern of requests that were ruled on yesterday.

The Chair: The minister has advised on the motion that it adds an additional charge to the Crown, and it is ruled out of order.

D. Chudnovsky: I respectfully would suggest that, in fact, there is no obligation required of the Crown arising from this amendment. I do so because of the following logic. The minister and the Premier and other representatives of government have said on numerous occasions publicly that there will be no additional funding arising as a result of Bill 33. We on this side disagree with that point of view and have argued that there should be additional funding. But the minister and government have said that there will not be additional funding.

The Chair: Member, we're not allowed.... We're debating the judgment that has been made from the Chair. The judgment has been made.

D. Chudnovsky: Yes, that's what I'm doing, Chair. If you....

The Chair: You can't do that, member. The judgment has been made.

D. Chudnovsky: I'm rising on a point of order. Hon. Chair, I seek your guidance. I don't want to be doing something that I shouldn't be doing. But yesterday this same pattern came forward and an amendment was put forward. There was an objection from the government side, a ruling was made, and I rose several times on a point of order. I'm only doing what I did yesterday, and I seek your guidance. I don't want to be doing anything that I shouldn't be doing, but I think what I'm doing is precisely what happened yesterday.

The Chair: Member, a ruling has been made by the Chair, and the ruling is not debatable. So we'll continue with the debate now.

D. Chudnovsky: I wanted to make some general comments on section 11 of the legislation because I believe that section 11 is a key and fundamental part of this legislation. I think it needs to be looked at carefully.

[1030]

I want to begin my comments, if I might, by saying that I believe that the purpose of section 11, among other things — and it is a very good purpose, and it's a purpose to be celebrated, as I see it — is to bring some stability to the public education system, which has been, unfortunately, racked with a certain amount of instability over the last four or five years. I think that's to be celebrated, and we want to thank the government — and have — for taking a step which would bring us in the direction of stability.

I think that it's important in looking at this section of the bill which, as members opposite will know, we have some criticisms of.... We think there are some weaknesses, and we've been trying to point those out. Notwithstanding those criticisms and weaknesses, we think that the bill pushes us in a good direction, because it begins to redress and begins to deal with instability that was created by government in 2002 when provisions for limits on class sizes, when provisions for services for students with special needs, when provisions for non-enrolling teacher availability were legislatively removed. This bill in general and section 11 of this bill are useful in beginning to put us on a road to redressing the problems that were caused legislatively by this government in 2002.

Now, the situation in 2002 and leading up to 2002 was far from perfect. There were all kinds of problems, all kinds of challenges, all kinds of ways in which school trustees, school administrators, district administrators, teachers, parents and students had to work together to try and make a system work that would serve the needs of students. There was some progress in that. Section 11 of Bill 33 begins us on a road back towards some of that kind of stability.

The minister has mentioned on a number of occasions the need for flexibility, and I think that — again, notwithstanding the fact that we think there are problems with the elements of the bill that look to the issue of flexibility — it is important to note that in the past there have been, as well, moves made by people on all sides of these debates towards a flexible implementation of class-size limits, of provision of services for special needs and non-enrolling services. For instance, there was a landmark negotiation between the British Columbia Public School Employers Association and the B.C. Teachers Federation, which came to agreement on provisions of flexibility which were requested by the B.C. Public School Employers Association, representing school boards, on class-size flexibility for kindergarten to grade three. That was a step forward.

This notion of flexibility which is mentioned in section 11 of Bill 33 is not a new one. It's not one that had

been ignored in the past. It's one that had been worked on very diligently by people on all sides of the debates, and it's one on which there had been some substantial progress. Nevertheless, the government in 2002 chose to implement Bill 27 and, more specifically, Bill 28, which created a situation of instability which this bill is beginning to push us away from. That's a good thing. In particular, section 11 takes us a little ways down the road towards a more stable situation in schools.

[1035]

The challenge is that there is a whole series of areas in which instability had become a part of our lives in schools in British Columbia. Areas like class sizes; services for students with special needs; the closures of schools; the issue of non-enrolling teacher availability; art, music and drama programs which had been cut — there were legions of areas in which, unfortunately over this past four or five years, there had been reductions in service and cuts to services.

Among the problems we face with Bill 33, section 11 in particular, notwithstanding the fact that it begins us on a road to more stability, is that there are elements of the problems that we face which aren't dealt with in this bill. We've attempted to point those out. There are the specific elements of services to students — that is, the specific problems we've faced in schools across the province over the last number of years — that Bill 33, and specifically section 11, begins to deal with.

There is a general set of propositions, problems that the bill also begins to deal with. They are the problems of low morale, fear and frustration that many in the system faced over the last four or five years. The bill admittedly begins to give some hope and some confidence that we'll move over time to dealing with those problems. But I want to say that the very tabling of Bill 33, and specifically section 11, tells us that the more dramatic disruption we faced last fall in the schools of the province was entirely unnecessary. It didn't have to happen.

The disruption that happened in the fall, which was precipitated by government, didn't have to happen. The proof of that is the very existence of Bill 33 — and section 11 — which has, notwithstanding its weaknesses, been embraced to a great extent by people who are interested in the public education system of the province. I dare say that had government chosen to move on some of its ideas in Bill 33 a year ago or last fall in September or October, had government chosen to acknowledge the problems which it had created in the system prior to the disruption last fall, it didn't need to happen.

That's something for all of us to remember. Because as government begins down the road towards making some advances — small advances, but advances nonetheless — for kids in the school system, it's important for us to note and to remember and to learn that the disruption that was precipitated by government in the fall didn't have to happen.

The Premier, to his credit, and the Minister of Education, to her credit, came to know and came to acknowledge — as a result of the disruption, unfortunately, but they came to know and came to acknow-

ledge, and that's a good thing — that action had to be taken on a provincial level to deal with the problems of class size and class composition. That's why we have Bill 33 and section 11, notwithstanding their weaknesses. That's a good thing. They're to be commended for coming to those conclusions, even though they came to them late.

[1040]

The focus of section 11 of Bill 33 is to begin to move us to a situation of more stability in the system, and we applaud that. I would, though, make a plea and a suggestion and provide some advice to the minister and to the government. If, as I believe is the case, one of the purposes of Bill 33 and, specifically, section 11 is to bring a measure of stability and therefore a measure of confidence in the system and its ability to provide appropriate programs for students in our system, then I would suggest respectfully to government that the appropriate resources have to be made available for that to work. Without the resources and the availability of resources, section 11 is just words on paper.

I want to reflect back on some of what the minister said yesterday, because I have to tell you there were some, for me at least, glimmers of hope in some of the words that were chosen — and I know that this minister chooses her words very carefully. I note that in the questioning, when the minister was questioned as to the additional cost to the system of the provision in Bill 33 — the kindergarten-to-grade-seven provision, which requires the consent of professionals if overages are to be acceptable — the minister chose not to repeat her comments from the last couple of weeks in which she stated unequivocally that there wouldn't be additional resources.

I heard her. Chair, you heard her. The province heard her a number of times saying: "No, there isn't going to be any more money." But yesterday when she was questioned — and I take this minister very seriously, and I know that she chooses her words very carefully — she didn't repeat that, and that's a good thing.

It leaves the door open to the possibility that, in this minister's mind and in this government's plans, there are additional resources, and we would seize upon that. I think that there are thousands of parents in the province and thousands of students, teachers and school administrators who would equally seize upon the minister's choice not to go back to the oft-repeated position that there will be no additional resources for the implementation of Bill 33. We look forward to that, because if section 11 of Bill 33 is going to mean something, then the resources have to be there for appropriate class sizes, class compositions and placements for students with special needs.

Let me just finish with a couple more points on implementation of section 11. I want to stress a point made by my colleague from Malahat-Juan de Fuca. There are those in our community who are very intimately involved with providing services to students with special needs. There are those in our community who are advocates for and parents of students with special needs and who need to be invited to be part of

the discussion in an ongoing way on these issues. It's very important that we show them the respect that they deserve.

I'm talking about CUPE and other caregivers in the schools. I'm talking about advocates for students with special needs. I'm talking about the parents of students with special needs. The resources have to be there and a respectful discussion has to be there so they can be assured of something that's absolutely critical to them, which is that there are appropriate placements for every student with special needs in the province.

That's a goal we need to hold fast to. It's a goal that they deserve. Resources, a real and respectful discussion among all of the parties — those are things that we have to go towards.

[1045]

Hon. S. Bond: I appreciated the comments of the member opposite. Obviously, he has his view of education history, and I certainly have my view.

I think that the whole issue of instability and negativity in some of the discussions that take place around public education didn't start four years ago. I think there have been a lot of years of conflict and issues. We couldn't actually come to a negotiated settlement in this province for, I think, about 13 years. There has been lots of conflict. Heaven knows, I was a school board chair, and I can assure you that I was saying many of the same things the member opposite is reflecting upon over the last four years. I was saying them at least eight or ten years ago.

The whole point is this. The member opposite points out the fact that this is progress. Yes, actually, it is progress. One of the reasons that there are some very specific distinctions in this bill is because there was absolutely no agreement at the Learning Roundtable that would indicate that we should move in a different direction. We promised the people of British Columbia that we would begin the Learning Roundtable — that we would go, we would listen, and we would act. That's exactly what we did. We made that same commitment in the throne speech.

The challenge we face — and I have said this consistently — is that there was no general agreement. There were very strong opinions. Yes, the B.C. Teachers Federation expressed strong views about special education students, about non-enrolling teachers — about all of the things that the member opposite has spoken about. But the parents, the trustees, the superintendents and the principals talked a lot about flexibility and how important that is when you put classes together in schools today. This bill reflects what best we could find in terms of balance, in terms of moving forward.

The discussion will continue. As the member opposite would be very clear of, my previous response absolutely indicated, first of all, that we do respect the views of special education parents and support staff workers in this province. I previously said that I would be delighted to find venues in which we can have that meaningful discussion, and I committed — as the

round table agreed to — to a review of membership at the round table. Those are all steps in the right direction.

I appreciate the member opposite's comments, but I also want to put on record that this is a government that has spent \$669 million a year to do the very thing the member opposite has asked us about and that this bill reflects. This is our step forward in saying that the appropriate placement for every child in this school district, in this province, is important. The way to do that is to leave some flexibility, to allow the decision-makers at the local level to actually make those decisions.

G. Coons: I would like to touch on a couple of topics dealing with this section, and I would like to get into some comments reflecting from last night. We talked about shops, tech classes, labs, home ec classes, where in the past they traditionally had limits of 24, due to size constraints, the number of labs that are available and the safety supervision within the areas.

I did reflect on some stories from when I was involved in education. There was what we considered fairly — I wouldn't want to say.... A situation where safety concerns were out there. We were able to do that, but it took quite a while to readjust those classes.

Even as we speak, right now in schools in my district back home, there are shop classes of 26 to 28 students with six or seven students with IEPs, and the teacher is instructing six or seven different sections — whether it's metalwork nine, ten, 11; maybe some mechanics 11, 12. They're all in a shop along with teacher's aides and in a situation that, as far as WCB, the teacher safety is not in jeopardy. But these are situations where there is a concern, and I want to get that on the record, that it is still happening after a couple of years.

As we go on.... I talked to this particular teacher last night. He reiterated that, in his opinion, it is not safe for students but that he is going through the situation of trying to deal with what's best for what he has to go through. He sees that it is only going to get worse under this legislation.

[1050]

As we look at the rural situation, as the deputy minister knows.... He's been to Prince Rupert, he's gone through the schools, and the ministers have in the past. They've been to Roosevelt Park School, where there are 200 students with 60 students with IEPs. And those are the ones that have been tested. In our district they've been trying for years to find a school psychologist so that more could get tested, and the wait-list is months, if not years, away. So we have the grey area for students. We've got some very challenging situations in rural areas.

As the deputy minister has indicated, the EDI, as we all know.... In my home town of Prince Rupert 40 percent of the students are vulnerable. That's significant. When we go through legislation like this, a bill, a law that does not have the accompanying funding is a real concern. It's a real concern to teachers, to child care

workers, to parents of all students throughout the province and, I have to add, especially to those in the rural areas.

Again, as I did mention previously, the Task Force on Rural Education.... The B.C. school trustees wanted the report, and within four or five days, the deputy minister in his report put things out. But I think there needs to be a key follow-up, as the recommendations indicate, to make the improvement of rural-urban equity, of educational outcomes, a high priority; create the provincial vision for rural education by focusing on how to foster equitable student achievement in all areas of the province.

Again, in our discussion this week of the FSAs and how.... Lots of opinions do not help. They do not help the rural areas and the smaller areas that are struggling to make it through and being ranked and compared to other jurisdictions, including private independent schools.

One of the key recommendations for the rural education strategy was to review rural schools funding. Again, that's reiterated with the regional district of Kitimat-Stikine, which wrote a letter to the minister herself, looking at specific underfunding problems mentioned, and looking at.... Although the provincial government acknowledges that one size does not fit all and states there is flexibility, the regional district remains concerned their local needs are not adequately addressed under the current funding formula or within the existing provincial education budget. Legislation such as this will exponentially increase all those concerns.

When the round table was established and the communications were happening, there was some hope. There were optimistic views that we would move forward. There is; this is a start. But, again, this sounds like the start of the last teachers contract that was imposed, where there were some funding increases that people thought were going to work well, but they were not subsidized. They were not paid for. In my opinion, that was the start of the closing of the hundred or so schools and the layoff of 2,500 or 2,600 teachers. As far as Kitimat-Stikine going to a four-day week....

As far as section 11, I also have concerns about the multigrade, the split classes. In the rural areas you can go to some of the villages that I represent, and we have split classes of kindergarten, one, two, three — a four-way split with 20, 22 kids in areas where the needs are very challenging.

When we start looking at some of the information that I have discussed before, we've got classes of 28 students with eight IEPs in them, three teacher's aides in them. The classrooms are built for 24 to 25 students. So I think in the educational world, especially in the rural areas where declining enrolment has had a major effect in the makeup of classes....

[1055]

The really positive aspect is that finally — after many years of hearing the outcries from parents, from teachers, from everybody in the educational realm — the words came through the Premier's lips that there is a concern about class size and composition. But those words need some backing, and I think the minister and

her staff have to realize that without funding, it's going to be disappointing to a lot of the educational participants in the field.

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

Last week I was at the North Central Municipal Association up in Fort St. John. They made a motion, also, dealing with rural education and funding. There are concerns in the rural areas, and this legislation does not meet those concerns.

I'd also like to comment on the concept of how this legislation does not deal with English-as-a-second-language students. As far as we can read this bill, there could be a class of 30 students, including three with IEPs and an unlimited number of students designated as ESL. Once again, this comes to the component of our needing a wider range of classifications for students with special needs.

I have to go back to the B.C. School Trustees, and I'm sure the deputy minister, the minister and staff have been briefed on those, if they weren't there for the voting. One of the motions passed by the B.C. School Trustees Association was the need to broaden the categories of special needs students with funding. They urged the ministry to include a fourth category to recognize those students with neurological disabilities — you know, FAS, FAE, autistic — who require additional classroom and school-based support. Again, the key: it needs the funding.

When we look at, as the minister says, the trials and tribulations of what's happened over the last ten or 12 years with education, we do have the best educational system in the world. We have the best teachers in the world. We have superintendents, administrators and support staff, but again, in a district such as school district 52, we're seeing next year's budget being a deficit of \$300,000.

That may not seem much to many in this room, but that's a loss of five teachers with a declining enrolment of 45 students. Now, I'm not too sure how we do the math with 45 fewer students and losing five teachers, but that's fairly significant when you've got challenges in regions dealing with the outcomes that we've seen under the EDI, etc.

I would encourage the minister in her deliberations to respectfully look at this bill, to look at what is going on in education and what's happening in our classrooms.

[1100]

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the home ec class in Prince Rupert that had 16 students with IEPs. When I asked the president of the teachers union up there how many were in the class, he just said it doesn't matter how many are in the class. Whether it's 20 or 25 or 30, when you've got a class with 16 students that have been designated, that have needs which, hopefully, members of this House could see are not going to be met in a lab or a home ec class that's built for 24, you can see the challenges going on in that.

A previous member talked about stability in the educational system, and that's what parents, teachers

and educators want in this province. They want stability. This bill will not lead to stability. We look at the distributed learning where the time lines and the flexibility involved in that may not help rural districts have stable planning for the next school year.

Before I pass it on to the next member, I'd just like to reiterate to the minister and staff that as far as I'm concerned, this bill has potential, but the funding must be there. It must meet the needs of students throughout the province, and there must be that equitable division between rural and urban.

Hon. S. Bond: I want to take the opportunity to respond to a couple of comments by the member opposite. First of all, we will be contacting the school district this afternoon about the classes that have been mentioned in terms of issues of safety that the member opposite has brought to our attention.

There is no acceptable reason to put students at risk in the school system. That is not acceptable. It is not appropriate for either side of the House, and every single time that members have stood up on either side of this House and made comments about a particular classroom, we are delighted to go and have a look. We will be holding the professionals accountable for putting classes together that would even suggest that children be at risk in this province. It is not acceptable.

As early as this morning I was reassured by a group of superintendents that those circumstances do not exist, so I can assure the member opposite that we will be contacting that school district the moment these questions are complete for the morning, and we will follow up on those issues.

We also need to have a discussion about rural schools in context, and the member opposite is absolutely correct. Rural schools in British Columbia are facing extraordinary challenge, but the member opposite might want, also, to go and look at the circumstances of rural schools around the globe. If you look at countries like Ireland and New Zealand or provinces like Saskatchewan, Quebec and Ontario, all of those jurisdictions are facing the unbelievable demographic shift that's taking place around the world. To suggest that schools closed because it was a unique phenomenon to this province is inaccurate.

Provinces, countries, jurisdictions are facing unbelievable enrolment decline. By September in this province alone, 37,000 fewer children are attending public schools in the province. I would suggest to the member opposite that while those decisions are difficult for school districts to make, unfortunately they were necessary. We need to take the record-level resources we have in public education and focus those on classrooms. Empty and half-empty buildings are no longer acceptable.

Do rural schools have challenges? Absolutely they do. In fact, this government has recognized it, and in this year alone we will be providing an additional \$11.9 million in supplemental funding to rural schools. That's because we understand there are difficult challenges. We know that the funding formula also ad-

resses things like low enrolment, dispersion, geography and climate. Those are the kinds of practical things that can be done to deal with that.

To the member opposite: I know and understand the concerns that have been expressed, but the absolute reality of the situation in school district 52 is that in ten years they've seen their enrolment decline by 31 percent, and at this point in time their funding has remained virtually the same. They've had a 31-percent decline in enrolment, and funding has remained the same.

[1105]

Are there challenges with needy children in terms of EDI? Of course there are. This government embraces EDI and the work of Dr. Clyde Hertzman. We are working very hard to focus on those neighbourhoods where there is the most need. But make no mistake about it. The issue of rural schools is one being faced by countries around this world. It is not unique to British Columbia, and this government has paid an incredible amount of attention to rural schools in particular.

J. Kwan: I'd like to ask the minister some questions around section 11 and particularly.... There's not one mention of ESL in this entire bill. Why is that?

Hon. S. Bond: We understand that ESL students across the province are a major part of many school districts. The discussion at the round table and, certainly, the advice and information that we heard there.... At no time did the partners suggest or even discuss whether or not there should be limits or caps or any sort of threshold. The B.C. Teachers Federation may well have done that, but there certainly was not a general consensus about that.

I think that ultimately, we have to look at the outcomes for English-as-a-second-language students in this province. In fact, the completion rates for ESL students in this province exceed the level of completion by all students. The percentage of completion for all students is 79 percent, and the completion rate for ESL students in this province is at 82 percent.

J. Kwan: That's interesting. The minister says that the BCTF is the group that actually raised the issue around ESL concerns but that nobody else around the round table had raised that. Having said that, of course, the teachers around the table are the educators in the system, and they have to deal with the students in the classroom, on the ground, in terms of making sure that the learning environment is optimal for all of the children — ESL, special needs or otherwise.

Certainly, I would have thought that the minister would take that into consideration, but apparently not. I do want to actually touch on this for a moment, though, in terms of the breakdown of the number of ESL students in the province. How many ESL students are there in British Columbia?

Hon. S. Bond: I don't have that number. I can have that number given to the member opposite. Certainly,

in terms of the bill that is in front of us.... The issue seems more like an estimates question.

I want to go back and respond to the member opposite. First of all, I did say clearly that at the Learning Roundtable, the B.C. Teachers Federation certainly expressed a view about English-as-a-second-language students. The member opposite suggested that I perhaps didn't take that into consideration. I can assure the member opposite that each of the views and opinions that were shared at the Learning Roundtable was considered, was actually listened to and responded to in this bill.

I think the other point that needs to be made extremely clear is: we have said consistently that this is the beginning of work that needs to be ongoing in this province in terms of having thoughtful and meaningful discussions about lots of issues. I'm certain that as we continue, there will be discussion about ESL students. There will be discussion about secondary school students.

We need to be clear that there were comments and discussion about ESL students, but at no time was there a significant consensus about whether or not those students should be included in this bill.

J. Kwan: I guess the question here is this: to what degree is the minister addressing the concerns that have been raised? I can certainly tell you that the complexity of a classroom includes many factors, some of which the government is trying to address here. Class size was one of them. Class composition was the other.

Therefore, under section 11, as we're talking about class-size limitations, which is what the government is bringing forward — which, by the way, we support.... But within that complex classroom environment, numbers are not the only thing. It's the makeup of the class as well, so I think that it does fit into section 11, into the questions which I'm asking of the minister.

[1110]

More specifically, I just want to focus on the one area here around English as a second language. The minister says she doesn't have the information around the number of ESL students in our system.

Now, this is based on the information that I have according to the Ministry of Education student report document 2005-2006. There are 59,103.6 FTE ESL students. The operating grant estimates for 2005-2006 show 57,585 funded FTEs. That's the information that I'm basing my questions around. Next year, of course, for 2006-2007 the estimate is 57,413 FTEs. That's for the K-to-12 system.

Really, if you compare the amount of funding, or the number-of-students funding, per FTE, relative to the full-time-equivalent students, you can see that there are about 1,500 short of FTE funding, if you will. That's based on the minister's documentation, which we've extracted these numbers from.

I know that in my own community — and I should say, more broadly in Vancouver — in the secondary schools, the percentage of ESL students is around 56 percent. In the elementary schools the percentage of ESL students is about 52 percent. In Surrey, for exam-

ple, my understanding is that their ESL students are about 30 percent. In Coquitlam, albeit not as high as the other centres that I've put forward by way of comparison, their ESL students have increased by some 580 percent to a total now of about 10 percent of their student body.

We also, actually, did some research in citing some information that was brought to our attention from Dr. Lee Gunderson at UBC, who has done extensive research into the ESL situation. According to that information there, it shows that the dropout rate for ESL kids is some 40 percent. That contradicts the information that the minister had provided in terms of completion rates, so I'm particularly interested in exploring this area in terms of the funding.

The Chair: Member, just as a point the Chair would like to make, this section is on class limits. I would suggest that the member explain how this is relevant to the section at hand.

J. Kwan: Thank you, hon. Chair. I'd be delighted to do that. How it relates, of course, is that what the minister has in this bill in section 11 is limits on class size. It does beg the question, though, in terms of class size and class limits, for other segments within the class size, ESL being one of them.

I'm trying to get to the bottom of the class-size limitation in conjunction with the notion of composition. You have to look at those two together to determine whether or not 30 is the correct number. In order to break that down, we actually have to get a better understanding of what a class composition looks like before we can come to the conclusion that a class size of 30 is in fact the right number. This is what I'm driving at.

Without that, then you are just talking in a vacuum without actually looking at the real situation before us. I don't think that's justification for the students and the parents and the educators and for the government. To that end, I'd like to explore the class composition within a class size, for which we're talking about a cap of 30 — to explore that specifically on the ESL side of things.

The information that we have is that the dropout rate for ESL students is particularly high amongst certain immigrant populations — the Filipino community, the Vietnamese community, the Punjabi community and the Latino community, for example, many of whom are highly at risk. I'd like to find out from the minister whether or not she has any information to reflect on that breakdown within the ESL population in terms of how the students are doing and what the dropout rates might be.

Hon. S. Bond: First of all, we'll clarify the record here. The number of ESL students that currently are in our system — because, of course, students are counted and are given a student identification number — is 57,585.

[1115]

When you look at funding for ESL students and FSL — which is French as a second language — stu-

dents, we actually fund those students an additional amount to the core funding. The per-pupil rate is provided to schools, and each additional child, ESL or FSL, receives \$1,100 per student in addition to the per-pupil funding. That has seen this government increase.... In terms of the funding that government provides for ESL and FSL students, it's \$63 million a year, in addition to per-pupil funding. That is certainly a recognition of the importance of providing resources.

We do deaggregate the information that we get in terms of student information. We are able to identify students that are ESL students, and that's how we look at the completion rates. The member opposite listed a study of some sort that talked about a 40-percent drop-out rate. We look at the data that's provided to us by school districts across the province when we make the statements that we make. So I would be happy to receive the information from the member opposite. We would be delighted to have a look at it as a ministry. Obviously, we want to look at who did that research and where exactly it's centred.

I can only assure the member opposite that we work to make sure that students are supported with \$1,100 per-student funding in addition to per-pupil. The results have been the best of all students in British Columbia, in terms of completion rates at 83 per cent for ESL students.

We continue to look at the complexity of classrooms. The member opposite is absolutely correct. Classrooms are complex. That's why this bill takes an approach that is not about formulas and assuming there are certain circumstances which we can dictate from Victoria. This bill, which is what we're discussing today, actually allows for the people who work in schools to discuss how best to serve all of our students, whether they're ESL students, special needs students or typical students.

J. Kwan: Let's be clear. The number that the minister put out of 57,585 FTE-funded, in terms of ESL students, is based on a number that is on a funding cap and not on the service cap. I expect that's where the discrepancy comes from.

The ministry has actually cut off English-as-a-second-language funding after five years, regardless of the grade-level functionality of the student. Before that, it used to be seven years, so there is a difference here in terms of that. What we also do know is that advantaged immigrants take about two to five years to reach functioning levels in English; disadvantaged immigrants, however, take seven to ten years. There is a major discrepancy.

Children who are challenged tend to have situations where their schooling is often interrupted because of traumas of the past and poverty issues — many of whom, by the way, live in Vancouver-Mount Pleasant. We see those challenges on a day-by-day basis. We actually see situations where students, children, enter into the education system in kindergarten and have had no exposure whatsoever to English. That's why, in terms of creating a level playing field for all of the children so that each and every one of them has the oppor-

tunity to maximize their potential, it's absolutely critical.

We also know that the student success that ties into early childhood development and into education development from K-to-12 also has primary impact in terms of the success in the future for those individuals, in terms of them being full participants in our system, in terms of being self-sufficient in our broader society and in terms of being less likely to be in conflict with the law and so on. To that end, there is a major challenge here in terms of the number of years that ESL students are funded or not. But we see in this bill, though, that there's nothing in it....

The Chair: Member, again, the section is dealing with class-size limits. Please make your comments relevant to the section on class-size limits. I'm having a little difficulty connecting your comments with what this section is dealing with.

J. Kwan: How it is relevant is this, Madam Chair. The class-size limits speak to an overall number of students in a class. Within that class there are different children with different needs with different complexities. Is the class size of 30 correct in a classroom with 16 ESL students and three special needs students? Is that the right number?

[1120]

There's nothing in this bill that addresses ESL limitations. That's what I'm trying to get at here. How do we know 30 is the right number if you don't look at all of the issues relevant to the composition of the class?

It might be kind of funny for the minister, and she may want to laugh it off, but the fact is....

The Chair: Member, we don't impugn individual members in the chamber.

J. Kwan: Well, I apologize, but you know what? I have to say that it is a critically important issue, especially for the province, as we know there's declining enrolment and people are not having as many children in our own province.

We are calling on and working very hard to actually have immigrants come to this community, but we'd better be sure that our education system, our systems within British Columbia, have the supports for the immigrant community when they come here. I don't see that right now in our education system; I do see children being challenged.

I asked the minister, who says she's going to travel the province, to come to my riding any day, and I'll take her school by school and show her the complexity of the school system in Vancouver-Mount Pleasant. I will demonstrate to her, with the educators and with the parents in the system, the critical needs around class size and composition measures and ESL limitations.

These are children's lives, and they deserve every opportunity to succeed. Every child deserves that, and I expect the government wants to achieve the same

outcomes as I do. I expect that, and I accept that. But what I'm challenging the minister on is this: this legislation does not effectively address all of those issues. It addresses some of them, and maybe this is the beginning of achieving something that will be greater in the future — maybe.

But the minister and the Premier set aside a round table to look at this issue, and they had the opportunity to actually bring forward a piece of legislation that would address all of those issues. So I don't understand, and I don't accept the notion that ESL is not addressed in this legislation. I don't accept that on behalf my constituents. I don't accept the notion from the minister that somehow her funding level is the right level.

I challenge that, and the minister says that well, you know, she'd be happy to look at research that I could provide her. Let me just say this: the minister has way more staff than the opposition, so contact Lee Gunderson at UBC, and you'll be able to actually get that information accordingly.

Hon. S. Bond: First of all, let's make it perfectly clear that on this side of the House, we actually do care about every single child in British Columbia. This bill makes sure that at the centre of the discussion, we're not going to listen to one voice.

We're going to listen to all of the voices that were at the round table — to parents who actually care and who are children's first and most important teacher. We're going to listen to trustees. We're going to listen to principals and to administrators. We think they're in the best position to address the issues that the member opposite has actually brought forward in terms of the complexity of classrooms.

Let's get our facts straight. First of all, there is no cap on ESL funding in this province. If a child appears at a school, they will receive \$1,100 additional per student, whether they're ESL or FSL, in addition to per-pupil funding. That's the first fact.

Secondly, let's talk about the fact that — yes, you're right — ESL students currently receive five years of funding, but there's a process. If that child has additional needs, then that will be considered, and additional years of funding can be provided based on the needs of the child.

I visited and spent time at two round tables in Vancouver with parents who had children with ESL concerns. One of the things they said was: "We want our children to move into other classrooms and other programs as soon as they can. Five years is great, and we're glad you do it, but we want some flexibility there so that our children can move forward as well."

[1125]

We want to be sure that this bill captures what we heard at the Learning Roundtable. We want to engage in dialogue and discussion around this province. We care about every student in the province. We want a bill that allows the professionals in classrooms and schools today to make the decisions that are best for students in this province.

J. Kwan: I would invite the minister to come and talk to the PACs in my riding, the parents in my riding, who are struggling. I would invite the minister to come and talk to the inner-city school PACs. I would invite the minister to come and talk to Cynthia Wong, who has actually worked through the system as a parent struggling to advocate on behalf of the children in our system who are not getting the support that the minister claimed they are. That's the truth, and that's the reality. I would invite the minister to take a really good look at the reality of the everyday lives of parents with many challenges in our system and at their children's many challenges as well.

The reality is this. We know there is already an assessment problem with special needs kids. We know that a lot of the children fall into a gap. The minister says: "Oh yes, but we do have a provision that says we'll assess everybody." We know there are huge backlogs in terms of assessment. We know that many children are not captured in the category of getting the additional funding that they require to help them succeed and to help the educators teach those children in the learning environment.

That's the reality the minister refuses to acknowledge, and maybe that's the problem here. The minister can say all she wants that she really cares, but action speaks louder than words. The reality is that many children are falling through the gaps, and with this legislation, with the kind of caps that are being put forward, which will be debated under another section...

Section 27 is around the funding piece. The need is for the government to fully fund the class-size caps and for the government to fully provide optimal learning environments. The government has not included ESL as a component for consideration, and I do think there is a problem with that.

Hon. S. Bond: Let's talk about action. In fact, this is a government that has record-level funding in public education — the highest per-pupil funding ever in the province.

Let's talk about the outcomes. It's really interesting to sit and listen to the comments about students in classrooms in this province. Let's look at the outcomes. Our 15-year-olds in this province outperform every single 15-year-old in the world.

Let's talk about outcomes for ESL students. They are at 83 percent, the highest level ever. For all students the completion rates are at 79 percent, and our aboriginal students are at the highest level ever.

It's time that we actually talked about the good things that are happening in public education. There are many of them.

[1130-1135]

Section 11 as amended approved unanimously on a division. [See *Votes and Proceedings*.]

On section 12.

J. Horgan: As we now get into the process whereby section 11 will be implemented, I have a number of

questions, as does my colleague from Columbia River-Revelstoke. But I'll start with section 12 amending 76.2 with respect to subclause (b). It says: "consult with the school planning council with respect to the proposed organization of classes within that school for that school year...."

Could the minister advise if every school in British Columbia has a functioning school planning council?

Hon. S. Bond: The vast majority of schools across the province do have school planning councils. There are some schools that do not have school planning councils, but the intent of this legislation.... We should also point out that we are working very closely with BCCPAC and different parent advisory councils to help train and enable school planning councils to exist. In fact, the vast majority of schools have one. There are some that do not.

J. Horgan: Then those schools — an undetermined number — will be in contravention of this clause of this act?

Hon. S. Bond: Well, it's our intent to continue to work with schools across the province. Certainly, BCCPAC is involved in a major way with providing professional development for parents. Our goal would be to absolutely have school planning councils in place in each school in British Columbia. In fact, there is legislation regarding school planning councils, and schools are expected to have one.

J. Horgan: If there are no school planning councils in particular schools, how does the minister propose to implement this clause of the act?

Hon. S. Bond: The expectation is that schools will have a school planning council.

J. Horgan: How can the minister guarantee something will exist that doesn't exist today, without some sense of clairvoyance or some other information that's not available to us and certainly isn't available in this legislation?

Hon. S. Bond: Well, we're going to continue to ensure that schools actually have school planning councils. They have been very positively received, by many parents in particular, across the province. We as a government have provided additional resources to BCCPAC to provide ongoing training. The expectation is that schools will have a school planning council, and we will continue to work to ensure that occurs.

N. Macdonald: I'm going to talk about section 12, 76.2(b), and again the word "consult." It says "consult with the school planning council," and I just wonder if the minister could give clarity around what that consultation would look like, what the parameters are.

Hon. S. Bond: It incorporates the same principle we expect to occur between teachers and principals and

school superintendents. We would expect that principals involve parents in a meaningful way as they present and discuss, and there is a back-and-forth about the discussions around school planning.

[1140]

N. Macdonald: I'll lay out a scenario for the minister — Canal Flats. I believe letters have been sent to the minister. The scenario was that the school planning council, which I met with, met with principals. They organized with three-way splits. They organized a number of things that they were unhappy with. The reality for the principal and for the parents is that the resources simply were not there to do anything other than that, so the outcome for the parents and the school planning council was something they weren't pleased with. Nevertheless, with the lack of resources, they were left feeling that they had to support the principal in setting it up that way.

The question that I have for the minister is this. Without resources, you easily have the consultation, but it doesn't mean that you end up with an outcome that parents are going to find pleasing — or the school planning council or indeed the principal.

Part of what I'll say is this. The member for Vancouver-Mount Pleasant invited the minister to visit particular schools. The invitation I would make, as well, is that when you're in the beautiful Rocky Mountain school district, one of the schools and one of the communities that you would choose to visit would be Canal Flats. I'd be happy to help with that organization. It's a beautiful community. It would be a wonderful opportunity to meet with parents and have them express directly to the minister the concerns they have.

I'm giving you an opportunity to speak to that and also around consultation, which may take place but which may, in the end, leave neither parties involved in the consultation pleased if there are not the resources to go along in trying to come up with class organization that's going to be successful.

Hon. S. Bond: Well, you know, organizing schools and classrooms is all about making choices. I would assume that many of those are not easy as we balance how best to serve students who have English as a second language, those who have special needs and, yes, even those who are typical. It's all about those decisions. It's all about making the choices that are putting students at the centre of that.

There's no guarantee. You can't legislate consensus. What we're actually trying to do in this bill is say: "There is a process that you now must follow. You must involve people in the decision-making." Will parents be happy? Not always. Will teachers be happy? Not always. But the point of the bill is to say that we recognize consultation is important and that there are a number of people who should be included in that. Parents are one of those partners that should be included.

I do know that if parents are unhappy with the specific placement of their child, there's an appeal process. There are mechanisms to have that discussion. This is

about trying to find a way to facilitate those decisions that is inclusive. One of the things we heard at round table was that it was not always the case. This bill reflects that.

In terms of my visits around the province.... The member from Mount Pleasant made it sound like I was not visiting certain school districts. Our commitments in the throne speech, between both the Premier and myself, are that we will visit all 60 school districts. With a legislative agenda such as we've had, we've had to fit those visits in.

I am absolutely looking forward to visiting classrooms across the province. I should tell you that we've been to places that have not been visited by a minister before. We've been to places like Pemberton, Pouce Coupe, Vernon, Salmon Arm and Qualicum. We've had absolutely phenomenal visits.

In terms of ESL students, I've visited classrooms in Richmond that had representative children from 21 different nationalities. I actually do go to classrooms. I care about learning about that, and I can hardly wait to get to a number of other parts of the province.

N. Macdonald: Just to reaffirm that the invitation to Canal Flats is one I put out there. I know you have a complex schedule that you need to put together. I believe, and the understanding I have is, that some of the funding formulas that are in place make it difficult for schools once they get to around 100 students. That's something that I think the minister would be interested in. The invitation is out there. I'd be happy to host her. I think you could not help but come away from the area, especially if you come in June or July.... It's a wonderful time to be there.

I'll turn it over.

[1145]

J. Horgan: I'd be delighted to visit Canal Flats as well.

Interjection.

J. Horgan: Perhaps the minister and I will travel together.

I'd like to go back to the timing contained in section 12, because it certainly appears to me that the workload for principals is increasing exponentially. Within 15 days the principals have to meet with school planning councils that may not have yet been constructed.

I know that certainly in my district, the PACs meet usually on the third Thursday after the start of the school year. They are configured; assignments are given. SPCs will be constructed. Let's assume that there are SPCs functioning in every school and every district across the province. My understanding is that they won't be in place until well past the deadline of the 15 days prescribed by the legislation. Has the minister contemplated that?

Hon. S. Bond: Certainly, this does reflect some change, and we need to work on that. My staff has had

discussions with BCCPAC. DPACs are going back to their districts now to talk about how they can help facilitate this legislation in particular.

The whole goal here is to make sure that classes are organized as quickly as possible in ways that are as appropriate as possible, so there are time lines. They are expected to be followed.

I do want to respond to the comment about increasing workload. I actually believe that those principals across this province who are educational leaders involve people in this way now. It is best practice. Consultation does take place, and this legislation is to fill in those gaps where that may or may not be occurring. But best practice would dictate that principals actually do talk to teachers and that they actually do engage parents in that discussion.

These time lines are certainly clear, and we would expect that they would be adhered to.

J. Horgan: I have never at any point suggested that educational leaders in this province are not doing the best they can to achieve outcomes that are positive for their students, for their communities. I hope that wasn't what was implied in the minister's comment.

What I'm concerned about with respect to the time frames outlined in this section is that they are very ambitious, and they are going to be a significant challenge for the system. I'm wondering: in the formulation of this section, did the minister and her staff contemplate how all of these interactions are going to take place in the narrow time frame available and if, during the process of the consent and consultation components...?

What do we do when we get to know? What happens when someone says: "This is not going to work"? I know certainly with my children in district 62, the movement and the various permutations of what is possible at the start of a school year are extremely challenging. In those districts with increasing enrolment — and there are a number of them; the minister is aware of that — how are they going to physically meet the demands of this legislation?

Hon. S. Bond: First of all, it's a change, and that always causes challenge. I think the fact that we contemplated it is reflected in the section that says we're going to go back and look at this over the course of the next year.

We want there to be some feedback and some dialogue about whether or not this meets the test of what the round table presented to us, but I am confident.... We know this is ambitious, but it really is that way so we can make sure that students are at the centre of this, that they have the optimum learning opportunities that are possible.

We have built in a section that will require that these amendments actually be reviewed over the next year. As I meet with principals and superintendents and teachers and parents and others in the working sessions that I have with them, this will be an agenda item. We have already started to talk about the implementation of Bill 33 in those meetings, and I look for-

ward to hearing, and I never have any shortage of opinions to listen to in this regard.

[1150]

J. Horgan: With respect to the amendments to section 76.5 and the appointment of a special administrator.... Beyond those obvious challenges that are faced by administrators at the school level, superintendents at the district level and all of the various other components and players — parents, teachers, students — that are outlined in the legislation and are the essence and core of our public school system, at what point would the administrator be deployed? Could the minister walk us through how she sees that working, and in what time line?

Hon. S. Bond: Well, I think the deployment of the special administrator is clear. If school boards do not comply with legislation in terms of class-size numbers that are in legislation, a special administrator will be appointed.

The other area where a special administrator may be appointed is if the process that's been put in place regarding consultation, discussion and the processes that precede this is not followed. That case would also be presented to the minister, and in the minister's opinion, a special administrator may be appointed.

J. Horgan: So if a school planning council does not exist in a school in British Columbia — and therefore that section of the act is not complied with — and a special administrator is appointed, as a result of that deficiency, in a community or in a particular school, who will pay for the special administrator?

Hon. S. Bond: The school board.

J. Horgan: Well, that's certainly the first opportunity we have had to raise the unanimous resolution from the B.C. School Trustees Association that, although they endorse this legislation, they're concerned that they will be on the hook to fund it. We've just discovered for the first time the first clause that's going to put districts on the hook beyond the challenges that they're already going to face as a result of the increased workloads and demands as a result of this legislation.

Has this minister talked to BCSTA about the cost of administrators? What is the scale, the going rate for a special administrator?

Hon. S. Bond: Well, certainly we've made it clear that if school boards do not obey the law and obey the legislation, we will be appointing a special administrator, and those funds will be covered by the school districts. Every attempt will be made to find a person within the region of the school district to take on that function to minimize the costs, and we will be very thoughtful about how that process is done.

School boards are well aware of this part of the bill. At the Learning Roundtable one of the things we had consensus on — one of the things we actually could agree on — was that if school boards don't obey the

law in terms of legislated class sizes, there should be consequences. Those are clearly laid out here.

J. Horgan: I think one of the things that was also agreed on at the Learning Roundtable, with the exception of the government representatives, was that this was going to lead to significant increased costs for districts right across the province. This is the classic example of that.

Without even going into the challenges faced by administrators and superintendents to meet the needs in the community — to meet the growing demand for teacher-librarians; ESL teachers, as touched upon by my friend from Mount Pleasant; councillors; resource teachers; learning assistance teachers.... And the list goes on. If there's to be no cost to the Crown as a result of this legislation, I don't know where the costs are going to come. I assume they are deferred and devolve to school boards.

Is the minister saying that this legislation is going to lead to increased costs for school boards?

Hon. S. Bond: I think school boards should obey the law, and there will be no question of cost.

J. Horgan: Noting the time, I see all my friends with the nice suits and stuff showing up, so I guess we're near the end on this legislation. I find that unfortunate, but that's the nature of the beast. I'll conclude by saying I'm hopeful, with the passage of this legislation, that an era of trust will have been established and that we can start to move ahead in districts and schools across the province with our primary focus on ensuring that children get the best education possible.

This doesn't mean that the 79 percent who are completing are being forgotten, but I think that the 21 percent who are not there yet should be our focus. Quite often they're in the grey area. They are special needs kids and kids falling through the cracks because educators can't meet the demands put on them by districts and by the province.

So although I believe this is a positive first step that will lead us into the next number of years of trying to adjust to the changes and challenges that are put forth in this legislation, particularly in this section, I'm hopeful that the minister and the government will recognize that there are many, many partners that weren't at the round table and that should have been there — parents with special needs challenges and various other people in the community.

Certainly, the Canadian Union of Public Employees should have been there. They are an integral part of the school system, and it's appalling that they haven't been there to this point in time.

[1155]

Sections 12 to 28 inclusive approved.

Title approved.

Hon. S. Bond: I move the committee rise and report the bill complete with amendment.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 11:56 a.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

Reporting of Bills

EDUCATION (LEARNING ENHANCEMENT) STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

Bill 33, Education (Learning Enhancement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, reported complete with amendment.

Mr. Speaker: When shall the bill be considered as reported?

Hon. S. Bond: With leave, now.

Leave granted.

[1200]

Third Reading of Bills

EDUCATION (LEARNING ENHANCEMENT) STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

Bill 33, Education (Learning Enhancement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, read a third time unanimously on a division [See *Votes and Proceedings*] and passed.

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

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

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 12:03 p.m.

PROCEEDINGS IN THE DOUGLAS FIR ROOM

Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF HEALTH (continued)

The House in Committee of Supply (Section A); B. Lekstrom in the chair.

The committee met at 10:09 a.m.

On Vote 35: ministry operations, \$11,767,963,000 (continued).

D. Cubberley: Good morning to everybody.

I don't want to pick up where we left off. In fact, I can't remember exactly where we left off, so we're going to start in a new direction. We had planned originally to do some additional mental health questions, but the critic for mental health needs to speak to a bill in the main House. So he will join us and then go into his segment.

[1010]

I'm simply going to go ahead with some questions about capital projects and, in particular, about St. Paul's. Last fall when we were doing the estimates I asked the minister about the million dollars that was provided to Partnerships B.C. to develop a business case for a P3 project to replace St. Paul's Hospital — or rebuild, whatever the language would be.

The minister said at that time: "The province did support the planning that has been undertaken and the subsequent development of a business case." He also noted: "The planning is still underway so, of course, the business case is still in development." The minister noted that he couldn't speak to what stage in development it might be at that point. He said: "It could be early, middle.... I don't know." Then he said: "That would be a question, potentially, for Partnerships B.C. or the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority"

In thinking about that answer, I'm wondering whether the minister was trying to distance himself from the approving process to develop a business case for a new hospital. Is he saying that once Partnerships B.C. is commissioned to develop a business case, it's no longer a matter for the ministry and the minister to be involved with or to report out on?

Hon. G. Abbott: The member would be incorrect in that supposition. The answer was entirely appropriate for the stage of planning that the St. Paul's redevelopment was at, at that point in time. I'd certainly welcome any questions that the member may have with respect to the continued discussions around St. Paul's. We would answer those fully and correctly, but the answer was entirely appropriate when it was given.

D. Cubberley: Well, just to clarify, the business case has not at this point been completed. So the suggestion that it was a question for Partnerships B.C. or the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority.... I'm assuming that something has changed, because the minister is now saying it would be appropriate to pose those questions to him. So the matter is still with Partnerships B.C., but it is possible to ask questions about the stage of development of the business case.

Hon. G. Abbott: The issue is not with Partnerships B.C. The issue is with the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and Providence Health Care. The issue of the St. Paul's redevelopment is being considered within the context of ten-year capital plans. Those ten-year capital plans involve work by all health authorities. For Vancouver Coastal, certainly the St. Paul's redevelopment

is a very important issue and one that has been given lots of thought and effort to this point.

Clearly, more will be coming yet, but all health authorities have been asked to look, in their ten-year capital plans, at their inventory and what portions of the inventory remain sound and suitable for the 21st century. They've been asked to look at the future direction of health care that they provide, population needs — all of those factors that would go into how that health authority can ensure that their constituents get timely and good-quality health care into the future.

The legacy discussion, the St. Paul's redevelopment discussion, has been a part of that and continues. So we do welcome questions. We don't take the lead on that, but to the extent that we can answer the member's question, we're always delighted to do that.

D. Cubberley: I thank the minister for that. Obviously, the redevelopment of a hospital — a major hospital, especially a redevelopment that could have the potential to move the hospital a substantial distance away from its current location — is something that the host community is going to have an enormous interest in.

[1015]

In fact, generally speaking, discussions about hospital locations and consolidation or deconsolidation of services and the like are very, very important discussions within communities

There's a great appetite in the community that currently hosts St. Paul's to have a public discussion and to have a clearer sense of what process is actually engaged at the present time.

Back in April 2005, just prior to the provincial election, then Finance Minister Colin Hansen said there would "public consultations in the fall" on the fate of St. Paul's. To date, to my knowledge, there have been no public consultations around any aspect of planning a new hospital.

One of the apprehensions out there in the community, and it's a deep apprehension, is that at some point in time some fait accompli will pop out of Partnerships B.C. So I'd really like to ask the minister to speak to the question of public process and how that will unfold.

Hon. G. Abbott: Now I know that Partnerships B.C. is a bit of boogeyman for the members across the floor. I do want to advise the member that Partnerships B.C. plays an advisory role in respect to the potential redevelopment of St. Paul's. They do not lead the process. The process, as I've said now on a couple of occasions, is led by Vancouver Coastal Health and Providence Health Care. They are in the lead in respect of the potential redevelopment of St. Paul's, not Partnerships B.C. Partnerships B.C. is advisory to that process.

The other point I'd like the member to understand is that a few weeks ago, I think it is now, I had the opportunity to sit down with the MLA for Vancouver-Burrard and with the Save St. Paul's Coalition. We had a very good meeting, and I think the members of the coalition departed feeling good about what they heard.

I'm sure that in the community there are a range of views with respect to the redevelopment of St. Paul's.

What we do know is that the St. Paul's infrastructure is about 100 years old, and some of it is looking its age. We know that at some point we are going to have to grapple fairly, honestly and openly with the challenges that a decaying infrastructure plays with St. Paul's.

Part of the challenge for Vancouver Coastal and Providence Health Care has been to try to do some of their work around potential redesign plans and redevelopment plans and to not arouse the public unnecessarily until they had achieved some level of understanding of what would be possible and what would be appropriate.

There's a whole range of issues that come into play. It's not just the acute care portion of the hospital and the emergency room. When one is considering redevelopment, one would consider, for example, the residential care portion, public health aspects, primary care, out-patient hospital needs. All of those factors come into play in terms of what might be defined as a plan for redevelopment of St. Paul's.

It is now my expectation, and it will continue to be my expectation, that there will be a good deal more public discussion around this matter in the weeks and months ahead. I know that Providence and Vancouver Coastal have done a lot of small-group work in terms of discussion of the elements, but I expect that there will be broader-based discussions moving forward as well.

The redevelopment of St. Paul's is a very big project. St. Paul's is one of the largest and busiest hospitals in this province. It's a tremendous amenity, but it is — and I suspect that even the member opposite would acknowledge this — one with some infrastructure challenges which in pretty much every way are a result of its age.

[1020]

D. Cubberley: I can certainly confirm that even the member opposite would acknowledge that St. Paul's is an aging institution and in need of redevelopment. I don't think anybody actually disputes that.

I think it is important, I would concur with the minister, that the process proceed honestly and openly. I think one of the challenges the local community is having right now is that there is absolutely no sense that this process is proceeding honestly and openly. I understand, because I've been involved in local government and know what it's like when local government is quarterbacking an infrastructure project of any kind.

Public process is a very difficult thing, and it's a moving target, because what is a good public process? We'd have a long discussion on that, and I'm not going to try to wrestle that part of it to the ground. I may not be able to define what a good public process is, but I think I can see a problem process or a bad public process.

One of the concerns that the community has about this is that it feels as though the ball has been hidden.

Yes, Providence Health and Partnerships B.C. are having an engaged discussion, and presumably, it's honest and open between them. But the community doesn't feel the openness spreading out into the world. They don't have any clear sense of when the door to openness might be opened.

There's a real concern that we're into a process where an entity which is operating unto itself — with marching orders that people are not clear about, with a \$1 million funding grant to get its work done — is going to pop something out the other end which will be a decision. It will basically be an argument that this is the outcome.

I think one of the things people need to hear is that whenever Partnerships B.C. does release a business case, there will be, before any decision is made, a public process that invites comment in some fashion and allows the communities that are going to be affected by whatever it proposes an opportunity to comment. I would ask the minister to speak to that part of it.

I know that when we canvassed this in the fall last year, the minister said that once the business case is complete, it'll be made public in accordance with all the statutory and other provision around the publication of these things, which sounded very technical. That sounded as though it would be published in some fashion. He actually went so far as to say that it might be an information bulletin or a news release that would make people aware of the fact that the business case was finished. Since that time I certainly have got closer to the issue by talking with people in the community. I know that the local MLA has expressed very strong feelings about this same issue.

I think that it would be very, very useful and that this is a good opportunity to flesh out what a public process might look like once Partnerships B.C. has finished its work, so that a dialogue can begin. I would just ask the minister to speak to how a public process might work.

Hon. G. Abbott: I mentioned earlier to the member that I had had the opportunity to meet, with the support of the MLA for Vancouver-Burrard, with the Save St. Paul's Coalition. The meeting was a very good one. We discussed the apprehensions, which I think the member rightly relays, around a public process so that people are informed about what direction this might take and also have an opportunity to add their voice around what direction this might take.

To that extent, I think the member's comment is fair. However, I would also note that not once during that 30-minute meeting did I hear any mention of Partnerships B.C. That is something which I think the member is injecting as a boogeyman into this discussion and which has not found its place into the discussion that I have had with the coalition.

I know the coalition wants to have an opportunity to look at what's being contemplated, to express their views on what's being contemplated. I'm entirely confident that Vancouver Coastal Health and Providence

will provide that opportunity. I'm entirely confident that they will do that.

[1025]

There is much discussion that needs to occur, not only in the West End but in broader Vancouver, about the redevelopment plan for St. Paul's. There is not just the issue of St. Paul's, its emergency rooms and its acute care facility. There needs to be discussion around the HIV/AIDS portion of that, the Dr. Peter Centre, potential for residential care, potential for ambulatory out-patient hospital or ambulatory services. There needs to be, I think, attention paid to a primary care alternative in that area to a conventional hospital. There are lots of different facets about the potential redevelopment of St. Paul's.

Now, I know the member for Vancouver-Burrard is a relentless advocate for his constituents. I admire and respect that. I'm pleased to work with him and pleased to work with all members of the Legislature in trying to ensure that we have the very best outcome for the citizens of Vancouver, and given that it's a tertiary hospital — at least in some respects — the best outcome for all people in Vancouver.

Part of that will be an open public dialogue or process. I wouldn't pretend to be an expert in respect of how that should be conducted, nor do I think it would be appropriate for me to try to prescribe what should happen there. Obviously, the member has been involved in local government for a long time, just as I have. We know the menu varies across the board from focus groups through to public open houses on these issues, and dialogues and so on. There's a range of those opportunities, and I know that Vancouver Coastal Health and Providence will embrace a model which will work effectively for them to hear the voices of residents of Vancouver in doing that.

D. Cubberley: I don't think it's a matter of Partnerships B.C. being a boogeyman. Partnerships....

Hon. G. Abbott: Oh, come on.

D. Cubberley: No, those were your words.

Partnerships B.C. is an agency of the government. Its mandate is to develop business cases that show that P3s are feasible options for particular projects. That's what it's being paid to do: to develop a business case for the redevelopment of this hospital, which at the other end will in all likelihood — and I have no doubt in my mind at all — suggest that a P3 process is the right way to redevelop the hospital.

We could have an active discussion of how the model of P3s and Partnerships B.C.'s mandate will lead it to that conclusion irrespective of whether it's the best deal or not, because that's what it's there to do. It will do that because it has a model of risk allocation that leads inevitably to that conclusion, especially for a large project. That doesn't make it into a boogeyman. That makes it into an agency of government carrying out a mandate.

What I think is most problematic about the fact that it will indeed come out and recommend that is that embedded in it will be an argument that the hospital should be on a particular site. It will be part of the case that's made. That, of course, is the part which I believe — it's just my personal opinion — is far more problematic for the community than the risk allocation and financing model for the hospital.

That's not to say that's not an issue, but the method of coming up with the business case and the back-end loading of consultation, rather than some front-end loading or during the process or some interactive process, makes it problematic for the community — especially because of what we know about the availability of an alternative site. I would say there's a high likelihood that that P3 model is going to recommend the alternative site.

All I'm really trying to get at is that I think it would be reassuring to the local community, reassuring to members on this side and to some members on your side, as well, if there was a clear commitment to a public process, public consultation, once the business case is completed.

I don't think it should be that hard. I don't think it's an inappropriate question for the Minister of Health, because I believe the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority is an agency of the Ministry of Health.

[1030]

I don't think it should be that hard to give a clear commitment to a public process and a consultation. The Minister of Finance gave it prior to the last election. What I think people need to hear is a commitment from the Minister of Health that it will occur.

Hon. G. Abbott: The member apparently wasn't listening to my previous responses in respect to this question. As I've said very clearly now on at least two occasions, it is fully my expectation that there will be a public process around any plans or business plans that move forward in respect to the redevelopment of St. Paul's. I don't know how much more clearly I can say that than: it's going to happen. Clearly, this is going to be a very substantial process, and of course, there is going to be extensive public consultation with respect to it.

Around the business case and the role of Partnerships B.C. Partnerships B.C. is advisory to Vancouver Coastal Health and advisory to Providence in respect of this potential project. The business case will look to the description of options, to the risks of those options and to the costs of those options. It will relate the options to the population health needs, and it will look for evidence of the strengths and weaknesses for the respective approaches that might be taken on a project that is as large, complex and important as the redevelopment of St. Paul's is apt to be.

St. Paul's is one of our largest and busiest hospitals in this province. It's also a hospital that is about 100 years old and showing its age. Doing nothing is not an option here. I've said very clearly to the member, and I'll say it again: there will be public processes around

this. That's entirely my expectation, and I know those expectations will be met.

D. Cubberley: I thank the minister for the clarity of his statement. I'm sure that will be of some relief to those who are concerned about this. Let me just clarify for the record that no one is suggesting that the hospital is not old and in need of renewal and significant investment. We all understand that that's not an option.

I would like to clarify a couple of things. One of them, which is relatively simple, is when we expect the business case to be finished and made public. The other one is a little bit more complicated, but the answer may be simple as well.

I know in the case of the Abbotsford hospital, and I believe the ambulatory care centre as well, the P3 project undertaken.... In that P3 project the administrative and service functions of the finished hospital are designated for private delivery as part of the entire financing of the creation of the hospital. They're part of the business package that the P3 partner is undertaking. There was, as I understand it, a fairly clean line drawn — although, theoretically, there isn't such a clean line — between the administrative and service side of hospital delivery and management, and the clinical practice side.

What I want to clarify is that the business case that's being developed by Partnerships B.C. for the redevelopment of St. Paul's has the same division. That is, there is no consideration being given to privatizing the clinical practice side and that it will remain under not-for-profit administration and delivery as the business case is being developed.

If the minister could give us a sense of when we'll see it and whether my assumption is correct.

[1035]

Hon. G. Abbott: The business plan will be completed when we're satisfied with it, when all of the partners in the potential redevelopment of St. Paul's are satisfied with it. It is difficult to put a precise time line around the completion of the business plan. Fall might be a reasonable estimate of when that could be completed, but I'm not going to put a precise time line on something that is an evolving process and that involves a number of players. Work on the business plan continues, and it will continue until we're satisfied that we have the right plan.

Beyond that, the member's questions about whether this or that will be publicly or privately delivered.... Again, it would be entirely speculative on my part to guess at what might be recommended by Partnerships B.C. to Providence Health, Vancouver Coastal and the Ministry of Health. I'm not going to speculate on that. There's a range of options there that are part of the business plan discussion, and we will be giving appropriate consideration to what works best for Vancouver Coastal, what works best for the province and what delivers the best value and most effective service to the taxpayers of British Columbia.

D. Cubberley: I thank the minister for the approximate time lines for the business case completion.

Actually, my question wasn't about "this and that." My question was about the line that was drawn between the private delivery within a public not-for-profit hospital of administrative and service functions versus private delivery of clinical practice within the hospital. This is not an insignificant question. It is not about "this and that." Typically, in Canada, in almost all situations I'm aware of, clinical practice has been delivered in a not-for-profit model and administered in a not-for-profit model. Now to the south of us, of course, there's a great deal of for-profit medicine, and hopefully the minister is aware of how that operates — and live discussions about the quality of outcomes....

What I really want to know is whether I heard the minister correctly in saying that it's up to Partnerships B.C., the agent, and Providence Health to determine whether private delivery of clinical care within the new hospital is recommended as part of the business case — that it is within their terms of reference to recommend that there be private administration and private for-profit delivery of clinical care within a hospital in British Columbia.

Hon. G. Abbott: All of the discussion and all of the analysis that is done with respect to St. Paul's redevelopment or with respect to any other health-related project in this province is all conducted recognizing the bounds of the Canada Health Act and recognizing the bounds of the statutory framework as it exists in British Columbia. All of those discussions go on within and respecting the bounds of that statutory framework.

[1040]

Again, I'm not going to speculate on where lines might be drawn around any function in respect of a particular facility or facility redevelopment. It would be speculative and inappropriate on my part to do that. I can only advise the member that all of this discussion occurs within the statutory bounds within which we work in this province and this nation.

D. Cubberley: That's helpful to know. I just wonder if the minister and the ministry are aware of the meta-analyses by Devereaux and associates of for-profit delivery of clinical care in the United States.

Hon. G. Abbott: I'm advised that the ministry is well aware of the document and that there has been careful analysis of it. That does form part of the context in which we work and operate in the province.

D. Cubberley: I take that to mean that we're aware of the conclusions of that document about the relatively less good outcomes, in terms of patient outcomes, from the private, for-profit delivery of clinical care in the United States.

Hon. G. Abbott: We are aware of the document; we are aware of its conclusions. But — just to put some repeated emphasis on this — it is not the only docu-

ment we have analyzed in respect of these issues. The ministry has an extensive library, and extensive work is done to ensure that we learn from the national and international experience in this area of public health care delivery. We've learned from that. We learn from a range of documents that come in our direction.

C. Wyse: Good morning. We left off last night with some questions around addictions, so I have a question in that area. There is a gap between detox and rehabilitation beds that can be as long as three to four weeks, and often is. In the more rural part of British Columbia, a situation that commonly develops is: the individual goes to the detox part of rehabilitation, and then, because there is this period of a wait of three to four weeks, the individual returns to their home community, often returning to the same environment that increases the chance for a relapse.

With that background, there is a desperate need across the province for more treatment beds for people suffering from addiction. My question to the minister: has your government set specific targets for increasing the number of treatment beds for people who are suffering from addictions? I'm looking for targets here.

[1045]

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for his question. I think it's a very, very important question, and I do appreciate him asking it.

In terms of this issue, as the member rightly notes, the delay between detoxification and residential treatment can sometimes be a very important factor in terms of the eventual ability of the individual to meet and overcome the addiction that he or she faces. It is an important point. To the extent that we can, we always try to marry up the availability of appropriate treatments with the needs of the individual.

The member says that sometimes there's a three-to-four-week delay. That may be true in some instances. We know there would be some variation across and within health authorities in respect of time between detox and access to a treatment bed. But I can tell the member that we have made great progress over the past five years in respect to the provision of those treatment beds.

Treatment beds are not always the answer, but they are important. I want to go through both sides of that equation, and I'll try to keep it brief. What we have seen between 2001 and 2005 is an increase in mental health community beds from 4,940 to 6,391. There has been a 1,451-bed lift, or a 29.4-percent increase in the number of mental health community beds.

On the addiction treatment beds side, we have seen an increase from — and the earliest number we have is April 2002 of 874.... We have seen that increase to 1,038 — 164-bed increase, 18.8-percent increase. I believe that number will grow as we see some of the recent investment in crystal meth and other addictions funding come into play as well. So that's good.

In the area of youth beds, total youth addictions treatment beds have increased 75 percent from 90 in

2003 to 158 in 2006. Youth detox beds have increased by 63 percent from 30 in 2003 to 49 in 2006. I believe that number will climb again with the recent investment. Youth residential treatment and support recovery beds have increased by 82 percent from 60 in 2003 to 109 in 2006. There's great work being done in terms of the provision of treatment beds.

However, I think it is important to note there is a range of effective interventions that don't rely on treatment beds. In some cases, I think crystal meth may be one of these, but I'm not an expert in this area. I know we have folks on staff who are.

A treatment bed is not always the most effective option for someone who is dealing with drug addiction issues. There are alternatives like daytox, and there are some very good programs. Richmond has probably one of the best daytox programs in the province today for that.

There are home-based supports that can be put in place to help, particularly young people who may be dealing with a dysfunction in the home. If that's the core of the problem, then we've got different issues. But if it's a matter of working with parents to provide a range of support that we can in a home-based situation, then those can be very effective in some instances.

[1050]

Group supports can be enormously important. I guess the oldest and best example of group support is Alcoholics Anonymous, who have been doing a remarkable job for very many decades around this important issue.

We are always looking to build our best-practices understanding of the different addictions issues, because they're not the same, and the prescribed pattern of treatment is not always the same either. There may be an enormous divergence between, for example, someone who's struggling with an alcohol addiction versus someone who is struggling with a heroin addiction or a crystal meth addiction or any of the other range of potential addictions that one might confront.

We have to continue to build our best practices around those treatment regimes that have proven effective for targeted groups, and we do learn. We learn every day from what happens in this province. We learn every day from what's happening internationally around these new and sometimes very effective treatment options.

Senator Kirby, who we've discussed earlier in these estimates, I think has some excellent ideas in respect of this, out of his work with the Senate committee, and we do look forward to working with him.

We look forward to working with the health authorities, PHSA, around these issues, because we are building benchmarks in this area, as well, trying to identify what is the best time range in terms of ensuring that people get the treatment that they need.

There are a number of different initiatives underway in different parts of the province. I can go through those for the member — for example, Northern Health is doing some great stuff — but I won't go into detail.

Perhaps my answer has been sufficient at this point, and I'll turn it back to the member.

C. Wyse: The answer may have been specific, but I would have to root around in my mind to find out what the answer was specific to. I don't want to put words in the minister's mouth, but my question was: has the government set specific targets for increasing the number of treatment beds for people who are suffering from addictions? I would like an answer to that question, because I wouldn't want to interpret what the minister told me.

Hon. G. Abbott: We have not set targets, because we are working with the experts provincially, nationally and internationally to determine what the appropriate benchmarks would be for different forms of addictions treatments.

C. Wyse: I apologize here, because I got out of step. Normally, I've given the minister a bit of a broad area of where my questions were coming from. It is fully my intention to provide the minister opportunities, in some of my questions, for him to expand upon programs that I would like to get the update on, so that would be one of those questions.

I want to be very efficient in supporting improvements up here jointly in the system, so when I throw out these questions, I don't have a whole bunch of time. With that, and to provide that opportunity, my question to the minister is: can you give an update on the new mental health facility underway at B.C. Children's and Women's?

[1055]

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for his question. I do so often feel time closing in around me as well, so I can appreciate the tension it might produce in the member's life.

The project at B.C. Children's and Women's is an important one. It was launched in 2004, and the project will provide for reuse of the vacant Jean Matheson building. I understand that to be a heritage building. That's why it wasn't replaced. It will, however, be extensively redone, and effectively, it will be a new building.

The new facility will provide 32 in-patient beds in single bedrooms with a capacity to expand to 42 beds. Construction commenced in April 2005; completion is estimated for mid-2006. PHSA is providing \$13 million, and the B.C. Children's Hospital Foundation — whose tie I might note I'm proudly wearing here today — is contributing \$6 million, for a total project cost of \$19 million.

C. Wyse: Thank you, and I'm very appreciative of the information. If the minister would explain what the focus and the capacity of the program will be, and if he could include in his answer: will it accept emergency patients or just those who have prearranged appointments for assessment or other treatments? If I could leave those combined questions with the minister.

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for his important question. The new facility will offer a full range of mental health assessment and treatment for patients and family. These will include in-patient services and ambulatory clinics supporting children, adolescents and women with serious mental health challenges.

The member asked if the centre will accommodate emergencies. The answer essentially is yes, under some conditions. What the health authorities always try to do, of course, is to deal with emergencies within their own jurisdiction. But where that is not possible, there is provision for transfer of the patient to the tertiary facility at Children's.

We are, I think it's fair to say, building far better capacity across the health authorities to manage some of these issues within the home region. That's always the preferred scenario, because of course, then family has the opportunity to visit more readily with the young patient and, hopefully, we can keep a family united without having to go to considerable expense and disruption of working lives and others to manage these unfortunate situations.

A good example is the adolescent psychiatric centre that's been added in Kelowna. That would prevent residents of the interior Thompson area from the necessity of having to access that facility at Children's.

[1100]

C. Wyse: I'm moving into an area around youth. I'll give you the preamble why I'm addressing the minister here. The regional health authorities have funded phase one of the child and youth mental health plan. The regional plan didn't include any increase in funding for the contracted agencies. Some of those agencies have not had an increase in 20 years. Those same agencies are reporting sharp increases in the caseload.

I've brought the questions here because it's the regional health authority that is dealing with the item. I have four or five questions around this topic. How much funding is attached to the province's child and youth mental health plan?

Hon. G. Abbott: What the member is generally asking about, we think, is the purview of the Ministry of Children and Family Development. What we provide from the Ministry of Health is physician services, acute care services at times, but I'm not sure we have the overall purview with respect to the detailed question the member is asking about the relationship with the providers.

C. Wyse: I know that the minister and his staff understand the frustrations that do develop around fragmentation. As I mentioned, my questions were here because it was my impression that health authorities were under the responsibility of this ministry.

[J. Yap in the chair.]

I'm going to try one more question on this area. If that premise is true, then how is the province holding

the health authorities accountable for implementing this particular program?

Hon. G. Abbott: There may be a little confusion on the member's part in terms of which authorities we're talking about. Clearly, the regional health authorities and the Provincial Health Services Authority are within the purview of this ministry and are appropriate subjects for debate within the context of the estimates of this ministry.

The child and youth mental health issues are within the purview of the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Members may remember that early in our current term of office there was some discussion around where appropriately that responsibility should reside. It was concluded that it would reside with Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Within the framework of MCFD, I understand them to be developing regional authorities that will be working on child and youth issues, among them mental health issues. But those regional authorities are in no way responsible to the Ministry of Health, nor are they a creation of the Ministry of Health. They are the children, if you like, of the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

[1105]

There are occasions when some aspects of the work that is being done in the area of child and youth mental health might be contracted to a health authority, but all of the policy development, all of the work around child and youth mental health that resides with those regional authorities — newly created authorities — is something that would have to be canvassed in the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

C. Wyse: There's no doubt for you that there may be some confusion where the questions lie, and I appreciate the minister's tolerance around that. Likewise, there have been numerous occasions in which youth in youth facilities have been referred to in the discussion and answers I've received back on addictions. Is that in Kelowna, too? Is the youth centre in addictions?

I'm going to leave that area, and I'm going to move to another, broader issue so that the minister has a heads-up for it. Recently I was provided information from a mental advocacy group over in the West Kootenays area with regards to information they provided for me. I have no reason to doubt the information that in the last five years there have been 49 deaths of people with mental illness in that part of the province as a result of suicides, misadventures and accidents. I believe I have forwarded, in written correspondence, that information on to your office.

The point that I'm getting to here is: setting up a quantifiable reduction of these types of situations that exist around the province seems to have merit to it, in the sense that the plan is based upon having quantifiable results built in so that we can measure to see the effect of the programs that are there. There also seems to be merit in that it would encourage initiatives and the responsibility of care providers so that they would

act on the opportunities to reduce each consumer's risk of harm.

The coroner's office could play a key role in this situation by coordinating a system of investigation, at a standardized level, of every death of a mental health consumer. Very recently the government, in their wisdom, directed the coroner to track and report on deaths in the logging industry, so it wouldn't be setting a precedent, if you like.

My question is: what plans does your ministry have on addressing the issues of an apparently larger number of people with mental illnesses that are dying prematurely, regardless of what the cause is?

[1110]

Hon. G. Abbott: I hope this information is useful to the member. We do track suicide rates in this province very carefully and have been tracking them, at least on the graphs we have here, since 1994 through to 2004.

What we see from that graphing is relative stability overall and relative stability, as well, based on the health authority. There have been some modest reductions in some authorities, and I'll go into that for a moment.

Just for the information of the member. Tracking from 1994 through to 2004 — the 1994 figure is 492 — we see a gradual and consistent rise in that through 1998, when we hit a peak of 558. It then declines on a steady basis through till 2001, when it hits 457. It climbs one year to 508, then drops again the following year to 459 and then up in 2004 to 495.

Relative stability. In fact, I guess if one looks at the declines since 1997, it's a gradual decline over time. The other important stat here — and this is all collected by Vital Statistics — is the rate per 100,000 of B.C. population.

For Interior Health: in 1994 it was 17 suicides per 100,000. It peaked in 1997, as one might expect, at 18 and is currently at 14 per 100,000. That is 2004. In Fraser: 11 per 100,000. Again over time we see the rate today at nine per 100,000 — again 2004. Vancouver Coastal: 12 in 1994, peaking in 1997 at 14 and now at ten per 100,000. Vancouver Island: 15 per 100,000 in 1994, peaking in 1996 at 16 per 100,000 and in 2004 at 13 per 100,000. Northern: 15 in 1994, peaking in 1999 at 15 and today, or 2004, at 14. When you aggregate those, you end up with the numbers I talked about initially. That's useful.

In terms of knowing how many of those suicides would have been people with a mental illness, we don't know that precisely. But one could probably hypothesize with some considerable confidence that a considerable number of them would have been affected by a mental disorder. Typically, if one is feeling badly enough about circumstances to take one's life, there are obviously some serious issues going on. So that can be a challenge.

In terms of the possibility of expanding the coroner's role in some way, the coroner's office is under the purview of the Solicitor General. While I'm glad to pass along the views of the member to the Solicitor General, it would probably be inappropriate, given that I don't have a daily purview over this area, to make a definitive comment.

[1115]

C. Wyse: I thank the minister. I appreciate the information provided on suicides, but I would also mention that this group knows the area, had identified that there were 49 people with mental illness, and they included misadventure as well as accidents in there. If there happen to be other venues for advocacy or whatever, that information may be able to be shared and pursued so that some of the angst around this particular area would be addressed.

I have time for a limited number of questions that I've worked out with my colleague, so I'm going to give the minister a multi-ask question around Riverview, because I would like an update on that particular project. In other venues I have commended the government for the redeployment of these services in the tertiary provision of care for the seriously and chronically mentally ill. They are to be recognized.

What I would request of the minister is that he provide me with an update on the plan. I am familiar with the plan. Contained within that question, I would also like a response from the minister on what is being done to ensure that the health authorities are using the same per diem provided to them by the province when they develop their beds — so an update and then an answer around the monitoring of the expenditure of funds by the health authorities and the implementation.

Hon. G. Abbott: The staff is putting together a better answer around Riverview, so what I'll do, just in the interests of time here, is provide a response around the suicide issue, kind of put that to bed, and then I'll sit down again. The hon. member doesn't have to get up; we're still working on the Riverview piece — if that's okay, hon. Chair.

In terms of the suicide number, we don't necessarily quarrel with the number the member brought forward from the West Kootenays. Depending on how that information was aggregated by the group that provided the member with the information, if it was over a period of some years, it might well be 49 over five. That might well be the case, but what I can tell the member is that Vital Stats actually specifically focuses on this and keeps specific records on this. That information is then categorized by health authorities as well.

I suspect that the numbers are probably correct in both cases. Suicide has long been an issue here, as the member knows, and obviously, we always want to build our regime of mental health supports and addiction supports such that we minimize the suicide rate. I'm pleased that generally it seems to be on a declining trend, but one always looks for it to be even lower. So I appreciate that.

I will consult with my staff now on the Riverview redevelopment and then get up and respond to that, if I could, hon. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

[1120]

Hon. G. Abbott: I suspect that with this answer I might regrettably build again on my reputation for having overly long answers. The member....

C. Wyse: You can't build on it.

[1125]

Hon. G. Abbott: I've reached the pinnacle of...

Interjections.

Hon. G. Abbott: ...elaboration. Yeah well, that's entirely possible. But one always hopes there's room for continued improvement, and I'll see what I can do — although, some might not characterize it as improvement, either.

This is a very important question, and I'm glad the member asked it. It's important not only from a detail perspective but also, I think, from a thematic perspective around the public's understanding of mental illness and society's acceptance of mental illness as an illness that — like a physiological illness — needs to be recognized and managed and treated respectfully.

In May 2002 the government committed \$138 million to build modern, home-like facilities to replace some of the outdated institutional buildings at Riverview. I've visited Riverview, and I know the member has, and some of the buildings are clearly long past their date for replacement. As a result, the health authorities are building a range of new tertiary and specialized residential treatment facilities in communities across the province. I won't go through those in detail, but they're wonderful facilities, and again, I know the member has visited a number of them.

The new facilities provide supportive environments that are closer to home — very important — and maintain important ties to the community, making rehabilitation and reintegration easier. It's fair to say that the regional health authorities are at different stages in their implementation. Work has tended to concentrate on building capacity in those areas that have not traditionally had those facilities. For a long time — I suppose, historically, a hundred years, at least — Riverview was always the place where mental patients were sent and housed and kept, but the aim of this devolution project or devolvement project is to move away from that historical model.

A lot of the attention has been on building regional facilities in Interior Health, Northern Health, and on Vancouver Island. Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and Fraser Health Authority have been carrying out extensive planning work and have had some successes as well, but again, the Riverview facilities have been in their area historically. I also want to note that there are some particular challenges in moving forward for Vancouver Coastal and Fraser.

As of November 2005 a total of 372 patients have been committed or transferred: 76 to tertiary acute, 126 to tertiary rehabilitation and 170 to specialized residential beds. The breakdown of the health authorities' committed or transferred beds are as follows: IHA, 139 of their 150-bed allocation, so they're pretty much there; Fraser Health, 63 of their 267-bed allocation; Vancouver Coastal, zero of their 209-bed allocation; VIHA, 80 of their 186-bed allocation; and Northern Health, 65 of their 79, so they're very, very close to completion there.

I should also note the very important transfer of the neuropsychiatry program. That program is consolidating 25 neuropsychiatry beds at Riverview and ten neuropsychiatry beds at UBC Hospital. The 25-bed neuropsychiatry component is being transferred to the new 44-bed facility next to Royal Inland Hospital, called the Hillside Centre, scheduled to open in Kamloops in February-March 2006. In fact, it has opened. I had the great honour of being part of the opening of it, and I'm very pleased with that.

There are examples of people who have left Riverview, gone to specialized regional facilities and then improved — I'm happy to say — to such an extent that they have moved to supported housing in their communities. So there are some very real, human success stories out there that I think we can all be very, very proud of in this area.

In terms of Vancouver Coastal and Fraser and some of the challenges they face, the member rightly pointed to the excellent work that Senator Kirby and the Senate committee had done around mental health, in particular their acknowledgment of some of the denial that sometimes occurs in society in respect to the reality of mental illness.

The member again correctly pointed out that a mental illness is very common in our society, yet it is often remarkably difficult to get people to accept or embrace mental health facilities in the neighbourhoods in which they live. That is a challenge, and that has been a particular challenge for Fraser and for Vancouver Coastal as they have tried to move ahead with the Riverview devolvement.

I hope the work that Senator Kirby is doing, some of the work that our ministry is doing and government is doing and others are doing, and that the non-profits and advocacy organizations are doing will help to move the public's understanding and support for mental health facilities. It has been a very big challenge in our urban areas to have that acceptance of those kinds of facilities.

Interjection.

The Chair: Member, through the Chair, please.

C. Wyse: Certainly.

Hon. G. Abbott: The per diems follow the patient. If, for example, a patient moves from Riverview to the new Hillside Centre at Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops, the per diem would follow the patient. Those per diems are the product of a negotiation between Riverview, PHSA and the ministry.

C. Wyse: I was requesting what controls were in place to ensure that the funds actually went to those programs. So I will leave that....

[The bells were rung.]

The Chair: Division has been called in the House. We will recess for ten minutes.

The committee recessed from 11:29 a.m. to 11:38 a.m.

[J. Yap in the chair.]

On Vote 35 (*continued*).

Hon. G. Abbott: Just to be even more definitive than I was in the last answer, in every case, if a River-view patient moves to a facility in a health authority, the funding goes with that patient. If the patient, in happy circumstances, is able to improve sufficiently that they are able to move into supportive housing or back into the community, the funding would either go with them, or in some cases where all the issues were resolved, the funds would move into the mental health system.

C. Wyse: Just before I turn it over to my colleague from Saanich South, I would like to acknowledge the time that both the minister and his staff have spent.

I would just leave here on record the case of Peter Desenso of Riverview that is apparently being looked at for being moved against his wish as well as the family's wish. The minister's office and the minister have been advised of such, but I do wish to leave that on record because it is coming up for the end of the month.

Once more I thank the minister, and I turn it over to my colleague from Saanich South.

[1140]

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for his very constructive questions.

Just to clarify around the issue of the patient transfer, the deputy has been apprised of that issue and is looking into the case. So that's appropriate.

In response to the member's question earlier in these estimates about Hampton Court in Vancouver, Vancouver Coastal Health gave termination notice to Hampton Court in January of 2006 that the service contract would expire January 31, 2007. Hampton Court is a 16-bed, and outdated, facility. The closure of Hampton Court is part of the VCHA's overall mental health housing redesign plan, which involves reallocation of operating funds from older licensed care facilities with inadequate physical space to support independent living options for people with mental health illness. Hampton Court meets the criteria for closure because it's an older facility with shared rooms, limited private space for residents, and the style of the building does not provide a home-like setting.

VCHA is working closely with the residents and their family members to find new, more appropriate space. We're confident, based on best practices and past success, that the move to more appropriate facilities will be successful.

D. Cubberley: I would like to, in the small amount of time between now and noon, venture some questions on end-of-life palliative care. This is an area

which is cause for a lot of concern on many people's part. I venture to say there's been renewed focus on how it's being delivered in British Columbia in light of high-profile cases like those of Fanny Albo and George Cook.

But there is an even broader focus, I think, although probably more private and less expressed, amongst the baby-boomers generally, because they are dealing with it in relation to parents or have already, which is my case. Some, unfortunately, are beginning to deal with it in relation to spouses and close friends.

Of course, it's difficult to deal with. It's something which is not as much of a public discussion as it perhaps should be, anywhere in Canada.

There is a feeling out there amongst people that there is a bit of a disconnect between acute care and palliative care within the hospital sector. There is a similar disconnect — perhaps not the same; I don't pretend to understand it well enough — between hospital-based care and community-based care, and how the system goes about ensuring there is adequate access, good access, to palliative care nursing skills — in particular, for people who need them in order to deal with dying within their family and in order to achieve what the palliative care advocates call "a good death."

I want to ask a question about B.C. hospitals. Let me frame it this way. My question is: does the hospital sector across health authorities have a set of protocols for end-of-life care that kick in when patients are diagnosed as dying? Are those protocols, if they are in place, uniform across the system? Are they being well-observed by staff in the opinion of the ministry? And are there training programs in place to ensure that emergency treatment or acute care treatment links into palliative care at an appropriate point?

[1145]

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for his question. It is an important one. Probably the member and I are of comparable ages. He may take exception to that. I'm not sure. I suspect....

D. Cubberley: I'm complimented, if you think I'm your age. I'm highly complimented. A young man like you.

Hon. G. Abbott: This has become far too much of a love-in here, I think, hon. Chair.

The issues are important ones, and they're important ones for every generation. But I think for those of us who are in our 50s or who are part of that broad group called the baby-boomers, these are issues that if we haven't experienced them now, we're going to be experiencing them very soon.

I do think, further to the member's question, that there is a shift occurring in society around what are often very difficult and complex end-of-life issues. I think that shift is occurring. Is it occurring quickly enough? I'm not sure on that point. I guess the fact that right now we have what is now an exposure bill around the end-of-life issue of advanced care directives

is interesting, and I'll look forward to hearing what kind of submissions are made by the public.

I expect we'll see a range of views. The B.C. Hospice Association, for example, supports it, but we know there are other advocates who oppose it, so we look forward to that. There has been lots of work done in this area of palliative care, and much of it, I think, is bearing fruit now and will bear even more fruit in the future.

There is a provincial framework for end-of-life care. In October of 2001 a panel of experts were asked to examine how the range of home and community care services can serve terminally ill patients. They produced out of those discussions a discussion paper. Out of that came ministry instructions to the health authorities regarding the development of their health service redesign plans for '05-06 through '07-08, which included a requirement to report on end-of-life care actions consistent with the draft framework. So there's a good deal of work being done.

The member asked about training programs, and yes, there are, particularly in the nursing area. There are specific training programs that produce clinical nursing specialists in the area of palliative care, and provided they are used appropriately, they can be very useful in these situations.

[1150]

We know that, among the public, most people would prefer to die in a situation other than an acute care hospital. It is not well suited, typically, for that. We need to build that resource outside of hospitals. We are making some progress in respect of that on the palliative side. We've moved from 81 units to 135 units now. It's an increase, but there's clearly more that needs to be done. You know, every day we are hearing from advocates for better palliative care, and I support those advocates. I think there's lots of work that needs to be done in that area.

As well, the use of palliative drugs is up substantially from four million to 14 million today. We have a GP advisory committee on guidelines for this area of public policy. So there's lots of work being done. I think we are seeing a very fundamental shift in terms of the public's understanding and appreciation of these issues, but we've got a way to go. I think the member's questions were right on the mark in terms of those issues.

The Chair: Member, the committee needs to rise and report progress.

D. Cubberley: Can I ask one brief question? Perhaps what we can do is agree to continue this, because it is important.

My question is around protocols and the linkage between the hospital and the community hospice sector. Is it up to each individual hospital, each doctor or each health region to institute a referral protocol for dying patients to community-based palliative care services? I ask this question because I became aware that there is no referral protocol in Prince George despite repeated requests by the local hospice, and one result of that is that it operates at 50 percent of capacity. Fifty percent of the beds it has are in use. So just to ask that question about a protocol of referral....

Hon. G. Abbott: It's a very important question, and over the lunch period we will try to get a comprehensive answer for the member. But noting the hour, I move the committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 11:52 a.m.

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