



Second Session, 38th Parliament

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS
(HANSARD)

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON

FINANCE AND
GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Victoria

Tuesday, March 7, 2006

Issue No. 19

BLAIR LEKSTROM, MLA, CHAIR

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**SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

Victoria
Tuesday, March 7, 2006

- Chair:* * Blair Lekstrom (Peace River South L)
- Deputy Chair:* * Maurine Karagianis (Esquimalt-Metchosin NDP)
- Members:*
- * Harry Bloy (Burquitlam L)
 - * Dave S. Hayer (Surrey-Tynehead L)
 - * Gordon Hogg (Surrey-White Rock L)
 - * Richard T. Lee (Burnaby North L)
 - * John Yap (Richmond-Steveston L)
 - * Leonard Krog (Nanaimo NDP)
 - Jenny Wai Ching Kwan (Vancouver-Mount Pleasant NDP)
 - * Nicholas Simons (Powell River-Sunshine Coast NDP)

**denotes member present*

Clerk: Kate Ryan-Lloyd

Committee Staff: Jonathan Fershau (Committee Research Analyst)

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MINUTES

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES



Tuesday, March 7, 2006
8:40 a.m.
Douglas Fir Committee Room
Parliament Buildings, Victoria

Present: Blair Lekstrom, MLA (Chair); Maurine Karagianis, MLA (Deputy Chair); Harry Bloy, MLA; Dave S. Hayer, MLA; Gordon Hogg, MLA; Leonard Krog, MLA; Richard T. Lee, MLA; Nicholas Simons, MLA; John Yap, MLA

Unavoidably Absent: Jenny Wai Ching Kwan, MLA

1. As there was not yet a Chair elected, the Clerk called the meeting to order at 8:41 a.m.
2. **Resolved**, that Blair Lekstrom be elected Chair of the Committee. (John Yap, MLA)
3. **Resolved**, that Maurine Karagianis be elected as Deputy Chair of the Committee. (Leonard Krog, MLA)
4. **Resolved**, that a sub-committee on administration and procedure, comprised of the Chair, the Deputy Chair and John Yap, MLA be appointed to assist the committee with the review of the 2005 Budget Consultation process and planning for the 2006 Budget Consultation process. (Dave S. Hayer, MLA)
5. The Committee briefly discussed 2006 Budget Consultation process.
6. **Resolved**, that the Committee do now adjourn. (Dave S. Hayer)
7. The Committee adjourned at 8:56 a.m.

Blair Lekstrom, MLA
Chair

Kate Ryan-Lloyd
Clerk Assistant and
Committee Clerk

TUESDAY, MARCH 7, 2006

The committee met at 8:41 a.m.

Election of Chair and Deputy Chair

K. Ryan-Lloyd (Clerk Assistant and Committee Clerk): Good morning, everyone. We'll begin our meeting this morning.

As this is the first meeting of the Finance Committee for the second session and there has not yet been a Chair elected to serve this committee, I hereby open the floor for nominations.

J. Yap: I nominate Blair Lekstrom.

K. Ryan-Lloyd (Committee Clerk): Mr. Lekstrom, would you accept nomination?

B. Lekstrom (Convener): I would, thank you.

K. Ryan-Lloyd (Committee Clerk): Are there any further nominations? Any further nominations? Any further nominations? Seeing none, I'll put the question on the motion.

Motion approved.

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Well, good morning, everyone, and thank you for the support you've shown me in chairing this committee. It is certainly nice to be back.

I think we have done an incredible job over the past year with the work that we've done. I will comment on that further, but moving along, today's meeting will be relatively short. We have a couple of items we have to go over to begin the work of our committee for this year.

Next on our agenda is the election of a Deputy Chair. At this time I will open the floor for nominations.

L. Krog: I would be delighted to nominate the member for Esquimalt-Metchosin, Maurine Karagianis.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Any further nominations? A second time. A third and final time for nominations. Hearing none, I will ask Maurine: do you accept the nomination?

M. Karagianis: I do, and thank you very much for your confidence.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): With that, I will put the question to the members.

Motion approved.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Congratulations, Maurine.

G. Hogg: Both of them interpret it as confidence, as opposed to: "Who wants to do that kind of thing?"

B. Lekstrom (Chair): After all we went through last time, Maurine, I wasn't sure they would.

Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure

B. Lekstrom (Chair): What I thought we would do, again, is reconstitute the subcommittee that we had, which was Maurine, me and John Yap. We dealt with some issues such as agendas and procedures — some issues we're going to put together to bring back to the committee. I would look for a motion to that effect.

Moved by Dave, seconded by Richard. Any discussion? Seeing none, I will call the question.

Motion approved.

Work of the Committee

B. Lekstrom (Chair): What we will do this year, I think... We ended last year, and I was very happy with the outcome. I think we put together a very good report. I was under no illusion as the Chair — as were, I'm sure, each and every one of you — that every one of our recommendations could be acted upon in the context of the budget, but a good number of them were. I think that really says a lot about the people that came to present to our committee.

It's our job to go out and listen to British Columbians and, through the dialogue that we have, to put forward recommendations. I was quite happy to see the inclusion of roughly six direct recommendations included in the budget. Again this year I think we're going to go out and probably expand our tour significantly so that we can reach all areas of this province, put forward a report that I think we can all be proud of and continue to move things forward.

We also made a commitment as a committee that we would get together and review the process that we went through last year. What worked? What didn't work? How can we improve it? Certainly, there were a number of items that we spoke about as a committee that we thought we could build upon to make it even better.

I've had a number of calls from people that participated in the process last year thanking the committee. I wanted to share that with you. Because many people, I think... Human nature is: "Are they coming out just to voice their opinion and give us ideas, not to see them carried through on?" It was nice as the Chair to be able to pass on their thanks to each and every one of you.

[0845]

The commitment we made was that we would put these forward and work to have them included in the budget. As well, I thank the Minister of Finance for taking our report and using it as a tool in the development of this year's budget.

What I thought we would do after this meeting is that I would call the subcommittee together to put forward a meeting schedule. I don't think it will take a great deal of meetings to start off, to bring back some ideas. I would like each and every one of you to put

your minds to what you thought worked and what didn't work, and we will build upon that. If it's acceptable to the committee, the subcommittee will be putting forward an agenda and a time frame for scheduled meetings. We'll begin the process.

As well, I thought it was important to reconstitute our committee for the simple fact that statutory officers have the ability, upon their request, to come before our committee at any time. I believe there's a process underway right now with the Auditor General, for example, in British Columbia — whether we will have a new Auditor General in the near future. If there is, then what will happen is that I would certainly encourage him or her to come before our committee and give us his or her views as to the direction he or she would see the office taking and where their plan is at today.

With that, I am going to move on to any other business to be brought before the committee today. I'll begin with Maurine.

M. Karagianis (Deputy Chair): I think, for all committee members to start turning their minds to how we might approach the consultation process this year.... I know that a number of us, including Jonathan, struggled with how we actually collated information out of the last survey and consultation questionnaire that we had.

I think it's important that we all spend some time thinking about how we could make that process work better. I spoke with Jonathan just at the beginning of the meeting here, as well, to get input on how we might make recommendations to the Minister of Finance on designing a questionnaire that would give us better information, be easier to collate and perhaps be easier for British Columbians to participate in.

I would hope that everybody can think back over what they felt was lacking from the process, what they liked about the previous process and questionnaire, and maybe start putting those ideas together for us to discuss at length. I'd be happy to encourage everyone to kind of pass those ideas around by e-mail, as well, so that we all have a chance to perhaps spark our own memory and think about what each of us has observed in that process. Let's make it a lot easier and better for the next round of consultations.

L. Krog: With respect to item four, the schedule of meetings, I would ask the subcommittee, given that it appears we'll be doing this for another two or three years — maybe not the same membership — to give serious consideration to trying to get to some of the smaller communities. I well appreciate that the big smoke, Vancouver, draws most of us, and it's all well and good. But I would really like to hear from some of the communities that don't often see anyone other than their own MLA. I realize that there's a time constraint and budgetary constraints, etc., but we're certainly not under the same constraints as we were last fall with the very limited period in which to conduct these hearings.

I think it's really important. I say that in the full hope that it will help combat some of the cynicism about government in general.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): That is a valuable point. I think most people recognize that our time frame was so tight during the last tour. This year it would be my intent, certainly, as the Chair — and I'm sure each of you — to get to as many places as we can. There are some major centres that we certainly have to appear in, but getting out to rural British Columbia and not always the largest centres is, I think, a valuable way to do it.

D. Hayer: You know, I really enjoyed touring the small communities all over British Columbia over the last three or four years that I've been on the Finance Committee. At the same time, we can't forget the major cities which grow by 1,000 people per month — bigger than some of those cities are in a lifetime, they grow every month — like the city of Surrey. They had told me last time that they would like to see the committee come over there. It's not just Surrey; it's other cities close by there. I want to advise the committee to keep an open mind on that this time, so we don't have to re-juggle at the end of the day. Otherwise, it takes so long to get people to Vancouver because they're stuck in traffic over the Port Mann Bridge.

[0850]

H. Bloy: Just for consideration for the committee, how long do you plan on doing the tour? Are you going to plan on doing it longer so that when we're in some of the areas, there may be an opportunity to visit an industry or something while we're there?

B. Lekstrom (Chair): We will definitely look at that — the ability not only to go into a small community and meet with the people through the prebudget consultation process, but very much like what you've said. If we have the opportunity as a committee to go out and look at what really is important to that community — whether it be industry, whether it be a performing arts centre or whatever — I think that would be valuable for our committee as well.

G. Hogg: If we as a committee really were as good as you said we were at the beginning, then certainly much of the credit must go to Jonathan and Kate and the Hansard people who followed us around and did all of that work.

Interjections.

G. Hogg: I wasn't thinking of an ovation for it. I trust that you will, as a committee, engage them in your discussions, based on their experiences, to look at how we can better plan for and respond to the needs of the people of British Columbia over the next term of our activities.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Very much so. I've had a brief conversation with Kate already. Their input is very

valuable. We, as elected people, see it from one perspective. Certainly, Hansard and our staff see it from another. I think we can build upon each other's ideas.

G. Hogg: Perhaps some of the people that appeared before us, if somebody could take the time to contact a few of them and ask them whether or not the procedures and the way they were notified.... We could get some feedback from those people maybe from last year or even going back a few years — people who appeared or chose not to. We may be able to benefit from how they heard about it, how they were engaged in it as part of the process as well.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you. That's a very good idea.

Are there any other issues to be brought before our meeting this morning?

J. Yap: It's great to back with a wonderful group of people to do the important work of this committee.

G. Hogg: Are you okay?

J. Yap: I'm perfect, thank you.

The suggestion to get some postmortem feedback. Should all of us as members collect our thoughts and perhaps send them to Kate, as a suggestion?

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Yes. I was going to comment on that. I think that as a subcommittee we will get together, but if each member can put their thoughts towards what they thought worked.... And let's talk about what worked as well as what can be improved upon. If we can get those ideas to Kate, we will put those together for the subcommittee. We'll review them, and then we will certainly bring back our discussion paper for the full committee.

N. Simons: I'm just a little concerned if we start identifying particular groups in the communities we visit — to single them out. I don't know. I think the perception of fairness and equality of access is important for this committee. If we were to choose an industry, as my friend opposite said, I think that it might have some negative impact on that appearance of fairness. But it's not a huge issue, I suppose.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Referring to the tour you mean, Nicholas? When we go out?

N. Simons: Yes.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): I know that in the past it has worked, and there has been some very positive feedback. It would be very much, I think, community-based if the visit goes out — what's important to that community or that region. Certainly, it would not be the intent of this committee to take it on a political angle to say gosh, we're going to go here or there. That's my intent as the Chair, and we'll definitely stick to that.

N. Simons: Okay.

R. Lee: In the past, the translation of the questionnaire into other languages actually is given very little time for the committee to respond. I think if you can give it more time so that we can collect more questionnaires before the deadline.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): I think we'll be very able to do that this year with the expanded time frame, with the committee starting today and working through up until we have to report out, which will probably be mid-November of this coming year. The time was not in our favour last time. This time it is, and we'll be able to certainly build upon that.

[0855]

Just before we close, again, I want to emphasize the importance of this committee's role with our statutory officers. We have always indicated upon their presentations that we are here and are open at any time throughout the year should they have questions of our committee, should they have issues they want to bring back before us — budget issues, concerns or issues that have arisen since the last time they've met and discussion with the Finance Committee is needed.

I would encourage all of our statutory officers to make sure they know that that invitation is open to them for this committee. We look forward, certainly, to meeting with them when they are coming to present their annual plans and annual budgets, if not sooner.

With that, I would look for a motion to adjourn.

We stand adjourned. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 8:56 a.m.

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