



Second Session, 38th Parliament

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS
(HANSARD)

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

Victoria

Friday, November 10, 2006

Issue No. 42

BLAIR LEKSTROM, MLA, CHAIR

ISSN 1499-416X

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

Victoria
Friday, November 10, 2006

- Chair:* * Blair Lekstrom (Peace River South L)
- Deputy Chair:* * Bruce Ralston (Surrey-Whalley NDP)
- Members:*
- * Iain Black (Port Moody-Westwood L)
 - * Harry Bloy (Burquitlam L)
 - * Randy Hawes (Maple Ridge-Mission L)
 - * Dave S. Hayer (Surrey-Tynehead L)
 - * Richard T. Lee (Burnaby North L)
 - John Horgan (Malahat-Juan de Fuca NDP)
 - * Jenny Wai Ching Kwan (Vancouver-Mount Pleasant NDP)
 - * Bob Simpson (Cariboo North NDP)

**denotes member present*

Clerk: Kate Ryan-Lloyd

Committee Staff: Jonathan Fershau (Committee Research Analyst)
Mary Storzer (Committee Researcher)

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MINUTES

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES



Friday, November 10, 2006
8 a.m.
Douglas Fir Committee Room
Parliament Buildings, Victoria

Present: Blair Lekstrom, MLA (Chair); Bruce Ralston, MLA (Deputy Chair); Iain Black, MLA; Harry Bloy, MLA; Randy Hawes, MLA; Dave S. Hayer, MLA; Jenny Wai Ching Kwan, MLA; Richard T. Lee, MLA; Bob Simpson, MLA

Unavoidably Absent: John Horgan, MLA

1. The Chair called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m.
2. **Resolved**, that the Committee meet in-camera to review its draft report to the House. (Harry Bloy, MLA)
3. The Committee met in-camera from 8:12 a.m. to 10:06 a.m.
4. It was moved by Harry Bloy, MLA that the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services approve and adopt the report on the Budget 2007 Consultations as amended today. A debate arising, the motion was agreed to on the following division:

Yeas (5)

Nays(2)

Hayer
Lee
Black
Hawes
Bloy

Kwan
Ralston

5. **Resolved**, that on behalf of the Committee, the Chair deposit a copy of the report with the Office of the Clerk no later than November 15, 2006 and further that the Chair present the report to the Legislative Assembly at the earliest available opportunity. (Bruce Ralston, MLA)
6. The Committee adjourned to the call of the Chair at 10:26 a.m.

Blair Lekstrom, MLA
Chair

Kate Ryan-Lloyd
Clerk Assistant and
Committee Clerk

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2006

The committee met at 8:10 a.m.

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

Committee Report to the House

B. Lekstrom (Chair): At this time, I would like to call the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services meeting to order. We are into the final stages of developing our report that we will submit to the Legislative Assembly on the 15th of November.

Just before we go in camera to conclude our discussions on this draft report, we had requested some information from different ministers, and questions had been raised over the duration of our consultations and so on. We have received — and it should be in front of you — a response from Hon. Linda Reid regarding questions on child care. There is, I believe, a quite in-depth response there.

As well, there was a question regarding the Perrin report, on which we have contacted the ministry by a letter and followed through with a phone call. It has now been transferred to the hands of the Finance Minister, who actually had commissioned that report, I believe. That's the response we've had, and we are presently awaiting confirmation on that request as we sit here today.

So that is a brief update on the responses we've had. The others are in front of you, which we've received over the last week or so.

With that, I'm going to look for a motion to go in camera.

The committee continued in camera from 8:12 a.m. to 10:06 a.m.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): We are now in public session, and we have concluded deliberations on the report of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

There has been a great deal of work put in by members of this committee, and I want to thank you on behalf of myself and all British Columbians who took the time to come out and present at our oral presentation hearings as well as took the time to go on line to the survey or put in written submissions to this committee as well. In total, there were roughly a little over 8,000 participants, which is an all-time record for British Columbia in a select standing committee process.

Again, I think it says a great deal not only about the work of this committee but about the understanding that British Columbians have an opportunity to engage in the development of the budget for the province and be heard.

We will now look for some motions to move the report forward.

H. Bloy: I move that the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services approve and adopt the *Report on the Budget 2007 Consultation Process* as amended today.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Discussion on the motion now on the floor.

J. Kwan: I just want to be clear and be put on record. First of all, I'd like to thank the public who have actually come out to participate in the Finance Committee process — the people who provided their information and feedback through e-mail and through other means. Many people actually wrote separate letters to the committee, and many followed up with further information at the request of the committee. I certainly want to express my thanks to the British Columbians who took the time to do this work and for their thoughtfulness in their presentations.

I also note that as we were developing this report, it was challenged in a number of areas. Through the hearings, there was some information that we had requested of ministers, which would have actually assisted us in developing the recommendations for the report.

That information didn't come to the committee, and more particularly, I'm specifically referencing the Perrin report. We actually did not receive that report. I think, pretty well from all the presenters — whether it was educators or students — there were references about the importance of that report. The information contained therein would have been useful and helpful for this committee to consider, but that information did not come forward. I don't believe we actually got a response from the Minister of Advanced Education on that request at all.

Having said that, the committee worked long and hard at trying to arrive at a consensus with respect to the recommendations that are before us. There are a lot of areas where both sides of the House had actually pushed hard on the committee to arrive at consensus. I certainly do appreciate your work, Mr. Chair, in trying to bring around that consensus.

However, at the end of the day I'm very sorry to say — and please believe me that I am very sorry to say — that there've been a number of key areas in which we have not been able to arrive at a consensus in the areas around child care. We did not arrive at consensus in the area around women's services. We did not arrive....

B. Lekstrom (Chair): If I could, I just want to caution this. The report is still a confidential document until we deposit it. I want to caution members in their remarks here during the motion that is to either accept or reject this, and that we're very careful in what we say due to the discussions that we had in camera until the report is deposited.

[1010]

J. Kwan: Thank you. Yes, Mr. Chair. I'm not going to talk about the specific recommendations at all — just the broad-scope areas that we had difficulties with.

Women's services was another one. There were some challenges in the area around the education sector, in which we had difficulties arriving at a consensus. Certainly, there've been areas that have been a challenge, as well, in the health care component in terms of that recommendation.

All in all, I am very regretful to say, Mr. Chair, that I would not be able to support this recommendation.

It is in my view not a consensus report, given the difficulties in the areas that we have not been able to achieve agreement on.

I. Black: I would like to echo the first number of remarks of the member opposite with respect to thanking the public and thanking you, Mr. Chair, for what has been a very high amount of work through some interesting terrain, both geographically and ideologically. I would also like to add the thanks to our team from Hansard, who followed us on the road through all the journeys that we did and bore witness to the extraordinary amount of work that it takes to do the people's work in this crucial area.

I would like to state that this report, once it is released, will reflect inclusion of a great number of areas that had not been previously contemplated by one side or the other. To that extent I am suitably impressed with the degree to which we managed to move the report forward, to broaden its scope and to increase its emphasis in certain areas. Without being specific as to the content, Mr. Chair, I am very pleased with the focus and the remarks within it pertaining to some of the crucial areas of homelessness, seniors, women, child care and others of the most vulnerable within our society.

I am of the view that the ultimate disagreements that exist are ones of semantics more than anything else. I am surprised, at the least — and perhaps disappointed is a more appropriate word — that the very small number of areas that were ultimately not completely reached in terms of majority view — the very small number of them within the context of what will ultimately prove to be a very lengthy and comprehensive report — proved to be a stumbling block when we are bickering, if you will, over very, very slight wording.

I'm surprised in the sense that this report makes a very clear statement about the value system of where the people of this province believe we should be going. I think it has, to an enormous extent, reflected that.

I think the lack of unanimity on this vote, should that be the result, undermines the enormous effort that's gone into this report and undermines the value system and the effort of the people of British Columbia who came forward with their views. I for one will stand enormously disappointed if that ends up being the case because, as I mentioned, the differences that exist are very, very small and boil down to specific wording — which I think will disappoint those who gave us their opinions, to think that anyone who votes against it does not support their value system. I thank you for the time.

D. Hayer: I will echo what my colleague Iain has said on most of the things he said.

Also, I want to thank the staff and anybody else who worked with us. We had thousands of people who provided input on this, and we travelled all over the province visiting, I think, more than 15 or 16 different communities. I was happy to hear from so many people from different backgrounds and different income levels representing different views.

I think that at the end of the day, when you look at what we provide, it is information input from all those thousands of people, trying to come to some sort of report of what we think we heard from the people. I think the committee did a good job on it. I think the staff did an excellent job of reviewing everything and making sure the committee had access to all the information that was provided — whether through writing, e-mail or presentation, when they were being held in person.

Without taking too much of your time, thank you very much to everybody who participated in this vote. Thank you very much to the Minister of Finance, who came in and presented her view, and also to the staff and everybody on the committee.

[1015]

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I certainly want to begin by thanking you for the work that you've done in leading the committee through the province.

I also want to say to the presenters that came forward, through all the different avenues which they communicated to the committee, that I have listened and have taken into account all the presentations that have been made and reviewed them outside of the actual committee hearings. I really appreciate the thought and care that many people brought to the committee on passionately held views and important views of public policy.

I think the report is an effort to reflect those views. I think we should note — and I'm mindful of what the Chair has said about the limitations that are put on debate in this report when it's deposited with the Legislature — that there will be an opportunity to debate it in the Legislature when the body of the report and the recommendations are public. So I won't do that now.

I would note, though, that there was complete agreement on the body of the report, and indeed that was set aside to provide more time for joint work as a committee on the recommendations.

I would disagree with the characterization that's put on the differences as semantic, and I will save that debate for another forum. But I think it's misleading to describe them as semantic only. Granted, there were some semantic differences, but there were also differences of substance.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): To the motion, if we could, Bruce, please.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Well, I'm just....

B. Lekstrom (Chair): We're getting into....

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): You didn't rule that speaker out of order when he made those kind of comments, so I feel that it's part of the debate.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): I've tried not to rule anybody out.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Well, that's good. So then I'll continue.

Therefore, when the time comes to debate the recommendations, I'll debate the strength or weakness in the presence or absence of recommendations.

R. Lee: Mr. Chair, I'd like to add my voice to thank you and other committee members for the discussions. I believe this is a very comprehensive report, and I also believe the number of responses from the public is huge compared to other committees.

The report could be a very good summary on the quotations. Also, the recommendations — I think those are very comprehensive and extensive. It has my full support on all the recommendations.

R. Hawes: At the danger of being repetitive, I want to thank you, Blair, because I do appreciate how difficult your task has been. I thought you were handling it and have handled it in a masterful fashion — and, of course, the public who did come out and take a lot of time.

As we went through this, from a personal standpoint, I felt there was a great deal of compromise being made to reach a consensus. I'm extremely disappointed to find that perhaps we don't have consensus, and that view wasn't necessarily spoken previously.

To find out now that we don't have consensus after the compromises that were made.... I'm extremely disappointed. It will be very interesting when this does enter the Legislature and we are able to speak about it. I just think the compromises that were made might not otherwise have been made.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Randy, we have a point of order being raised.

Your point of order, Jenny.

J. Kwan: It's just not accurate to say that somehow when committee members came forward, we did not agree on this report — that it's a complete surprise.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Okay. Here's what we're going to do.

J. Kwan: That was actually tabled as an issue, Mr. Chair, and so it's....

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Order. Order. Order.

Jenny, what we're going to do is.... I've allowed, actually, each member to give their say at the end of what I think was a very good process — difficult at times. So rather than get into the back-and-forth....

Certainly, I'm hearing that the floor of the Legislature will be the place that we will have some debate on this report, and I think that is the appropriate place to have that debate.

So your point of order is not a point of order.

Randy, I'm going to ask you to curtail your comments, as well, to the report itself — the recommendation that's before us. I will put the mike back to you, Randy.

R. Hawes: Well, I'm pretty much done, Blair.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Okay.

[1020]

H. Bloy: I just wanted to thank Blair and the whole committee, and especially the number of people that responded this year — but also our attempt to reach out to the ethnic communities. It was not as successful as I think the committee would have liked. I thought it was a really good step in trying to include everybody in British Columbia, and I think that the information we received.... Hopefully, we've reflected it in our report in a true understanding.

Even though there may not be full agreement on it, I am personally pleased that we've been able to take the public's view and put it into a report for all citizens of British Columbia.

Again, I'd like to thank everybody, including the staff that put in many long, hard hours in getting it to this point.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): We have heard from all of our members that are presently with us here to bring to conclusion the *Report on the Budget 2007 Consultation Process*.

I think this was an effort to again go out, listen to British Columbians, hear their ideas, hear their views and then — through the work of all members on this committee — try and accommodate what they've heard and read in the written submissions and develop it into a report that, certainly as the Chair, I am very supportive of.

I think it has seen a very good mix of give-and-take. When I say give-and-take, it is finding that balance on the presentations that were put before us, having each member digest those presentations and bring forward ideas on what would be included not only in the recommendations but in the body of the report.

This report will have the opportunity to be discussed and debated on the floor of the Legislature. I believe there was much movement on trying to reach a consensus. Unfortunately, we won't know for a few more minutes yet whether that was achieved or not. It's sounding very much like it may not be, but this....

As the Chair of this committee and having had some experience over the years and the honour of being the Chair, I think one of the most important things is that this report is not a report that reflects government's wishes or opposition's wishes in the development of next year's budget or future budgets. This is a report that reflects British Columbia's wishes, and for that I am very proud of the work of all the committee members and the effort they have put in.

The schedule, I will point out, was a gruelling schedule. To visit 15 different communities and actually do it in a time frame of roughly 60 days from the start of the prebudget paper being presented to the full conclusion of this report is nothing short of amazing. Again, I want to thank all the members for the time and effort they have put into this.

I want to thank the public, as each and every other member of this committee has done. I think British Columbians should be very proud of this process. Although we will put forward a number of recommendations as

we have in the past, not every single one in the past has been acted on, but many have. I think it solidifies and, hopefully, regains the trust of the public in a parliamentary committee system — that they are going out, and their voice is being heard, for that has been the single biggest issue for me as the Chair of this committee and for the members. Again, thank you to the public.

In closing, I want to thank the Deputy Chair. Bruce, I want to thank you for the work that you've done in trying to cover at times when I was unavailable, as well as our discussions to move this report forward. With that, I am going to call the vote on the motion. I will have the motion read one more time, and then we will vote.

The motion would be: moved that the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services approve and adopt the *Report on the Budget 2007 Consultation Process* as amended today.

Motion approved on the following division:

YEAS — 5

| | | |
|-------|-----|-------|
| Hayer | Lee | Hawes |
| Bloy | | Black |

NAYS — 2

| | |
|------|---------|
| Kwan | Ralston |
|------|---------|

B. Lekstrom (Chair): For the next motion, I will call on Bruce.

[1025]

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): I move that on behalf of the committee, the Chair deposit a copy of the report with the Office of the Clerk no later than November 15, 2006, and further, that the Chair present the report to the Legislative Assembly at the earliest available opportunity.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Okay, you've heard the motion.

I. Black: I didn't hear it. Could I ask for it to be repeated, please.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): The motion was that on behalf of the committee, the Chair deposit a copy of the report with the Office of the Clerk no later than November 15, 2006, and further, that the Chair present the report to the Legislative Assembly at the earliest available opportunity.

Motion approved.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Carried unanimously. A motion to adjourn would be in order.

The committee adjourned at 10:26 a.m.

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