



Monday, November 2

Private Members' Statements: *UBC 15 by 15* report

M. Elmore: The newly released report *15 by 15: A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Early Human Capital Investment in BC* was released in August this year. I would like to congratulate the human early learning partnership, HELP, at the University of British Columbia and the authors of the report: Dr. Paul Kershaw, Dr. Lynell Anderson, Dr. Bill Warburton, Dr. Clyde Hertzman and the entire team of researchers at the UBC HELP research institute.

HELP is a research consortium of faculty researchers and graduate students from B.C.'s six major universities. It's led by Dr. Clyde Hertzman and is recognized as a world-leading contributor to new understandings of early child development. It's very unique and, I think, something that we should be proud of here in B.C. — that we're on the leading edge of this research.

This report was commissioned by the B.C. Business Council for their Opportunity 2020 project. The B.C. Business Council wanted to look at, looking into the future, how B.C. can successfully adapt and innovate to create a prosperous and sustainable future, recognizing the importance of leveraging human capital, our workforce and the contributions to our economy in a global context.

The key finding of the report is that the terminology, the stock of human capital or the resiliency of our people in our workforce, is key to B.C.'s long-term economic success. This means that early childhood development is a critical issue for business leaders, because it's the years before age six that set in motion factors that determine the quality of our future labour force.

Research data collected from 2001 to the present show that today only 71 percent of B.C. children arrive at kindergarten meeting all of the developmental benchmarks they need to thrive both now and into the future. That leaves 29 percent developmentally vulnerable. A rate of child vulnerability above 10 percent is biologically unnecessary. So here in B.C. we have the situation where it's three times what the rate could be. This current vulnerability rate signals that B.C. now tolerates an unnecessary brain drain that will have an impact into the future and impact our workforce and our economy.

Vulnerability is an objective measure that was developed at the UBC HELP institute. The early development indicator, EDI, is a population-based measure that rates vulnerability on five levels — social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive, physical health and well-being, and communication skills. Therefore, reducing vulnerability is necessary for B.C. to secure its long-term economic future. It will also inject a significant economic surplus.

The rate of provincial vulnerability was first measured in 2001 to 2004 at 26 percent and is currently at 29 percent. We saw the rise in this vulnerability occur over the 2001 to 2004 period, the three-year period during which.... This is a time that the province enjoyed a thriving economy measured by GDP and also lower unemployment levels and government surpluses. Yet we saw an increase in early vulnerability for children.

Today 484 neighbourhoods across B.C. were measured, and 93 percent of neighbourhoods fell below this vulnerability threshold of the EDI index.

The early years represent a very unique window in human life. All the research is pointing towards a consensus that the most effective interventions and investment benefiting our labour force happen in these early years — benefiting children.

It's the government of B.C.'s 2009 strategic plan which targets the lowering of the provincial rate of early vulnerability to 15 percent by fiscal 2015-16. It's this report referencing the 15 by 15 goal, which is ambitious but also a signpost along our way to the ultimate goal of reducing early child vulnerability to 10 percent by 2020.

However, significant changes across the entire province are required to create this equitable access to the conditions that help children and families thrive. New policy thinking is, therefore, in order. International research has shown that the best strategy to reduce early vulnerability is found in a comprehensive government policy which supports parents — men as much as women. There's a recommended investment of GDP to 1.5 percent, which is comparable to other OECD countries. Currently, we have an investment of 0.3 percent, which is among the lowest.

The main policy recommendations that have come out are: build on maternity and parental leave, raise the level of coverage for parents and incent fathers with their leave to encourage that. As well: build on existing employment standards.

In terms of resources: build on income and employment support policies; mitigate poverty among families with children; community resources — build on quality early childhood education and care services; address children with special needs; and work with the local early child development coalitions.

This investment in early child care is also a very significant investment in public infrastructure and in kids. It's been shown that investment in child care shows a return. Every \$1 invested generates \$2 into the economy — so a very efficient investment.

This is a long-term investment strategy, but it has short-, medium- and long-term benefits to children and families and our economy.

M. Dalton: I am pleased to respond to the comments from the member for Vancouver-Kensington. I've been a public school teacher for the past 15 years — the past seven years at the elementary level. I've taught from kindergarten right to grade 12, and I know firsthand the importance of our young people getting a strong start right from their early years.

All too often, students who struggle in the primary school years continue to do so all the way through their educational process. It can place limitations on them later on in life. Seeing our children get a strong foundation of skills is essential for their own future well-being and, I would add, for the well-being of the entire province.

The government appreciates the HELP report and its recommendations that support our shared goal of reducing early childhood vulnerability. Child vulnerability is the rate of children, as was described, who arrive at kindergarten not meeting all of the developmental benchmarks, such as holding a pen, climbing stairs, using the washroom independently.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

The province has provided help with approximately \$3 million in funding this year alone and about \$22 million over the past number of years. We are committed to reducing the level of early childhood vulnerability to 15 percent by the year 2015.

The latest results in HELP, our HELP partnership, show a very modest improvement in early childhood vulnerability rates in B.C. from 29.6 percent to 28.6 percent this year. We've seen a modest improvement in reducing childhood vulnerabilities, but there's more work that needs to be done.

This is why this government has committed to delivering voluntary full-day kindergarten for five-year-olds, beginning next year. This is to help ensure that our youngest learners get the best possible start. The delivery will be phased in over the next two years.

Boards of education have been asked to consider first reaching children from neighbourhoods where early development results show the highest level of vulnerability. This very significant initiative is going to help the educational needs of our children.

In my constituency there is one private school that is already using the full-day kindergarten. I was talking to someone that was involved in leading the program. He said that children going into grade 1 who have had the full-day kindergarten as opposed to the half-day are noticeably more advanced.

Also, I was talking to another kindergarten teacher last week. As a longstanding teacher at the kindergarten level, she says that more time is needed to reach the educational benchmarks, and she feels that the full-day kindergarten will benefit students to get a better grasp of the necessary skills.

We believe in providing free, innovative early learning options for children, because early learning is essential. This is why we've developed the StrongStart B.C. program. It's a free, drop-in early learning program for preschool children when they're accompanied by their parents or caregivers. We've invested \$43 million in StrongStart B.C. centres across B.C., and more are opening up every week. We're hoping to have approximately 300 by the end of this year.

There are a number of StrongStart centres in my constituency, including the first one that began in Mission. It's a very successful early learning program for children.

The government has also helped deliver Ready, Set, Learn, which is a program for three-year-olds. This program helps make positive connections between families, the school system and the community agencies to help three-year-olds get ready for school.

There's much more that the government is doing, including the B.C. Family Bonus program, which provides tax-free contributions calculated on a family's income so that the lowest level of families in B.C. receives the most in direct financial support from this government. B.C. also invests \$1,000 into the children's education fund for every child born after January 1, 2007.

In conclusion, the government recognizes the need for giving our young children the educational tools they need from the very beginning. This is why we've gone to great expense and effort towards achieving this goal.

M. Elmore: Thank you to the member from Maple Ridge–Mission for his comments. I also appreciate our shared recognition of the value and benefit of investing in early learning.

In terms of, also, the recommendation from the HELP report was.... The level of investment that's needed is significant. It's along the lines of \$3 billion a year in terms of significantly reducing the early vulnerability to keep on track for the 15 by 15, to reduce the target 15 percent by 2015. So it's a significant investment that's required on a number of policy levels in terms of supporting families.

The programs the member mentioned are quality programs. I met with a number of child care providers and educators, and they've told me. I've met with working families, as well, who wish they had the opportunity to access these programs, but they have to work. So there is a need, especially for support for working families, for the wraparound care when they drop their kids off to kindergarten or to have an opportunity to provide care for them while they're at work so that these children can also benefit from these investments.

It's a significant investment, which again would require a very significant shift in priorities in terms of government policy. It's a very substantial investment, but I think, as the member mentioned, the benefits that we will see in terms of investing in children will provide that they get the start that they deserve and should expect in B.C.

I think the report shows that the investment pays off in the short term in terms of freeing up the labour force, allowing more parents to access the labour force once they have child care for their children.

It shows that the benefits to the children themselves moving through the school system are.... We'll see the results also, in terms of the long term, with the benefits to our labour force and the quality of their life. Also, for the efficiency of decreased costs to the health care system, providing support to kids at this very early stage is beneficial.

I'd just like to wrap up and to commend, again, the excellent work of the HELP research team at UBC; their findings, which are being used across Canada for measuring early childhood development; and also their recommendations for significant investment.

Hon. B. Penner: I'd like to call Motion 16 on the order paper, a motion put forward by the MLA for Richmond Centre.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 16 without disturbing the priorities of motions preceding it on the order paper.

Statements: StrongStart BC centres in North Vancouver

J. Thornthwaite: On Friday I had the pleasure of attending the openings of two more StrongStart B.C. programs in North Vancouver. With my former colleague Susan Skinner, the board chair, and Rick Chan, who's the principal, childhood educator Heather Van Holton, Joanne Robertson and Irene Young I was very pleased to be there to meet with them again.

The preschoolers of both Lynn Valley and Seymour Heights now have the opportunity to learn in an interactive and fun environment. Not only does this partnership create a stronger community, it also creates an environment that facilitates early learning and literacy for our little ones. As a parent with three children in North Vancouver, I appreciate the values that these centres represent, and I know that if they had been available when my kids were young, I would have been eager to participate in the learning opportunities they represent.

These centres require great teamwork between school districts, schools educators and, of course, the public. It's an investment into the future of our province, as the children of today are our leaders and innovators of tomorrow.

The official opening of Lynn Valley and Seymour Heights brings the total to seven StrongStart centres in North Vancouver. This goes to show that the communities in North Vancouver are dedicated to providing our youth with access to all of the skills they need to be successful.

Children are our most precious resource, and we must do everything we can to give them the best of all possible starts in school and in life. By working together, we will reach our goal and make British Columbians the best educated and most literate people in North America.

Estimates: Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts

S. Fraser: Thanks to the minister for that. I'm not too sure where to start on the response, my question to his response.

You mentioned tourism. Well, we've all seen the dismantling of Tourism B.C., a huge success; and the implementation of what amounts to a broken campaign promise on HST, which the tourism industry that the minister just referred to has said will be devastating to the industry.

I mean, the alternatives that the minister is talking about... The communities are having their rugs pulled out, and their alternatives are looking slimmer and slimmer under this government. They're getting hit by every side of this, and attempts at diversification of the economies in some of these communities are being hampered by this government at this point in time.

I'll go to a specific here. The minister referred to specific tax breaks. Let's go with the provincial industrial tax breaks around the school taxes. They were quite significant for catalysts. Can the minister quantify that, with the help of his staff? Thanks.

Hon. B. Bennett: Hon. Chair, sorry for the delay. We were trying to find the number. I know we have a number for the Catalyst situation in the four communities, and I would ask that the member not accept this number as gospel because I'm not 100 percent sure. But my recollection is that through the 50 percent school tax cut, they will save about \$5 million a year between the four communities. Provincially it looks like.... Well, I'm not in a position to give him the provincial number either, but I'm pretty sure it's around \$5 million that Catalyst will save as a result of those tax cuts.

S. Fraser: Thanks to the minister. That's close enough. I guess we can get the exact numbers. I can't remember at this point. I think this was in two phases. Am I correct? And if so, what was the timing on these? When did those occur?

Hon. B. Bennett: As of 2008, the school property tax rate for class 4 was reduced over two years to equal the business class — that's class 6 rate — providing a benefit of \$24 million annually in 2009 and future years to B.C.'s major industrial property. That includes pulp mills, sawmills, ports and mines.

The following year, 2009, and beyond there was an industrial property tax credit created that will reduce the provincial school tax otherwise payable on major industrial and light industrial — that's class 5 properties — by 50 percent. That measure provides an additional benefit of \$50 million annually to B.C.'s manufacturing, mining, forestry and other major and light industries. That was the sequence.

S. Fraser: Thanks to the minister for that. Since those savings were realized by Catalyst, has there been any investment, new technology or job creation since those tax drops?

Hon. B. Bennett: Well, I don't know for sure whether or not these companies have bought any new machinery since we announced those tax reductions. What I do know is that the company we've referenced here and all of the pulp and paper companies in the province.... If they are surviving, it's by the skin of their teeth.

They are laying off people. They're cutting costs every which way that they can find to do. I would suggest to the member that in a general global downturn like this, one that seems to contain a very specific weakness for forest products, it's not surprising that forest companies wouldn't be out spending a bunch of money on things that they would perhaps otherwise like to do but can't do during this particular time. There is — and I know what the member is getting at. The member, I think, is suggesting that these tax reductions don't work. Why bother doing them?

I don't want to put words in the member's mouth, but we just disagree on this side of the House. We think that when you reduce taxes for business and for individuals, you'll find that more businesses want to locate in that jurisdiction and more people want to live in that jurisdiction.

We stand on our record over the course of the last 8½ years. If you look at the trend lines for investment, for employment, for real disposable income, you'll find that, actually, the personal income tax cuts that we made — and the corporate income tax cuts that we made and these other tax cuts just referenced that we made — did, in fact, lead to considerable growth in our economy.

And, you know, our economy will grow again. These companies are not in a position right now to invest a bunch of money in new things, new technology or machinery. But if we stay with it and we work with the communities and we work with the industry, they will once again be in that position to create jobs in the forest sector in this province.

Wednesday, November 4

Statements: KidSport BC Program

G. Hogg: An 11-year-old boy wrote this letter: "Dear KidSport. Thank you very much, KidSport, for supplying me with hockey gear. I love the game of hockey, and I think it is an awesome program. I have two older brothers in hockey, and we all play rep. My mom has two jobs so we can stay in hockey. She works really hard, so this is a good thing for her and for us. P. S. I made the peewee-rep team. Sincerely, Trevor

The KidSport motto is "so all kids can play." Since 1993 it has been providing support to financially disadvantaged kids so they can do just that. From its inspired and humble beginnings right here in B.C., it has grown to 177 chapters across Canada. This year KidSport will assist over 6,000 kids to get into the game.

Those who dream of scoring a goal, hitting a home run, taking one for the team or just making new friends will be given that opportunity through KidSport.

Benefits such as setting goals, working hard, learning from others, sharing and staying positive despite adversity — these are just some of the skills learned every day in sports venues across our province through the process of sports. The lessons enable us to make healthy lifestyle choices, to meet challenges and to work together. Sports skills are life skills, and KidSport is leaving a human legacy of community chapter volunteers in 40 B.C. communities, chapters that will support many kids who will be inspired by the Olympics.

I ask this Legislature to congratulate and to thank KidSport, its volunteers and its sponsors and encourage all communities to become KidSport communities so that all kids can play.

J. Horgan: I rise to join with my colleague from Surrey–White Rock to endorse and speak in favour of KidSport B.C. I do it for Peter, who is in the crowd, the executive director. I don't think the member for Surrey–White Rock could get his jumpshot over top of me even if he had a stair to stand on. But I'll leave that.

As we prepare 100 days from now for the Olympic Games with the coming together of elite athletes from around the world, it is very important that we remember that there are children in the communities right across B.C. that don't have the resources to play every day. I was one of those kids. As a young child, I wasn't able to play hockey or lacrosse until later in life. I played games that you had shoes for, like basketball or soccer, where you had a pair of boots. That was the extent of the expenditure that we could make in our house.

In 2005 the Victoria Foundation established that one in five children in the greater Victoria area live below the poverty line, and that's why it's so important that in 1993, in that decade of a previous government, B.C. Sport established KidSport so that all kids could play, so that those less fortunate could have access to team sports so they could learn the benefits of cooperation, determination, personal sacrifice and taking one for the team.

I know I join with my colleague from Surrey–White Rock again in urging all members of this place to go back to their home communities, to look up the local chapter of KidSport, see what they can do to promote and advertise this great program that provides every kid in the community an opportunity to enjoy the benefit and value of sport.

A hundred days away from the Olympics a real legacy for the kids of British Columbia living below the poverty line would be massive investment in KidSport. I encourage all members to follow my lead and the lead of my colleague from Surrey–White Rock and do just that.

Statements: Activities of 4-H in BC

D. Barnett: Today, as the minister has said, we celebrate 4-H Day in British Columbia. Since 1914, 4-H is about young people, parents and other interested adults working together for the benefit of youth, family and community. And 2,350 youth across B.C. are developing leadership abilities, new skills and learning something about themselves.

4-H has some 24 different projects and 4-H groups: Clover Buds, 6- to 8-year-olds; junior members, 9- to 12-year-olds; senior members, 13- to 19-year-olds; and special projects for 20- to 21-year-olds. Fourteen 4-H members from British Columbia have been awarded 4-H scholarships totalling over \$24,000 to assist in their post-secondary education.

In the Cariboo-Chilcotin we are proud of our 4-H organizations — Williams Lake, Lone Butte and the Canim Lake band to mention a few. Parents, 4-H leaders and community members have come together to assist our young people in their endeavours.

From raising a steer — a sale in Williams Lake which brings a great price, to pride and to the opportunity to learn about their animals, to respect, their social development and marketing skills. To those 4-Hers who take public speaking, grow vegetables, knit or do one of the many opportunities for 4-H youths, you are all achievers. To the volunteers, leaders and sponsors of 4-H, you are to be congratulated.

I will leave you with a 4-H pledge that I took from a 4-H website. It says: "My head to clear thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service and my health to better living for my club, my community and my country."

Estimates: Ministry of Children and Family Development

M. Karagianis: I do have one other issue that kind of comes out of the foster care question, and this has been posed to me by several care workers and a foster mom.

The government had initiated a program that social workers and child care workers have been calling on for a very long time, which was financial assistance to former wards of the government or foster children or children in care for their educational courses. This was implemented over a year ago, just over a year ago, but this has now been cut.

I have several care workers who are approaching me about the fact that these educational courses and living allowances for individuals who are aging out of care need to go on to post-secondary education. In the case of this one, it's a child who has FASD. There are not enough support systems to allow these children to leave care, pursue a post-secondary education or a trade and have adequate money to live on.

This has become a growing crisis for these children and for the children who have youth agreements as well. As they age out of their youth agreement, there are concerns about their ability to be able to pay for shelter and food while they go to school. For some of these individuals who, of course, have been very challenged.... Those children who have grown up in the system, so to speak, have great challenges in trying to make sure that they get an education. Where they're pursuing that, it seems to me that any barriers that government puts up to them doing that fails these children the second they leave care.

Youth agreements are the same way. I've had the same comments from individuals that have been on youth agreements, and once they reach an age, so many of the resources that would help them to finish their education are removed. Can the minister comment on this?

Hon. M. Polak: With respect to the youth education assistance fund — that's a fund that's managed by the Victoria Foundation — we're not aware of any cuts to it. They ended the quarter of March 31, 2009, with a balance of \$2,929,520. Those are handled as bursaries out to those young people, and the Victoria Foundation manages those.

With respect to agreements with young adults, that program was reinstated in 2008-2009. The expenditure for that year was \$1,742,229. Our budget for this year is actually \$3,288,200 — so again, no reductions there either.

M. Karagianis: So there are supportive programs for those children who are in youth agreements and pursue further education. What happens to them when they're 19, though? Does the ministry continue to give them that care until they finish their post-secondary education course? What happens with their living allowances and other things? They obviously receive that kind of protection and care when they're on a youth agreement. What happens once they're 19?

I mean, just providing them with tuition is not adequate because many of them have no capacity to support themselves once they reach the age of 19.

Hon. M. Polak: It's the youth educational assistance fund that would provide for tuition and books. When it comes to the other support, the agreements with young adults program functions such that between the age group of 19 to 24 a young person who has been in care can enter the program, and they can receive financial assistance for 24 months.

M. Karagianis: I do have several of my colleagues that would like to ask some questions. I'd like to give them a chance to do that, and then I'd like to ask another question that harks a little bit back to the autism program, but this is around how the funding is paid to families. So I will cede the floor to my colleagues.

S. Herbert: Thank you to the minister and her staff. I had a question regarding ... I know the goal, one of the goals of the ministry in the service plan is preventing vulnerability in children and youth by providing strong supports.

The suicide rate amongst gay, lesbian, bi and transgendered youth is incredibly high — some surveys say six times, some say four times the average for youth in BC. My question is: what is the Ministry of Children and Family Development doing specifically to help queer youth and kids in their care?

Hon. M. Polak: I thank the member for the question. Certainly, it's always tragic when a youth commits suicide. But we recognize that there are specific groups where the prevalence rate is much higher — in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community; in the aboriginal community.

As such, because of the doubling of the funding for our child and youth mental health services, one of the things that has allowed us to do is to increase the number of clinicians and others who are involved in intake when youth are brought to our attention. So we not only work with those assessments, such that if it is determined that that is a component of what is presenting as the cause for that young person, we then work with agencies who are connected with the local gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender community.

As you can imagine, it differs, depending on the region, the amount of community support there is, or what agencies we can connect them with. But we certainly do everything we can to address the specific needs of that individual. Where those involve issues around sexual orientation, we certainly make every attempt to connect them with local resources in their area connected with the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered community.

Also, we work closely with the Youth in Care Network, who are exactly what it sounds like — a group of youth who are in care, have been in care. They are invaluable in providing us with, really, more up-to-date information with respect to what's going on with young people in their everyday lives out in the community. That also is a tremendous help to us as we try to ensure that all of our staff are made well aware of the challenges out there for those young folks.

S. Herbert: I appreciate the answer about what happens if somebody did go to the lengths of suicide or a suicide attempt. But the question that I've got is: what about the before? The prevention,

you know.... How is the ministry working to ensure that the youth that are in its care know that it's okay for them to be who they are?

Hon. M. Polak: Globally, in terms of prevention, we've recognized for quite some time the need to really get down to the younger grades in terms of dealing with mental health issues, with anxiety and, in particular, getting at suicide prevention.

One of the ways in which we've done that through our ministry is implementing the Friends program in grades four and five. That's something that is funded through MCFD. It's provided as a school-based program, and it's the first of its kind in Canada.

Working with that age group, we've seen what we believe is some very big success in terms of preventing the kind of anxiety and mental health issues that can eventually lead to suicide.

When it comes to those youth in care who may be struggling with their sexual identity, this is one of the benefits of an integrated model in that when it comes to those who might be presenting with.... They are already down the road, so we're past prevention. They're already there, and they're presenting with a challenge. This is something where, as I've said, we would be wanting to connect them with those within the community in their area.

But when it comes to those for whom care is being provided, and they're growing up in our care with foster parents, we are certainly pleased to be highlighting in our ministry the U.N. convention on the rights of the child for foster parents who have kids in care. They are certainly aware of the rights of a young person who is living with them.

When I say that, it sounds almost cold to talk about it in terms of rights, but the U.N. convention is so much more than that. It really asks us to consider the whole youth and everything about them. So that's one of the reasons that we're moving to our new assessment model, which does take into account all aspects of what's going on in a young person's life when we're taking them into care.

Certainly, as we work with our foster parents and other care providers, when there are challenges around adjusting to a person's sexual identity and struggling through that, that's another area where we certainly work with youth, just as we would with any other challenge they're facing in their life.

S. Herbert: So I'm just trying to understand. The first part of the minister's answer was about the Friends program and about children from grade four and grade five, I believe, people dealing with mental health issues — and I'm sure that the minister didn't mean to infer that it was children with sexual orientation that I was meaning — anxiety. I'm guessing that the anxiety would be because of discrimination or something like that. The minister nods her head, and I'm glad to hear that. So that's at the elementary-school level.


Now, oftentimes people will discover their sexual orientation later in life. It could be as a teenager or something like that. I'm curious if there are any resources focused specifically on ensuring that either foster parents or the youth themselves get those resources so that they know before they might go to something — the level of suicide. So that they know that they are okay to be who they are and if they have questions, who to talk to.

Once we finish this question I've got something about sexual health and those kinds of questions, but we'll finish with this one.

Hon. M. Polak: We don't have specific programs that deal with that. When we're talking about youth in care, we're talking about children who are being cared for by a foster family.

It's our expectation amongst foster families that when the young person in their care is experiencing difficulties in any area — if in fact, it happens to be struggling with their sexual identity or figuring out whether they want to come out or not — whatever those questions might be, our expectation would be that that foster family, as any loving family would, would seek out the kinds of supports that that young person would need, whether those be in school or in the community.

We would certainly, as an organization, be assisting foster parents in that work if they needed assistance in identifying what organizations might be out there or what supports there might be in the



community or in the school. We would certainly be encouraging and supporting that with the foster family just as we would with any other aspect of growing up in care.