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## FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORTS ON BUDGET 2008 CONSULTATIONS

VICTORIA – After hearing the budgetary priorities of 5,800-plus British Columbians, the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services has concluded its Budget 2008 consultation process. In response to this year’s budget consultation questionnaire, the committee’s report contains 55 recommendations – including 17 recommendations for addressing climate change; nine suggestions for ensuring the sustainability of B.C.’s health-care system; and four recommendations on enhancing housing supports.

“It was clear from our consultations that although British Columbians place a strong economy at the top of their list, they also want the province to be a leader in developing and promoting and adopting new technology to address climate change,” said committee chair Bill Bennett, MLA. “The committee’s report contains several recommendations including tax credits to encourage the production and consumption of environmentally friendly products, support for B.C.’s agricultural producers, incentives for the development of a competitive biofuels manufacturing industry, and prudent investments in transit.”

Over the course of the public consultation process, the committee noted concerns from residents living outside B.C.’s largest urban centres that proposals for tax shifting and additional transportation taxes could impact rural people disproportionately. In general, the committee recommends that government consider incentive-based programs targeting behavioural change for both individuals and businesses, before punitive taxes are considered.

The Finance Committee also received hundreds of submissions on other budgetary priorities. The committee’s report includes recommendations on topics such as arts funding, wildlife conservation, child care accessibility, post-secondary education costs, and funding for restorative justice programs. With respect to enhancing economic growth, the Finance Committee makes recommendations to bolster B.C.’s mining and forestry sectors, review personal and corporate income taxes, continue with transportation infrastructure investments, and consider the elimination of the capital tax on financial institutions.

This year, the committee held 14 public hearings across the province, and invited written, online, and flyer responses to the questionnaire contained in the government’s Budget 2008 Consultation Paper. In total, the committee heard presentations from 222 witnesses, received 477 written submissions, and reviewed 3,863 online and 1,241 flyer responses.

Comprised of government and opposition members, the all-party Finance Committee unanimously adopted its report. “I am proud of all members of our committee and that we were able to work together on behalf of the people of the province to produce a fair and balanced report,” said Bennett. “We are grateful for the contributions of the individuals and organizations who took the time to participate in this important process.”

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The members of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services are:

Bill Bennett, MLA (East Kootenay), Chair  
Bruce Ralston, MLA (Surrey-Whalley), Deputy Chair  
Iain Black, MLA (Port Moody-Westwood)  
Harry Bloy, MLA (Burquitlam)  
Randy Hawes, MLA (Maple Ridge-Mission)

Dave S. Hayer, MLA (Surrey-Tynehead)  
John Horgan, MLA (Malahat-Juan de Fuca)  
Jenny Wai Ching Kwan, MLA (Vancouver-Mount Pleasant)  
Richard T. Lee, MLA (Burnaby North)  
Bob Simpson, MLA (Cariboo North)

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