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6TH SESSION, 37TH PARLIAMENT

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MONDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2005

The House met at 2:04 p.m.

Introductions by Members

J. MacPhail: This announcement pains me. It physically pains me. Mike Smyth and his wife, Mary, gave birth to a 10 pound 13 ounce baby. I can hardly think about it, but I do wish.... The new baby boy is named Seamus. I would like to give my heartfelt congratulations to Mary — one, for being married to Mike Smyth, and two, for birthing that baby. Declan is a proud brother.

[1405]

I also understand that congratulations are in order to a very dear, close friend of mine, Gary Collins. I do sincerely want to offer Wendy and Gary congratulations on the birth of their baby girl.

Hon. G. Bruce: On behalf of the government members I, too, would like to offer our congratulations to both, and to the new British Columbians to this great province. Of course, it doesn't pain me quite in the same way that it may have pained you, but I, too, had my trials and tribulations. I love to have children but fainted all four times.

J. Kwan: I dare say that the Minister of Labour has no idea what labour really means.

There are a number of seniors who are visiting us today to observe QP — that's question period. They're here today to demand that the government fulfil their commitment to long-term care beds in British Columbia. They're Alison Acker, Clara Halber, Max Halber, Sylvia Kerr, Bel Paul and Linda Siegel. Would the House please welcome the seniors.

R. Nijjar: I have two recognitions to make. On behalf of my colleague from Burnaby-Willingdon, who cannot be here at this moment, I would like to introduce three constituents of his from Burnaby. Raz Ali, Husnia Hakimy and Rahila Muhibi are here today in the Legislature. Would everybody please make them welcome.

Also, it is my pleasure.... I know that on Valentine's Day we have Valentine wishes for all our loved ones, but there's an equally important day today. There's a Mr. Valentine, a Mr. Valentine Anderson, the MLA for Vancouver-Langara, who is celebrating a birthday today. After 14 years in the Legislature and 14 birthdays through this chamber, this will be his last birthday in this House. He will have many more great birthdays with his wife, Joyce, as he retires from the Legislature. Would everybody make the member welcome. [Applause.]

Hon. J. Murray: I have a friend and new constituent in the House today, in the gallery. It's Mr. Ashley Haslett. He's the communications manager for the British Columbia and Yukon Hotels Association. Could the House please make Ashley very welcome.

Hon. P. Sahota: Joining us in the gallery are 80 grade 10 students from the constituency of Burnaby-Edmonds from the great high school of Burnaby South Secondary. The students today are accompanied by their teachers, Ms. Moore, Ms. Ghani, Mr. Bobrowick, Ms. Lumb and Ms. Wilson. Would the House please make them all welcome.

R. Hawes: In the House today we have representatives from the white sturgeon sport fishing industry in the Fraser Valley. They are here to talk to the Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection about the proposed listing of white sturgeon under the species at risk, endangered species legislation. They are Fred Helmer, Vic Carro, Roger Dornam, Eric Christianson and Frank Kwok. Could the House please make them welcome.

Additionally, we have Mr. Terry Raymond, chair of the Fraser Valley regional district; Keith Warrenner, the director of electoral area H, which of course is Sumas Mountain; and Arne Zabell from the Hope-Sunshine Valley area, who is an electoral area director. Could the House please make them welcome. They're here to speak to the minister on the same issue.

[1410]

J. Wilson: Today I have the pleasure of a friend and constituent who has come down to Victoria to visit us. I would like the House to make my constituency assistant, Randy Davis, welcome.

Hon. K. Falcon: Today in the House I'm pleased to say we are joined by the mayor of the village of Lions Bay, Douglas Miller. I would ask the House to please make him welcome.

Statements (Standing Order 25B)

SAFE SCHOOLS

L. Mayencourt: It is a privilege to stand in this House today to speak again about something that I feel very passionately about, and that's safe, caring and orderly schools.

As members of this House will know, for the last several weeks I've been travelling around the province talking to students and teachers and parents around the issues of bullying, harassment, intimidation and discrimination in our school system. As we all know, those things are still continuing today in our school system, and it's a shame. It's something I feel very, very badly about — that kids in our school system can be subject to racist, sexist or homophobic comments in the school system and that those kinds of attitudes go unpunished and unaddressed by so many people in our province.

I think there is nothing more important than making sure kids can get to their school and feel safe, know that they aren't going to be abused, know that they aren't going to be targeted or face retribution because they've decided to stand up to a bully. I think it's very

important that we as a House do everything we can to help those kids that are in great need.

In the time I've spent travelling this province I've been told by many educated people that the incidence of bullying affects around 15 percent of the students in our system. In each of the meetings I have had with students, with teachers, with chambers of commerce, I have asked people to stand up if they have ever been bullied. I asked them to stand up if they've ever witnessed bullying and not known how to defend the person being bullied. I have never had fewer than 80 percent of the people stand up. I say that the 15 percent we say are affected by bullying is a deep, disturbing lie. It's time for the 80 percent of us that have been affected by bullying, harassment, intimidation and discrimination to take a stand, to end the bullying in British Columbia.

WHITE STURGEON FISHERY

R. Hawes: Under the federal Species at Risk Act it's law, when a species is identified as being in danger of extinction, that they be protected from all threats and that a recovery plan be put in place. The white sturgeon is now being considered for addition to this endangered list, and if listed, all sport fishery on this species, including the current catch and release program, would be suspended.

Unfortunately, the federal bureaucrats considering this have not recognized that there are several distinct species of white sturgeon, some of which may be endangered and others not. One species inhabits the lower Fraser from its mouth through the Fraser Valley and up to the Hells Gate and Fraser Canyon.

An extremely successful sport fishing and guiding industry relies on the ability to catch and release young adult sturgeon from this grouping. This industry provides hundreds of direct and indirect jobs and contributes many millions to the local economy and provincial tourism totals. Thousands of international visitors are attracted annually to fish this great species, and my home, Mission, is the centre of the industry.

Working closely with the conservation group chaired by Rick Hansen, the guiding industry has been engaged in tagging and carefully nurturing the sturgeon stock for many years. They've been able to document a significant increase in the stock since the tagging program commenced, and there are no documented mortalities among sturgeon as a result of the catch-and-release program. The guides have become the eyes and ears of the river, and as one said of the sturgeon: "These are our babies, and we'll do everything possible to care for them." They are truly the watchdogs that report poachers and those who would fish illegally.

If this species is listed as endangered, even catch-and-release fishing would cease and the industry would die, the tagging program would end, and the sturgeon would lose their protectors. Sturgeon can be unintentionally caught in gill-nets, so the salmon industry could be adversely affected.

[1415]

Input on this can only be given to Ottawa until February 28. Representatives from the sturgeon sport fishing and guiding industry are here today to urge the Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection to assist them in saving their industry and properly protecting the fish stock. They want him to join them in convincing Ottawa that only certain white sturgeon populations are at risk. The white sturgeon in the lower Fraser River should not be listed as endangered.

RAW LOG EXPORTS

B. Belsey: The forest industry in British Columbia's northwest has faced some very difficult times over the last few years. Through these difficult times there is no question that the export of raw logs has been crucial in keeping many of the foresters and many of the related jobs from disappearing. It is not our first choice, but raw log exports have kept families working. Now the leader of the NDP is speaking out, telling the residents of the northwest she knows what's best for them. She knows which loggers, truckers and scalers should be working and which loggers, truckers and scalers should not be working. First she says she needs to stop raw log exports, and now Carole James is telling us that raw log exports are okay.

This may very well be the mixup between the message we hear in the south and the message we're hearing in the north. It seems that on this issue the NDP have some kind of a plan. Actually, we don't know what the plan is; it's still a bit of a mystery. To be honest, it doesn't really sound like there is any plan.

There is no mystery that raw log exports have kept hundreds of people at work. There are approximately 2,000 people in the province that work because of raw log exports. There's no mystery that without the exports, struggling forest companies would be closed. There's no mystery that without these jobs that companies have created for loggers and truckers, they would have to uproot their families and move to other places.

A modest amount of raw log exports in the northwest is vital to keep truckers, loggers, scalers, boom-boat operators, longshoremen, tugboat operators, pilots, maintenance people and office staff. It keeps them working.

My constituents are waiting to hear just how many jobs the NDP plan to cut when they reduce raw log exports. We're waiting to hear how many jobs will be lost and how many families will be driven out of our community by the NDP and Carole James. The people in the northwest need to know now.

Mr. Speaker: That concludes members' statements.

Speaker's Statement

RULES FOR QUESTIONS IN QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Speaker: Hon. members, I do want to take a couple of minutes. I'd like to apologize to the House for

having to repeat my statement of last week. However, judging by the media coverage stating that I was shortening question period, it is apparent that my message of last Thursday was either misunderstood or misinterpreted or both. It was certainly misrepresented. Perhaps I didn't do a good job of explaining what my intent was; therefore, I am compelled to go over it once more. Please bear with me as I give it another try.

First of all, the one-minute time limit on questions and answers is not new. We have been doing this for over three years. Let me repeat: there is no change in this time limit for either side of the House. I fail to see how this could be construed as shortening question period, as was reported, or stifling the opposition.

Incidentally, I did a little research this morning and have discovered the following: London has a one-minute time limit on questions and answers; Ontario has a one-minute limit; Manitoba has 50 seconds; and in Ottawa, which has a much longer question period than we do, the time limit for questions and answers is 35 seconds and is strictly enforced.

The only change was an attempt to shorten the length of supplementary questions and answers. A supplementary question is not a new question. It is a follow-up to the main question and therefore should be shorter. Also, supplementary questions are at the discretion of the Speaker, and opposition members are the only members in this House to be afforded the privilege of supplementary questions.

The object of the exercise is to try to get more people involved in what is already a very short question period. I would at least like to accommodate the independent members, who are understandably concerned about their participation. On Wednesday last only three people managed to get a question in, and that is not acceptable.

Question period is primarily for the opposition and non-government members, and I must ensure that they are fairly treated. I also should mention there is no rule excluding government private members from participating in question period, when time permits.

[1420]

Oral Questions

LONG-TERM CARE BEDS IN INTERIOR B.C.

J. Kwan: Last week Kelowna city council reported an increase in homelessness amongst seniors. In one case a 90-year-old senior is living on the street. The word "shameful" doesn't even begin to cover this. This government cut residential care beds in the Okanagan. As he prepares to deliver tomorrow's budget, can the Minister of Finance tell us where in the *New Era* campaign document the Liberals promised to cut long-term care beds and put 90-year-old seniors on the street?

Hon. S. Bond: When we came to Victoria, we actually had a facilities audit and interviews done so that we looked at every single facility in the province. We

wanted to make sure that seniors have the level of care they require in the kinds of facilities they deserve. In fact, we have renovated or added over 4,000 units to the province. We have said that we will continue to add seats, and we will meet the commitment of 5,000 beds by 2008.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Vancouver–Mount Pleasant has a supplementary question.

J. Kwan: The Liberals knew what the state of the land was. They campaigned on \$139,000 per bed, and they fell short on that promise. The 2004 service plan of the interior health authority is very clear. This government cut beds, one of which, no doubt, this woman would be pleased to occupy in these cold winter months.

Again, to the Minister of Finance: how can he justify cutting long-term care beds in the interior, leaving seniors out in the cold and some on the streets?

Hon. S. Bond: Let's look at some of the facilities that seniors were actually in when we developed a plan to begin to renovate and develop new facilities across the province. Let's take a look at James Bay Lodge, actually, right close to us here. In fact, the rooms were tiny — four beds in a very small room. It was difficult to get wheelchairs in and out of the rooms. There was no room for families to visit with their loved ones. James Bay Lodge is going to reopen this summer. There will be 90 units, and in every single one of them the residents will have a bathroom. They will have individual and private rooms. In fact, the quality of opportunities for them will increase significantly.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Vancouver–Mount Pleasant has a further supplementary.

J. Kwan: Prudent planning would have ensured that those new beds were in place before you shut them down and put seniors on the street. What doesn't the minister get?

Will the Minister of Finance commit today that he will release the funding necessary to make sure that this poor 90-year-old woman and other seniors like her in Kelowna and across this province will have a warm bed to sleep in immediately? Make that commitment now.

Hon. S. Bond: This is the government that's added over \$2.4 billion to health care since we arrived in British Columbia. Let's talk about responsibility for long-term care planning. When we got to Victoria, not one single FTE was assigned to planning in the Health ministry. Where's the responsibility of the members opposite to have planned over the past decade?

J. Brar: We now have evidence from the interior health authority that the number of residential beds in that community has decreased — not just remained the same but decreased — in places like Kelowna. The Lib-

erals promised to invest \$682 million on long-term care. Last week we learned they only spent \$100 million.

Will the Minister of Finance tell this House why British Columbians should believe their promise now, when they shortchanged seniors by over half a billion dollars in the last four years?

Hon. S. Bond: As we move to transition, the opportunities available for seniors in this province.... We want to make sure that seniors are placed in the level of care beds that they require.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. S. Bond: In fact, wait times in the province in terms of placement have dropped to 60 to 90 days, instead of a year under the previous government.

[1425]

Mr. Speaker: The member for Surrey-Panorama Ridge has a supplementary question.

J. Brar: No matter what you ask, the same answer is going to come out, you know.

Tomorrow this Finance minister will table his budget. We know he has shortchanged seniors by \$582 million. I want to know how much of the surplus came as a result of breaking the promise they had in the *New Era* document for seniors.

Hon. S. Bond: This is a government that has added over \$2 billion for the provision of health care across the province. In fact, health authorities have actually seen increases to their budgets in excess of 12 percent.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. S. Bond: In fact, as we redesign this system, we are looking at each facility and each bed, making sure that they meet the needs of seniors in the province. We're going to continue to work toward that promise. We will meet it by 2008.

J. MacPhail: So the government's explanation for breaking the promise is that they're just gosh-awful incompetent — not, not telling the truth. Nice answer.

Last week the capital regional district pointed out that this government had no plan — no plan — to replace the beds the B.C. Liberals cut. Same story in the interior. Not only did the government break its promise and cut beds in the interior, but according to the health authority it still doesn't have the money to add any new beds. Incompetence, I guess, is the answer — just straight incompetence.

Will the Minister of Health release the money immediately to fund new beds in the interior so that seniors don't have to live on the streets?

Hon. S. Bond: It's amazing to me that the member opposite can stand up, as the previous Health minister, and take absolutely no responsibility for the fact that little planning was done in this province in a decade.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

The Minister of Health Services has the floor.

Hon. S. Bond: In fact, after a thorough review of every facility in this province we determined that they needed to be replaced or renovated. There is a plan in each and every health authority designed to make sure that the needs of seniors are met in this province.

Mr. Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition has a supplementary question.

J. MacPhail: All the health authorities have to do is table the plans. We learned last week that there's no plan in the interior health authority or in the capital regional district. Are they not telling the truth?

We'll see what happens in the budget tomorrow, although I don't know how we could. It was the current Minister of Finance that made a mess of everything. We'll see whether the government keeps its promise of over 5,000 additional long-term care beds by.... Is it 2008 or 2006? They're going to have to allocate \$190 million tomorrow, immediately, to keep their promise.

I want to get back to that 90-year-old woman on the streets in Kelowna. Will the Health minister commit to immediately finding beds for this woman and other seniors like her? Go out today, get those senior people living on the streets, and get them a bed.

Hon. S. Brice: Of course, issues that surface as a result of media reports leave one speculating about what the actual situation is. As the member opposite knows, in this country every senior is either covered under old age security or, if they are not eligible, they get funding from the Ministry of Human Resources at the highest rate, which was increased by \$70 just recently.

The member knows that oftentimes situations about homelessness are compounded with mental health and addiction issues. This is why our Premier invited the mayor of Kelowna to join with him in a homelessness task force.

LOGGING TRUCK OPERATORS LABOUR DISPUTE

P. Nettleton: A major protest closed streets in Prince George this weekend, with talk of further job action. Northern interior logging truck operators are

demanding better pay and working conditions. These mostly small and independent operators have suffered in silence for years as costs have escalated, including fuel.

[1430]

Government has been complicit in allowing their friends in the forest sector to record record profits on the backs of hard-working truckers and their families. Forest companies have refused to negotiate directly and in good faith with these very same truckers.

My question is to the Deputy Premier: what is the Deputy Premier's position in addressing these inequities and resolving this dispute?

Hon. G. Bruce: Safety in the forest industry is important for everybody. Of course, as the member will know, we started with a Forest Safety Council. The Forest Safety Council first has dealt with the aspect of fallers, now working in the silviculture side. I will be asking them to be looking into the safety concerns relative to the trucking industry so that we indeed have a safe forestry industry in all sectors, all aspects of that industry.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Prince George-Omineca has a supplementary question.

P. Nettleton: Yes, Mr. Speaker. For the information of this House, this protest occurred outside the office of the Deputy Premier for a very good reason. She sits on a committee with the Minister of State for Mining, and they have been inactive. They have sat on their hands and made no attempt to address this issue, while these people suffer.

My question is to the Deputy Premier. What is your position with respect to the issues that I have brought to this House today — your position?

Hon. G. Bruce: As I mentioned and reiterate again, in the whole aspect of the forest industry — whether it is trucking, whether it is silviculture, whether it is falling — we've had a terrible record from the standpoint of safety. We have far too many deaths in the forest industry, and they need to be eliminated.

We have embarked through WCB and with the industry and the unions — a whole coming together of all players — to try and make sure we can make this industry safe and secure so that when you go to work, you know you're coming home alive, well and healthy. This sector needs more attention, and we will be instructing the members of the Forest Safety Council to be looking at that.

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE AND SAFETY

W. Cobb: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. In the Cariboo, many of my constituents are concerned about the maintenance and safety during the winter season. I know that looking out there today we wouldn't realize it, but in my riding it is still winter-time. I presented a petition last week, and I had delivered a couple of boxes of letters in this regard.

The province has witnessed some extreme weather conditions this last year, particularly in the 100 Mile House and Williams Lake area. My constituents feel that the highway maintenance standards are not adequate to meet today's needs.

Can the minister reassure my constituents that maintenance standards on the highways are being kept and that they meet the needs of the travellers today? If that is not found, will he review those standards and make sure they do meet the standards of today?

Hon. K. Falcon: The member at the beginning of his question actually hit the nail on the head. We have had severe — frankly, unprecedented — weather conditions in the province in the last few weeks. Many of the contractors, including the Cariboo contractor, have gone through a year's worth of salt and sand in the last few weeks. Many of the crews have been working 24 hours a day trying to deal with these unprecedented conditions.

What I can tell the member, and I think the member will appreciate, is that I have asked for a complete review from my staff. The member will know that we now have maintenance contracts that can punish the contractors for lack of performance. That means that if they do not meet the standards that we set, we have financial penalties in place. I will get a complete review, and I will let the member know the results of that review.

FUNDING FOR LONG-TERM CARE BEDS

J. Kwan: A simple question for the Minister of Finance. Will he commit that he will put \$190 million in the budget tomorrow for long-term and intermediate care beds for seniors — yes or no? Less than 20 seconds.

Hon. C. Hansen: Tomorrow is budget day in British Columbia. There is some great news coming for British Columbians in every corner of this province.

[1435]

When you have seen the billions of dollars being added to the Health budget, as the Minister of Health Services indicated earlier... I can assure the member that tomorrow in the budget there will be lots of good news for those who want to make sure that we continue to have the best health care system in all of Canada.

[End of question period.]

Reports from Committees

V. Roddick: I have the honour to present the report of the Select Standing Committee on Health for the fifth session of the thirty-seventh parliament, entitled *The Path to Health and Wellness: Making British Columbians Healthier by 2010*.

I move that the report be taken as read and received.

Motion approved.

V. Roddick: I ask leave of the House to permit the moving of a motion to adopt the report.

Leave granted.

V. Roddick: I move that the report be adopted. In moving the adoption of the report, I wish to make the following comments. The Select Standing Committee on Health report calls for more effective prevention strategies that will help keep people out of the hospital systems, reduce crisis care intervention, and create a healthier, more active and productive population. Our work focused primarily on the triple threat of poor diet, inactivity and obesity, and identified the roles that individuals, communities, schools, businesses and governments have in reducing these threats.

As host of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, British Columbia is in a unique position to capture the spirit and excitement of the games to make all of us fitter and healthier. Our report makes practical recommendations so that we may become the healthiest jurisdiction ever to host an Olympic Games.

I appreciate this opportunity to move the adoption of the report, and I would like to thank the many individuals and organizations who took time to provide us with their thoughts. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to all the members for their input and dedication throughout this important process, which actually covered four years and three reports.

The Select Standing Committee on Health would also like to thank research analyst and consultant Anne Mullens and everybody in the Clerk of Committees office for enabling us to produce this excellent trilogy. Our health is our life.

Motion approved.

K. Stewart: I have the honour to present the first report of the Select Standing Committee on Crown Corporations for the fifth session, respecting the reviews of the liquor distribution branch, Forestry Innovation Investment Ltd., and Land and Water British Columbia.

I move the report be taken as read and received.

Motion approved.

K. Stewart: I ask leave of the House to permit the moving of a motion to adopt the report.

Leave granted.

K. Stewart: I move the report be adopted. In moving the adoption of the report, I wish to make the following comments. In its oversight role, the Select Standing Committee on Crown Corporations reviews the annual reports and service plans of British Columbia's Crown corporations in an effort to enhance the

accountability and improve the public performance reporting.

In our first report the committee made 15 recommendations to ensure a clear and consistent approach across all Crown corporations in the presentation of performance, financial and governance information. I would like to thank the senior officers of the liquor distribution branch, Forestry Innovation Investments Ltd., and Land and Water British Columbia for their participation in the process.

Motion approved.

[1440]

K. Stewart: I have the honour to present the second report of the Select Standing Committee on Crown Corporations for the fifth session, respecting the reviews of the British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority, the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia and the British Columbia Transmission Corporation.

I move that the report be taken as read and received.

P. Nettleton: I would like to speak to this report, if I may.

Mr. Speaker: I understand the member wishes to debate the motion on adoption?

P. Nettleton: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: For now we'll just ask the question: the report be taken as read and received?

Motion approved.

K. Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I ask leave of the House to permit the moving of a motion to adopt the report.

Leave granted.

K. Stewart: I move the report be adopted.

In moving the adoption of the report, I wish to make the following comments. The Select Standing Committee on Crown Corporation plays an important role in ensuring that British Columbia Crown corporations provide clear and concise reporting in their annual reports and service plans. To this extent, the committee has made 14 recommendations pertaining to the presentation of performance, financial and governance information in the annual reports and service plans of B.C. Hydro, ICBC and the British Columbia Transmission Corporation.

I would like to thank the senior officers of B.C. Hydro, the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia and the British Columbia Transmission Corporation for their participation in this process.

Mr. Speaker: And now the member for Prince George-Omineca.

P. Nettleton: You're a patient man, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

I would like to speak to this report. I have voted against it and spoken to it in committee. This is a debatable motion, so I would like to speak very briefly, if I may, to summarize some of the concerns I have with respect particularly to B.C. Hydro and BCTC.

B.C. Hydro has been played for the fool by U.S. interests and U.S. protectionism as a result of the B.C. government's greed, obstinacy and arrogance. B.C. Hydro is in distress under a \$7.2 billion debt, amidst a restructuring and realignment strategy with the western U.S. electricity grid that went seriously awry. Just as California deregulated its electricity utility industry and unwittingly set the stage for outsiders to manipulate the system to their own advantage, B.C. foolishly went down the same path of deregulation.

B.C. Hydro, through its marketing division Powerex, blames California's electricity utility restructuring and deregulation for that state's losses as part of B.C. Hydro's defence for the huge profits Hydro made from California's energy crisis over which they're presently being sued.

Was this resulting catastrophe at Hydro's...? Was it self-inflicted, or was it aided, promoted and abetted by U.S. interests, which took advantage of Hydro's desire to become a big player and an equal partner with the western U.S. electricity utilities? Was it also a planned payback scheme led by those 11 western U.S. states — spearheaded by California and its Attorney General, Bill Lockyer — for the Enron manipulation of the U.S. energy market they claim B.C. Hydro also participated in and profited from?

Whatever the reason, Hydro's master plan for the future has failed. We will soon see the wreckage floating up on B.C. shores, at the least in the form of loss of credibility and continued bitter, ongoing legal wrangling.

Personally, I am shocked even though I have, in a sense, predicted such an event arising out of this major breakup and privatization of B.C. Hydro and the handing over of Hydro customer services to a former U.S. entity now based in Bermuda and calling itself a B.C. company. The wreckage on the shore will be evidenced as the facts come out.

[1445]

It's time for the B.C. government and B.C. Hydro to come clean and let the B.C. public know about this sorry state of affairs and the details of this debacle, which is not over yet. This colossal mismanagement may well go down as one of the biggest blunders in B.C. government history, making the fast ferries fiasco look like a blip on the B.C. political scene. It could well be that we are witnessing the collapse, demise and decimation of B.C. Hydro as we knew it. Now B.C. Hydro's enemies hover like vultures to get a piece of the spoils as the victim lies confused and wounded, not knowing which way to turn, not able to discern friend from foe.

I'm deeply saddened by this turn of events, but it is one of this government's own making through secret deals and a desperate grab for a bigger slice of the

American pie. This is the price of secrecy and concealing from the public the true nature of this government's wheeling and dealing with a much-loved and respected public utility — B.C. Hydro. It's about time this government started putting the interests of British Columbians first and stopped gambling with our future. This venture was a spin of the roulette wheel, an expansion of the gambling nature of this government, which cares less about the public good than it does about the elusive possibility to make a quick buck today, regardless of what it robs from tomorrow and totally disregarding and disrespecting the heritage of the past.

In conclusion, as I have said before, W.A.C. Bennett will be turning over in his grave in response to this betrayal of public trust by this present administration.

B. Penner: Mr. Speaker, as a member who served on this committee I, too, would like to make a few comments on the report that has been tabled in the House today.

First, I would like to make an observation about the report itself and clarify for members. On page 5 of the report it talks about some committee members expressing concern about B.C. Hydro's projected operating costs for generating electricity from existing heritage assets. The concern there was simply that B.C. Hydro is projecting a decrease in the cost per megawatt going forward from \$22 in 2003-04 to \$20 and change in 2006-07. The concern was not that it's not a worthy goal but merely that we question the ability to hit that target, given increasing maintenance costs as these assets age. We know the previous government did not invest very much in renewing those assets, and that was the concern of the committee. I just want to re-emphasize that here.

In relation to the member for Prince George-Omineca's comments about the debt, it is true that B.C. Hydro has been shouldering a debt of about \$7.2 billion for many, many years. That debt has been incurred over the last several decades as the assets that we all benefit from today were built.

In terms of the dispute with California, it is unquestionable that there are ongoing political machinations taking place in that state. I'm sure he does not mean to suggest that he's taking the side of the Americans in this dispute. It is very vexing and troubling for us in British Columbia, who believe in the rule of law. My understanding is that B.C. Hydro operated according to the rules that were in place, which Californians themselves imposed on their state and their electricity purchase practices.

Furthermore, my understanding is that the U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has fully investigated and exonerated B.C. Hydro in relation to these dealings. It's quite understandable how people in California, particularly at the political level, in an attempt to escape responsibility for some of the problems they brought their own state, will try to find others to blame for what happened in California. That's politics.

The U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has looked at this, and I can't understand any reason why they would take British Columbia's side of the story for any reason other than those are the facts, because it is a U.S.-based commission.

Finally, I point out that in British Columbia, in fact, what happened in the 1990s was that — the member is correct — B.C. Hydro was partially deregulated. It is under this government that B.C. Hydro has been brought back to full regulation under the B.C. Utilities Commission. Even today I think we're awaiting a decision from the BCUC with respect to a proposed power project on Vancouver Island. That demonstrates again that B.C. Hydro has been brought into the regulatory process by the BCUC.

K. Stewart: In closing the debate on this topic, I'd just like to make a few comments with regards to the process that we took in this committee. For those of you out there in the general public that would like a fairly accurate recollection of what really went on in those committees, it is all in *Hansard*. Fortunately, it's all there for you to read, and you can read what went on in the committee.

[1450]

One of the things during this committee that we always ensured was that everyone had an opportunity to say what they wanted and that time was left for that. I think *Hansard* will clearly show that.

Before I close, I'd like to bring to your attention that this committee has been recognized nationally for its openness in the way it has made Crown corporations more accountable. Just recently, the CCAF — which is a national body in public sector governance, accountability, management and audit — has done a report with regard to this committee. It's quite flattering for the citizens of British Columbia to know that they're being represented with that type of clarity and transparency within their Crown corporation organizations.

I thank all committee members for their hard work and their good questions in ensuring that those Crown corporations are held accountable to the citizens of British Columbia. Thank you for that opportunity.

[1455]

Motion approved on the following division:

YEAS — 55

Falcon	Coell	Les
Chong	Locke	McMahon
Sahota	Christensen	Bell
van Dongen	Barisoff	Roddick
Wilson	Bray	Cobb
Lee	Thorpe	Murray
Plant	Hansen	Bond
Bruce	Brice	Abbott

Neufeld	Coleman	Penner
Anderson	Jarvis	Hogg
Nebbeling	R. Stewart	Hunter
Long	Mayencourt	Trumper
Johnston	Bennett	Belsey
Krueger	J. Reid	Stephens
Masi	Nijjar	Bhullar
Hayer	Lekstrom	MacKay
Halsey-Brandt	K. Stewart	Suffredine
Whittred	Sultan	Hawes
	Kerr	

NAYS — 2

Brenzinger

Nettleton

Tabling Documents

Hon. G. Plant: I rise to table and file documents. I table the *Final Report of the 2004 British Columbia Judges Compensation Commission*. I also rise to file a notice of motion in my name containing the response of the government to that report. I also file and table the response to the 2004 report of the Judges Compensation Commission.

I also rise to table the *Report of the Judicial Justices Compensation Commission*, dated September 1, 2004, and a notice of motion in my name making certain recommendations with respect to that report. I also table the response to the 2004 report of the Judicial Justices Compensation Commission.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

MISCELLANEOUS STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

Hon. G. Plant presented a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: a bill intitled Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005.

Hon. G. Plant: I move that the bill be introduced and read a first time now.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Plant: I'm pleased to introduce Bill 3, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005. Bill 3 amends a number of statutes to clarify provisions, correct inadvertent errors and make a number of minor housekeeping amendments as well as to effect an aspect of the transition in forest and range practices.

Specifically, Bill 3 amends the following statutes: Crime Victim Assistance Act; Expropriation Amendment Act, 2004; Forest and Range Practices Act; Land Title Act; Motor Vehicle Act; Motor Vehicle Amendment Act, 2004; Municipalities Enabling and Validating Act (No. 3); Park Act; Property Transfer Tax Act; Refer-

endum Act; and Small Business Venture Capital Act. I will elaborate on the nature of these amendments during second reading of this bill.

[1500]

I move the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill 3 introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

ATTORNEY GENERAL STATUTES
AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

Hon. G. Plant presented a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: a bill intituled Attorney General Statutes Amendment Act, 2005.

Hon. G. Plant: I move that the bill be introduced and read a first time now.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Plant: I am pleased to introduce Bill 4, Attorney General Statutes Amendment Act, 2005. Bill 4 amends several Ministry of Attorney General statutes to provide for greater flexibility and efficiency.

First, amendments to the Family Relations Act will provide statutory authority for a child support service to recalculate child support amounts based on updated or changed income information using the child support guidelines. This will allow us to pilot and administer the process for updating child support orders on a regular basis, based on changes in the paying parent's income. Our objective is to provide an effective way to keep child support amounts up to date without requiring parents to go to court to have the order changed simply because the payer's income has changed.

Bill 4 also makes amendments to the Legal Services Society Act to allow the Legal Services Society greater flexibility in its budgeting process. Bill 4 amends the Offence Act by enabling fines to be prescribed for violation tickets without requiring the prior consultation with the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court. This amendment will increase efficiency, and it is supported by the Chief Judge.

Finally, this bill makes minor amendments to the Provincial Court Act. The amendment implements a recommendation made by the 2004 Judges Compensation Commission that the highly successful senior judges' part-time program be made permanent — a recommendation which government has accepted in the documents I tabled earlier. This program was started in 2001 as a pilot project. It allows senior judges to elect to sit on a part-time basis rather than retire completely. We get the benefit of their experience, and we get to use public dollars more efficiently.

I will speak in greater detail about these amendments at second reading.

I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill 4 introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Orders of the Day

Hon. G. Bruce: I call continuing throne response.

Throne Speech Debate
(continued)

B. Suffredine: I'll try to pick up seamlessly where I left off on Thursday.

The next topic that I was wanting to speak about in terms of the throne speech.... A broad and aggressive strategy for the province for the coming decade is our strategy with respect to being the best in education. We're committed to making B.C. the most literate jurisdiction on the continent, and changes have been made to give school boards greater autonomy and to help them direct resources where students need them.

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

All school districts have received funding increases of \$863 for every student since 2000-01 in spite of declining enrolments. In the coming year, block grants will increase by \$150 million, and that money will be dedicated to providing library services and learning resources. Districts will report annually on how they provide those services. The Action Schools initiative, which is a great initiative to see children become more physically fit, will extend to every school from kindergarten to grade 9.

In my riding, in places like Lister, Yahk, Edgewood and many others, declining enrolment means that school boards have found difficulty keeping schools open. This is a result not of changes in funding but of shifting population patterns. Working with community school advocates and others to examine new uses for those underutilized schools will benefit small communities, where they might help fill needs for early childhood development centres, parent centres, community libraries, seniors centres, day cares, diagnostic services or even meeting rooms. These uses can revitalize schools as centres of learning, community activity or child development.

[1505]

Next I'd like to touch on supports for the needy. Having the best system of support for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk or seniors is fundamental to us all having safe, strong communities. A strong economy generates the revenues we need to help build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, for special needs or for children at risk. It allowed us to announce the single largest rate increase in history for people with disabilities

on income assistance. It also combined funding for autism and early childhood development — to almost triple since 2001. It allowed funding for social housing to increase by 38 percent since 2001.

This year even more will be done to improve our social safety net for society's most vulnerable in British Columbia. The amount that people with disabilities can earn without penalty while on income assistance has doubled. It's now a \$400 per month exemption. Those earnings exemptions are to be increased even further next year, and I am pleased to say that that's in part due to people from my riding coming forward and getting the issue heard. It's important to people in our communities. It's important that we give them all the opportunities we can.

Making British Columbia the best place on earth to live and to play is an important goal. Nothing is more important to our quality of living and lifestyle than our personal health. Leading the way in healthy living and physical fitness can help take some of the pressure off our health care system. Our aging population, new technologies, expanded health services and soaring drug costs all create new cost pressures in health care each year.

We've had to revitalize our health care system. The process hasn't been easy, but it was necessary. Improving patient care has always been and is the guiding principle. There's much more that we can and must do, but we are making progress. We have the longest life expectancy, the most universal prescription drug program, the lowest smoking rate, the lowest smoking prevalence among teenagers and the best record in curing cancer.

The number of doctors in training has doubled since we began, and 600 more nurses are now at work. Another 2,100-and-some new nurses are in training spaces since 2001. Some of those nurses are at Selkirk College in my riding. That's 50 percent more nurses in training since 2001 and 25 times more nurse training spaces than were added through the entire 1990s.

There's also some new hope in that the recent federal-provincial health accord will pump an extra \$5.4 billion into British Columbia's health care system over the next ten years. That will support major improvements in home care. It will help reduce wait times for cardiac treatment. Wait times in diagnostic imaging, joint replacements and sight restoration will also be improved.

We will increase investments in telehealth for rural and remote communities and in new medical equipment and technologies. Telehealth and those electronic imaging improvements are things which will greatly benefit small communities, like Kaslo, Nakusp and even Nelson, in my region. They're going to make a huge difference in the ability to deliver services and emergency services in a very timely way.

British Columbia is, as we all know, the best place on earth to work, invest and get ahead. We know that. Every one of us.... When you ask people around the region — it doesn't matter which community they live in — that's their reaction: where they live is the best place to live and to work.

Leading the nation in job creation and improving the standard of living and growing opportunities are

all possible with a strong economy. There are 200,000 new jobs, and 97 percent of those new jobs are full-time. Many are in high-paying sectors like forestry, energy, mining and technology. Forestry, mining and small business are all back.

[1510]

In conclusion, there's one thing I did want to talk about. I listened to the opposition. I was concerned when I heard the House Leader for the opposition. She wouldn't talk about the future or their goals. She critiqued what has happened, but she gave no vision of what could be. The NDP House Leader gave us absolutely no vision for the future. She had two goals. She wanted to make us afraid of the future, and she wanted us to believe that someone else was to blame for it.

There's nothing to fear in the future. We have a plan to build a future which will realize our goals and our true potential as the best place on earth to raise a family, to live, to play, to work, to invest and to get ahead. The time has come for us to move very boldly forward and to test the limits of our potential. B.C.'s golden decade is in front of us, and the decade of decline is behind us. Let's never go back.

G. Trumper: It is with great pleasure that I rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne. For the past few years this government has worked hard to improve our economy, to provide more employment and to provide a balanced budget so that we can enter a golden decade for British Columbia.

Four years ago when I ran for the provincial government, I ran because as mayor of a resource-based community I had seen the policies of the previous government have a huge negative effect on my region — loss of employment and lost opportunities. I wanted to be part of bringing a positive change to British Columbia.

Before I continue, I do want at this time to thank my staff, who get very little recognition. I want to recognize Maryann Washington, who is my constituency assistant; Noreen Pelk; Margaret Souther; and Marilyn Hayden, who has worked for some time in my Qualicum office, for all their hard work in my constituency. I am very fortunate to have them, and I might tell you that from talking to other MLAs, I obviously have a very busy office and need those people in the office.

In my first response to a throne speech, I stated that the economy of this province will turn around to enable us to provide the services we need. Patients and students must always come first. School districts, colleges and universities now have the ability to set the direction they want, to provide the best training and education for the students and to provide the programs that they need when they want them.

Our government lived up to that statement. We are on track to add 25,000 new post-secondary student spaces so that our students are able to get the education they need in order to succeed. They're able to do it in four years, for instance, rather than six years because the programs could not be provided. I know that in my region, North Island College — which I have a great

interest in because I was the first board member from our school district to sit on the board, when it first came into existence in the seventies — is now looking to expand its campus in Port Alberni and to expand its courses.

The government reduced taxes and other restrictions placed on business in British Columbia. The results of the business-friendly environment that British Columbia created are clear. There are more than 197,000 new jobs than there were in December of 2001. Of those new jobs, 97 percent are full-time jobs, allowing more people to support their families. Unemployment hit a 23-year low, and in my region it has been a long, long time since you could say that unemployment was down below 10 percent.

[1515]

We all know that real estate prices are going up on Vancouver Island and in British Columbia. This is particularly welcome news in Port Alberni, where prices dropped substantially in the late nineties. We are now seeing some of the highest increases on the Island. Actually, just in the last few weeks, one of our real estate representatives, David Koszegi, received the highest B.C. award from Re/Max for his sales last year, which is quite surprising for a community of our size.

This increase in prices is a great benefit for the residents of my riding, many of whom have made a substantial investment in their homes which will now provide a handsome dividend. This is one of the benefits of the economic recovery that the B.C. Liberals brought to our province.

Mining investment, mining exploration and mining jobs are coming back to British Columbia. We now see exploration taking place in my riding which stopped in the nineties. At one time I had friends of my son who were at UBC and were doing exploration work for mining companies staying at my house in the late eighties. I never saw them again in the nineties. It's really interesting and exciting to see what is taking place.

The economic boom is more than job numbers, percentages and ratios. It's about new opportunities for British Columbians so that we have the social safety nets we need and so that those who have been on social security are able to leave that and find jobs and start careers that support their families. It gives them pride and the initiative to be able to take responsibility for their lives.

All over my riding, from east to west, businesses are saying that they are doing well. Some of them have had the best years that they have ever had. Also in my riding we have had two large stores come to the town that I live in — one very large grocery store and a Wal-Mart. They would not have come to our region if they had not looked at the numbers and the things that were happening in British Columbia and known that the economy was turning around. That has provided a lot of jobs for people in my riding.

The economic recovery allowed the government to increase health spending by more than \$2 billion a year to ensure that health care would be there for every British Columbian. I want to say that it hasn't been easy.

As the demands are greater, we've had to face a shortage of doctors and nurses due to the lack of spaces being provided in universities for the last 20 years for these students.

There is a shortage of general practitioners, for instance, in my riding. I know that the search is on to attract new general practitioners to the area. It is a great place to live and to raise a family, but unlike when my own husband was in practice, so many doctors today are not wanting to have to put in the long hours that they put in before. They want to be able to spend time with their families. I can tell you that often my family used to say that at weekends I appeared to be a single mother, driving the kids everywhere, all over the place, to their various hockey games, swim meets, etc. Today these people who are coming into the profession are putting their families first. They're also wanting to be in places where they have more coverage and are not having to be on call every other night. That brings problems to rural areas.

We do need the opportunity to have new technology. The health technology has improved. We now have defibrillators on the ambulances in the province, which is incredibly important when you consider the geography and the distance travelled by the ambulance service in this province. In the hospital in my hometown, we're getting digital imaging capabilities, which means that the X-rays can be taken in the hospital and relayed to a radiologist in Vancouver or Victoria and read. For communities outside urban areas, this can be a lifesaver. We do need other technology. I am working with others to be able to have a CAT scanner at West Coast General Hospital. This will help to improve the services to patients in the region.

[1520]

We are considered, as someone has said, to have the healthiest population of all the provinces. However, we are concerned about the growing obesity in our children and must encourage all citizens to take more responsibility for themselves and for their children's health. We should all take it as a goal, as we work toward the 2010 Olympics, that each one of us take steps to become more active and, therefore, healthier as we get older. On Saturday I attended the five-year run-up to the Olympics, where all of us who spoke at it encouraged our young people to take part in the programs that are available and are coming, to be able to make sure they are physically fit as well as mentally fit so that as they get older, they will be able to not have such a call on the health system, which, after all, is having issues in trying to keep up with the huge demand that's there.

I'm also very pleased to see that we will be having a new Premier's council on aging and seniors issues established. That hits rather close to home, as I know that in the not-too-far future I will probably need some services. We will examine how to improve seniors housing and home care. We will look at how to improve seniors' independence and quality of life, and those people sitting on that council will be those people that it affects.

I have a high seniors population in my riding. In Qualicum Beach, construction has already begun on The Gardens, which is a 225-unit seniors housing development. Thirty of these new assisted-living units will be subsidized by the provincial government through our Independent Living B.C. program, and there are more spaces being made available in the Qualicum area at another facility which will be opening very soon.

In the Alberni Valley there are more assisted-living developments coming, and ground is about to be broken for a seniors housing unit in Ucluelet. One of the big issues, though, on the east side of the island and the Oceanside area is the need for a primary care facility of some type. We are working hard with other agencies to have, hopefully in the near future, the services that facility would provide, but we do need the buy-in of all the professional health people to be able to do that.

We had 15 apartments open in Port Alberni that will allow people with mental illness or drug addictions to live independently. These apartments are, for people with mental illness, a safe place to live, which is important for their well-being. There is somebody there seven days a week to make sure that they are looking after themselves. There are plans in place to have a similar facility in Oceanside.

With education, probably the best gift we can give our children, we have been able to increase educational spending by \$863 per student per year, ensuring that our children will receive the education they need to succeed in the future. We have taken steps to ensure that the new money goes to the students and their needs.

The Ready, Set, Learn program. In school district 70 and school district 69, the two school districts within my constituency, they have some wonderful, innovative reading and literacy programs. I hope to see those programs expanded so that every child in the region is able to take advantage of them. We have Roots of Empathy, and we probably have the best alternate program school in the region in school district 70. It's known as Vast. It's having a great success with students who have not been able to operate in the conventional school program.

I do want to say that it hasn't been an easy ride over the last three years. Issues such as the softwood lumber dispute continue to plague the forest industry in British Columbia and in my riding. After all, forestry is the backbone of the economy in my region. We all need to remember that it is the dollars created in resource communities that fuel B.C.'s economy. The government does continue to make progress in this matter, although it's slow. More rulings from the WTO have been secured in our favour, and I believe it is only a matter of time before this issue is resolved in our favour.

[1525]

In addition to the progress made on the softwood lumber dispute, the government is working to expand markets for B.C. lumber. One such program is Dream Home China, which I spoke about earlier today. I

joined the Minister of Forests and the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Services on a trade mission to China. In China, a new dream home constructed of wood was unveiled. This is important because ten million new homes are constructed each year in China — five times more than in the United States.

Chinese people are, unfortunately, accustomed to concrete construction, but demonstrating the benefits of frame houses will undoubtedly convince many of these new home buyers to switch from concrete and cement to wood, which will create more opportunities for our forest and woodworking industries and also help to improve the air quality in China, as wood construction is more environmentally friendly than the materials currently used in Chinese housing. I can tell you that in Shanghai, we never, ever saw the blue sky. The pollution is something that I haven't seen for many years.

This raises the issue of the need for ports to ship materials to Asia. We do hear a lot about the efforts that are being made for the Prince Rupert port, but in Port Alberni we have a deep-sea port which is very underutilized. With improved road access to Port Alberni, materials could be shipped to Asia a day quicker than from Vancouver. This government is studying the Horne Lake connector to improve road access, and negotiations are also underway for the revival of the rail connections on the Island, which could certainly further enhance the opportunities for the port.

In my riding we have reaped many benefits from the economic recovery, and I would just like to go over some that have come up in the past year. As part of the recent increase to the emergency shelter program, the Port Alberni hostel received funding for four cold- and wet-weather beds. I think it is true to say that because of our climate, we have many people who come to the west coast for the winter who have had difficulties in other parts of the country, and sometimes those beds are taken up by people who come from out of the province. These beds will be a life-saver for people seeking shelter.

The Port Alberni hostel provides many essential services to our community and is able to bring individuals seeking shelter in out of the cold, together. The rotary club in Port Alberni has actually taken the hostel under its wing and is helping to fund some of the new changes that need to be done to it.

One of the issues that I am most interested in is programs to combat violence against women. This will be stepped up over the next few years with new funding and will ensure that women all over the province will have access to safe housing when escaping from abuse. I'd just like to point out that not all transition houses have 24-7 service. We want to make sure that whether it's a residence with four beds or whether it's one with 20, they all have the same security and the same safety measures right through the province.

I also would just like to talk about a very innovative group called Share Our Services in Parksville-Oceanside, which covers many services that they provide in the area. They do some of the women's services

out of that particular organization. I would just like to point out that the only money they get from government is the programs that they have in contract. They raise the money from a thrift shop they have, which raises over a million dollars every year. That is what they fund all the programs out of — many for children, for women, for providing Christmas gifts for children at Christmastime, for providing needed services and needed clothing, etc. It's all done mainly by volunteers. It's a wonderful program, and it is an example to other places in the province.

Also, as I have said, forestry is the backbone of our economy. The Premier announced a further \$50 million for the forest revitalization fund, which will help many of my constituents who have been affected by the difficulties in our forests on the coast. We also now have the opportunity for two community forests in Ucluelet and Port Alberni, enabling those communities to have more control over their resources. They are some of the first community forests to be awarded by this government. The region also received almost \$40,000 from the decision to return traffic fine revenue to municipalities, and this new money for policing will go a long way to making our communities safer places.

[1530]

It was 4 Circles Consulting that took over the training for jobs program and community assistance contracts with the Ministry of Human Resources, and this Thursday the minister will be visiting that particular firm. Through this program, the provincial government is creating opportunities for my constituents to get the training they need to take advantage of the 197,000 new jobs that have been created.

In my constituency, we have a large first nations population, and I am proud that our government provided the funding for first nations for economic development opportunities. Money was provided for the Maa-nulth first nations in my riding, and that money will help more of our aboriginals take advantages of the opportunities our growing economy provides.

The Maa-nulth first nation is working toward a treaty. They have an AIP in place. This weekend I attended a meeting where they signed a memorandum of understanding with the Alberni-Clayoquot regional district so that they could work closer together. I do believe that was a very positive step enabling the two communities to work together.

A forestry agreement was signed last year between the provincial government and the Sechelt first nation. This agreement gives the Tseshaht band an opportunity to become very involved in forestry. It will grant the Tseshaht first nation access to 236,000 cubic metres of timber over a five-year period, and they will also get \$2.18 million in revenue-sharing over that period of time. The Dididaht, who are in my riding, with the Pacheedaht first nations, got access to 300,000 cubic metres under a similar agreement in 2003.

Some of the technology we've previously talked about in health also extends to education. I have communities on the west coast where it's very difficult to get services to, particularly for education. They have

small numbers, so it's hard to get the numbers of teachers into the school there to give them the variety of programs they need.

School district 70 was one of the first school districts that helped put the Internet in place, out to the various places on the west coast and to other rural communities in British Columbia. Bamfield Community School and Wickaninnish Community School in my riding both got access to the Internet, which is going to make a huge difference to the education of those children as they go through the system.

In my first response to the throne speech, I said I know that in four years' time, we are going to be able to look back and say we did the job we were elected for and that there's a future for our children and grandchildren. I hope it will encourage my sons and daughters to come back to British Columbia. Three of them left and are in Alberta and, as a matter of fact, in New Zealand. They left because of the state of the economy in the nineties, and I'm hoping they will come back.

It takes time to change the direction of a ship. It cannot always be done in a very short time. In four years, we have started, and we can now see the results. We do have a vision for this province. We have a vision for the future, for the well-being of all British Columbians, and my constituents look forward to the golden decade ahead for us all in British Columbia.

Hon. S. Bond: I am delighted today to be able to respond to the throne speech. I think it's a wonderful opportunity to reflect a little bit on the past but also to look very much to the future, and I think that was reflected in the throne speech we heard just the other day. Our Premier has a vision, and it is infectious. He wants very much to share with all British Columbians the great excitement we have for the future of the province.

Make no mistake about it. We have certainly had some very challenging times in the province as we've moved forward with a plan. We have had a plan. We recognized all along that it would require some very challenging decisions to be made, but we knew that once those decisions were made and we began to see the benefits, we'd be able to talk about the future of this province in a way we haven't been able to do for a very long time in British Columbia.

[1535]

In fact, we care deeply about the future of this province, because all of us want our children, our grandchildren and those who come behind us to inherit the province they deserve. We saw British Columbia go from first to worst in so many areas over the last decade, and we are so pleased that we'll now be able to look ahead, will be able to provide the kinds of sustainable and important programs that are necessary for our children and for the future of the province.

Our throne speech this year promises to move us beyond recovery and back into a mode of discovery. We want our very youngest British Columbians to discover the world around them through sight and sound — in fact, \$76 million through 2007 for vision and hear-

ing tests for all newborns. How important is that? It's so important — so that as our children move into the world, they have the opportunity — to make sure all of the tests they need to ensure they have a future that's bright are done. I'm very pleased that some of those initiatives will be through the Ministry of Health.

We want to make sure our toddlers are able to discover new friends through Roots of Empathy, a program that is highly recommended and certainly has been supported significantly by our Minister for Early Childhood Development. She has done such great work to make sure we all realize as British Columbians that all of the work we do in terms of prevention helps us — helps individuals but also helps the province as we move forward.

We also want our elementary and high school students to discover the joy of a well-rounded education. We are going to be investing \$150 million in libraries, textbooks, art and music education, and in an expanded Action Schools B.C. program to help us with the level of physical fitness.

We also want to look at our post-secondary students and make sure they are able to discover their potential. We have increased funding for colleges and universities by \$132 million, and we are limiting tuition increases to inflation. A brand-new scholarship will be created, the One World scholarship fund, for them to help discover the world abroad.

We also want to reach out to our entrepreneurs. We want to help them discover the Asia-Pacific market. We know that the B.C. trade and culture centres will act as a starting point for new opportunities.

We also are creating a B.C. competition council. In my riding, I've already heard very positive feedback to the fact that we know this is a new area of opportunity for expansion for us. In fact, people in Prince George–Mount Robson have recently looked to expanding their opportunities not just in the Asia-Pacific market but in other countries such as South America. We know that all we need to do is to give small business owners the opportunities, then get out of the way and make sure we're allowing them to reach their full potential.

We are also concerned that our scientists continue to lead in the world of discovery. We know it was in B.C. that we were able to map the SARS genome. It was here in B.C. that the world learned the genetic code for influenza A. With a further \$100 million for the Michael Smith Foundation, as mentioned in the throne speech, B.C. will continue to lead the world in the areas of cancer research and genomics.

We've all been invited to discover a golden decade. One of the things that the throne speech talked about was a commitment to help British Columbians become healthier and fitter and to help us as we set personal goals. Act Now is an initiative that will work across government ministries, not simply resting with the Ministry of Health but making sure that as we work across ministries in government, we're focusing on what we can do to ensure that British Columbians lead healthier and more fit lifestyles.

We have commitments to make sure that the quality of our water, our air and our parks will also be part of the Act Now strategy. We're looking at an alternative energy and power task force to make sure we use the forces of nature to generate power and improve the quality of our air.

We've also committed \$120 million for the B.C. community water improvement program and a further \$16 million to implement the drinking water action plan. Just recently — I believe it was on the weekend — an announcement was made around a \$6.5 million donation to the habitat conservation trust fund. That will result in more parks and areas of conservation for us to explore.

[1540]

The Premier wants us as a province to pursue five goals, and I want to spend just a minute or two talking about those goals.

The first goal is to make B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. Certainly, in my time as the Minister of Advanced Education, I learned a lot about the issue of literacy, and in fact, many adults in British Columbia are challenged. A significant percentage, over 40 percent of adult British Columbians, have challenges every day doing things that many of us take for granted — using an ATM machine, looking at their banking statements and filling out the most basic forms. We need to have a concentrated effort in terms of increasing the level of literacy within British Columbia.

We want to make sure the money we invest in new funding will ensure that school districts provide the library services, textbooks, arts and music programs and the services that our students need. We are going to expand the Action Schools program in cooperation between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education. I have been lucky enough to participate in a very short segment of the Action Schools program, and I can tell you that schools that participate will certainly see positive results for their students. In fact, if you exercise in the little segments that they've provided through Action Schools B.C., you will be fitter. I certainly got a good workout when I was there.

We also want to look at new ways to use our underutilized schools for the benefit of their community. Those buildings are assets that British Columbians should be able to take advantage of. We want to look at using them not just as centres of learning but also as centres for community activity with, in particular, a focus on child development.

We are going to continue, as has been mentioned many times, adding 25,000 post-secondary student spaces by the year 2010, and we are looking at new programs being offered across the province. One of the things we also have been challenged to do is speed up credentialing in trades and in professions.

Most recently, there has been discussion about foreign-trained medical professionals, and we are going to continue to work toward how we can find a process that would speed up the credentialing in those

absolutely critical areas for the economy and for the province.

Our second goal relates to how we provide supports to people who actually need additional help. I've had very good feedback about the creation of the Premier's council on aging and seniors' issues. The whole point of that is for us to be able to identify areas where we can improve service to our seniors — how we look at housing options and home care and how we consider even the issue of mandatory retirement. As we can see throughout all the professions, because of the bulge that's moving through the system, we know that's going to be a challenge, and we're prepared to have a discussion about mandatory retirement.

We also intend to increase the earnings exemption for persons with disabilities, and this follows on our previous move to create the single largest rate increase in history for persons with disabilities on income assistance.

We are also adding \$37 million in new funding over the next three years to ensure that women and children escaping violent and abusive relationships have more 24-7 access to safe housing. The Task Force on Homelessness will continue developing new strategies to tackle homelessness, but with that, often, is a series of other issues that individuals are challenged with — issues of drug addictions and mental illness. I know that my colleague the minister of state that deals with these issues will continue the great work she has done in terms of how we begin to address those in meaningful ways in the province.

A third goal is to lead the way in healthy living and physical fitness. There is absolute evidence that if we can deal with the issue of prevention and if we can look at the issue of chronic disease.... It is absolutely critical that we begin to address the health and lifestyle issues that British Columbians face. We are facing a generation of young people.... For the first time, if we don't begin to aggressively deal with the issues of obesity, lack of exercise and healthy eating, we are actually in jeopardy of shortening our children's life expectancy. That is a shocking statistic and fact in a country and province such as ours. It's time for us to be aggressive and to be innovative as we look at how to create a healthier British Columbia.

[1545]

One of the things my ministry is going to be considering as we look at the Act Now initiative is that we're going to have a look at what the United Kingdom is currently doing in their health care system. They have done some incredibly innovative things, including the creation of personal health guides, and what that does is allow the people of Great Britain to create health care plans and lifestyle plans for themselves.

It means that citizens there will have the opportunity to work with their physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses and counsellors to create personally developed health plans, where they can set targets and goals for increasing their health and live a more active and healthy lifestyle. So my ministry over the next number

of months will be looking at how we can look at a similar concept here in British Columbia.

As we have committed in the throne speech, we will be continuing to reach our target of 5,000 beds as we provide for seniors across the province. We are going to do that in a way that better serves the needs of the seniors of today. We fully realize that previously, there were two options for seniors in this province: you could either be at home or be in residential care. Seniors today have told us that they want a variety of options. Some seniors require a little bit of assistance. Others require complete help for 24 hours a day. We are going to continue to build a model that reflects the needs and desires of those seniors.

The other goals talk about leading the world in sustainable environmental management. We're going to continue to build on the success we had when we acquired and preserved Burns Bog. As I have mentioned, we are adding \$6.5 million to the habitat conservation trust fund.

We're also going to establish a conservation corps. It has a great purpose, and not only that, it will provide work for some of our students. We want the students and graduates in programs in this province to be able to work in B.C. parks and wilderness as a new generation of conservationists, so \$7.5 million will also be added to add up to 50 new park rangers and conservation officers. We are going to continue in our strategies as we look at expanding the living rivers strategy and make new investments in those areas as well.

We have said from the very beginning that one of the best health care tools you can give a person is a job, and the other is a top-quality education. We want to lead the nation in job creation.

As I mentioned in my earlier comments, we are going to launch an Asia-Pacific gateway strategy so that we can make sure we take the products created here in British Columbia to the world. We want to open new doors for cultural exchanges, relationships and partnerships in education. We are going to appoint an Asia-Pacific trade council that will give advice to government so that we can go to the people who have expertise, who can give us the direction we need.

We also, as I mentioned, want to create a B.C. competition council. We believe we need to conduct a comprehensive review of B.C.'s competitiveness in every single sector. We want to identify barriers for growth, and frankly, we want to eliminate them.

As I also mentioned, we want to create a One World scholarship fund. We want British Columbia's students to have the opportunity to earn their degrees and diplomas in other non-G-8 countries, helping B.C. to create, again, new relationships all around the world.

We are going to continue to focus on our transportation strategy. This government recognizes the importance of transportation infrastructure to the economy of British Columbia. As a lifelong resident of a northern riding in the province, there is nowhere that that's more critical. We're going to open up our transportation links to the Pacific by making sure that the port of

Prince Rupert is addressed. We want to also expand the port of Vancouver and improve cruise ship facilities all along our coast.

The goals are worthy ones. They are ones that British Columbians deserve the government to focus on and spend their time delivering for the people of the province.

I want to remind people about some of the things that have happened in the province because we had a plan and because we stuck to it. You simply have to read some of the headlines — over the last number of months, in particular. We've seen that over the last number of years, in 2004....

[1550]

Let's take housing starts for an example. In 2004 the urban housing starts in British Columbia increased 25 percent. That is the highest number of starts in British Columbia for ten years. Multiple starts climbed 36 percent, while single-detached starts rose 12 percent. The good news is we knew that if we had a plan and stuck to it, once we began to see the economy turn around, we would begin to be able to build those programs that are so necessary and important for British Columbians.

Let's talk about the development boom we've seen in the area of small business. The Ministry of Small Business and Economic Development's major projects inventory lists \$62 billion in projects planned or underway in the final quarter of 2004. That is up over 40 percent from the same period a year ago.

Let's talk about jobs. B.C.'s unemployment rate has hit a 23-year low in the province. In December, B.C.'s economy generated 17,300 new jobs — half of all the new jobs created in Canada — and the unemployment rate dropped to 6.1 percent, the lowest monthly rate since June 1981. Since December 2001, B.C.'s economy has created 197,700 new jobs, the best job creation record in the country. Of these new jobs, over 97 percent are full-time.

You simply have to look around you. There is more and more good news as we continue to see the impacts of the work that has been done, that we have committed to as a government, and of the plan we have put in place.

I want to talk a little bit about my riding and about the impact that the work we've done has had there. I represent, and I'm extremely proud to represent, the riding of Prince George–Mount Robson. Certainly, the northern part of British Columbia has faced some significant challenges over the past decade, and there would be many who would suggest it has taken far too long for us to feel a sense of optimism and a sense of hope for the future again.

But that has begun to happen in northern British Columbia. There are so many positive things we could actually reflect upon today, but I want to give you some of the highlights as I look at my riding and the accomplishments and things we've experienced over the last number of years.

When I look in the area of advanced education, which is absolutely critical to the success of the province and to how we build a future that is sustainable in

British Columbia. I can't help but talk about how excited people are about the new northern medical program. For the first time in this province, physicians will be trained outside of the lower mainland of British Columbia.

We are so fortunate that in Prince George, 24 medical students have arrived on our campus, and we have a brand-new medical facility there. They are connected on a daily basis, using phenomenal technology, to two other institutions in the province — the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria. Through that integrated model, students will be trained simultaneously at three campuses around the province. That is leading edge. It is unprecedented. In fact, we are being watched by North America as we move this model forward.

The work that's being done in advanced education is phenomenal in Prince George. That is very much due to the leadership of the president we have at the University of Northern British Columbia, Dr. Charles Jago — and I can't help but mention Dr. David Snadden, who has worked so hard to make sure that the medical program has been delivered in the very short period of time we had — and also the work at the College of New Caledonia.

Very recently at the college, we were able to create a trades and technology centre with \$6.46 million from the government, and it was recently named in recognition of a person who has supported the trades significantly in Prince George, Mr. John Brink.

I also want to congratulate the leaders at the College of New Caledonia. We have a new president there. His name is Ralph Troschke. He is new to the College of New Caledonia. We also want to recognize the president recently retired from the college, Dr. Terry Weninger. In northern British Columbia, we now have medical training, and we have the potential to be the leader in trades training in the province, using the John Brink Trades and Technology Centre that will be housed right beside the College of New Caledonia.

[1555]

I want to also recognize an education program that is a partnership between high schools and the College of New Caledonia. It's the career technical centre. I was recently absolutely privileged to be able to speak at the graduation ceremony for dozens of students who are able to complete one of their years of high school and also gain credit toward their first year in a particular trade.

I had so many parents come to me and say, "We are so glad this program was able to meet the needs of our particular young person" — who maybe wasn't particularly geared toward an academic university degree. I can tell you, it was an exciting night as literally dozens of students received that certification.

I want to congratulate, in particular, a tireless worker on behalf of students and in the trades, particularly related to the career technical centre: Mr. Jim Rose. Because of his health, he is now stepping away from that program, and there is a new coordinator. But he has done a phenomenal job and, certainly, spent

much time with me when I was Minister of Advanced Education discussing the whole need to deal with trades training in a very new and innovative way.

I also want to speak briefly about health care achievements, because it certainly has new relevance for me now with my new portfolio. Member after member has stood up in the House, as they've provided their response to the throne speech, and talked about the great news in education and health care across the province.

I think it's important for us to share those examples and make sure we remind British Columbians about how much work has been done by this government, which made a commitment to make sure we protected and increased funding to health care and education. That is precisely what we've done, and I've certainly seen the benefit of that as I've looked at some of the issues facing Prince George and Prince George-Mount Robson.

Just recently, I had the opportunity to participate in a tour that looked at a new geriatric day hospital. I was so impressed with the concept and the model that's being used now in the north. This new geriatric day hospital will offer seniors clinical advice and education in how they can better manage their chronic health conditions.

Seniors will have the opportunity to work with physicians, nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists in one setting. The northern health authority invested \$185,000 in minor capital expenses and one-time costs to open the geriatric day hospital and will continue to provide \$185,000 a year to cover operating costs.

In the village of Valemount, which is part of my riding, northern health nurses have traded in their aging radios for cellular telephones to better manage after-hours medical emergencies. Patients will still be able to dial the Valemount health centre's emergency number if they need help, but the new cell phone service will help nurses to make an initial determination quickly about a patient's needs and to contact the appropriate resources for care.

The expansion of cell service in the Robson Valley has made the switchover from radios to cell phones possible. Certainly, in working with the village councils, it is important.... Cell phone coverage is something that some people in urban ridings probably take for granted. In fact, until very recently, the village of McBride has not had any cell phone coverage. After a great deal of work and partnership with both the village council and the mayor, Mike Frazier, we were able to see, for the first time, cell phone coverage in the village of McBride.

Many parents pointed out to me in McBride the other day that one of the most popular Christmas presents in McBride this year was cell phones. I can tell you that the day cell phone coverage began in McBride, I actually got a number of phone calls from McBride, with residents using their cell phones to let me know that, indeed, it was working.

[H. Long in the chair.]

We also know we needed a plan for physician recruitment in the north in particular. While there are challenges around the province and continue to be some, we know that a plan is now in place for recruitment across the north. As a result of that, the plan was developed by physician leaders.

We have had an excellent working relationship with physicians in Prince George. We've had numerous meetings. My colleague the Minister of State for Mining and I have had numerous meetings with physicians to make sure that we were hearing the concerns of physicians and that our strategy was addressing the concerns that had been expressed.

[1600]

General practitioners and specialists in orthopedics, internal medicine, pathology, psychiatry and radiology — certainly, a part-time locum there — have been successfully recruited in Prince George, along with specialists in obstetrics, gynecology, emergency, pediatrics and pathology. A plastic surgeon and an anaesthetist have also agreed to do long-term locums. Mackenzie and Dawson Creek have new permanent general practitioners, and specialists in internal medicine have been recruited to Fort St. John, Terrace, Quesnel and Prince George.

We needed a plan; we needed a strategy. In fact, the new northern medical program is designed on the principle that if you train students closer to home, they are far more likely to stay there. We know that in the short term we needed a solid plan for recruitment and retention of our physicians. But in the future we know that as we train physicians in northern British Columbia and they do their practical experience in those small northern communities, we are much more likely to actually keep them in northern British Columbia.

Also landmark in the province and in my riding of Prince George-Mount Robson is the agreement-in-principle that was reached with the Lheidli-T'enneh first nation. It's appropriate that the Attorney General is in the House as we speak, because incredible work has been done. I want to pay tribute to the work that's been done not only by this government but also by first nations government and municipal governments as well.

Interjection.

Hon. S. Bond: The Attorney General says it's very exciting, and indeed it is. I am thoroughly confident that the agreement-in-principle that has been reached with the Lheidli-T'enneh will lead to a final treaty with the Prince George-area first nation.

I want to pay tribute to Chief Barry Seymour, who has provided incredible leadership, who has been bold and aggressive on behalf of his people but has been willing to sit down and to work with us as we move forward to find, hopefully, one of the first treaties that will be signed.

I also should comment that the relationship between the first nations government and the government of British Columbia, and also our municipal

council, is exemplary. We know that there has been much work — many MOUs signed — as we look at how best to work together as different levels of government in Prince George–Mount Robson.

Obviously, forestry is a key component of my riding, as we look at the economy of that riding. We were delighted recently, when working with the Minister of State for Forestry Operations and the Minister of Forests, that the province contributed \$25,000 to the city of Prince George for projects that will reduce the risk of wildfire. The province also appointed a three-member task force to devise a strategy for logging tenure, timber pricing and other issues associated with salvaging beetle-damaged trees from Crown lands within city limits.

Our municipality was facing a significant problem, and certainly our residents were facing individual challenges financially. A number of citizens within Prince George worked to bring this idea and this issue to government's attention. In fact, we responded quickly, and we know that work is moving forward.

We have had a number of significant issues in terms of telehealth — all good news — as we look at how we link patients and facilities together across the very large ridings that we have. When I think about my riding, I think about how diverse it is, and yet I know people are concerned about the same kinds of things. They want to ensure that their children have a future that is sustainable and that we have a plan in place in this province to make sure we are continuing to look at those things that would help us build a revitalized economy. We want to make sure the future is prosperous and holds great hope.

One of the things that is significant in my riding is the opportunities we find in terms of tourism potential. The Robson Valley is an absolutely beautiful riding. I am proud to represent it. As you know, it is home to Mount Robson. We have untapped potential in Prince George–Mount Robson.

The throne speech points to hope, to opportunity, and I am so proud to be part of a government who has once followed its plan and now allows us to look to the future with optimism.

[1605]

Hon. G. Abbott: Thank you for this opportunity to join the throne speech debate today. It's always challenging to follow the Deputy Premier in the speaking order. She, of course, is exciting, charming and charismatic, and I absolutely refuse to be any of those things, so this is going to be tough. Fortunately, I have got some good material to work with today in terms of the throne speech, so that may be my only saving grace here.

The throne speech, of course, sets out for the provincial government its vision and its direction for the coming year. In the case of our current throne speech, which was delivered last Tuesday and which will be followed tomorrow with the budget speech, it sets out a vision and direction that I think is very ambitious, very exciting and, indeed, very balanced. What the

throne speech sets out to do is to build a prosperous, healthy society based on three key elements that emerge for me, at least, in the throne speech.

The first of those is a dynamic economy. For those of us who were in this House between 1996 and 2001, we remember all those dark days when a lot of the economic reports, a lot of the economic indicators, were all going in the wrong direction. They all pointed to the provincial economy going downhill. Happily, that is no longer the case. We see in jobs, for example, record low unemployment in the province. It has been 25 years or more, I think, perhaps 1980 or 1981, since we have seen unemployment figures the way they are in British Columbia today. We have now close to 200,000 jobs which have been created during the past three and a half to four years. We are now near 2.1 million jobs, full-time jobs, in the province. That is great news.

We're seeing investment recovery in this province again. The NDP had us about number ten in Canada in terms of new investment. That has changed. British Columbia is rightfully moving back to its position either at or near number one in Canada in terms of new investment.

It is particularly delightful to see, Mr. Premier... Sorry; Mr. Speaker. I didn't mean to elevate you to that lofty office so quickly. It is great to see mining back in British Columbia — \$130 million in exploration investment in the last year. That is the highest it has been for a long, long time and up, I think, from \$25 million in mineral exploration back in 2001. We're on the way back. There are some 20 new mines somewhere in the process of creation. Again, mines can be a tremendous source of wealth, of employment and of investment in this province. It is absolutely delightful to see the mining sector getting back on its feet in the province.

As well, of course, we have seen consumer confidence, business confidence and small business confidence very strong in the province once again. People are investing, they're moving back to British Columbia. The consequence of that is new government revenues, new jobs and great opportunities for our children and our grandchildren in this province once again.

The second leg, I would suggest, in terms of the throne speech and that vision of a healthy prosperous society is a clean, sustainable environment. Of course, there are lots of elements involved in that area of public policy, some of which I'm certainly involved in as minister responsible for sustainable resource management in the province. We have had, for example, the creation of 37 new parks in the province in the last year. Those 37 new parks are all over the province, but I'm delighted some of them are in my constituency of Shuswap.

Again, I think it is remarkable, and it probably has been understated to this point, but in the five land and resource management plans which have recently gone through cabinet and which are out for government-to-government discussion with first nations right now, there will be about one million hectares of new protected areas added to the province. That takes us to

about 13.5 or maybe even approaching 14 percent of the land base in protected areas, which likely, ultimately, will become parks or conservancy areas at some point in the future.

[1610]

Again, that's just part of the attraction of British Columbia. We have a remarkable natural setting in British Columbia, and it's a place where the world loves to come to visit. Remarkable landscapes — and we're doing our part as a government to ensure that those landscapes and those sensitive, special, unique areas of the province are protected for the future. We're also, at the same time, bringing certainty through land and resource management planning, so that the mining sector, the forestry sector and the tourism sector all have opportunity to build and grow across the land base in British Columbia as well.

The third leg in terms of the vision for a prosperous and healthy society is enhanced services, especially in the area of health and education. Those are very, very important for my constituents in Shuswap and, I'm sure, for the constituents of all the members of this assembly. Those enhanced services range from assisted living, housing and, certainly, intermediate care facilities. I know that in Shuswap we've seen new additions in Armstrong, Enderby and Salmon Arm, and we look forward to really improving that area of public policy. We've seen improvements in early childhood programs to ensure that our kids get off to the best possible start in life.

One area that I find very exciting is the expansion of post-secondary education across the province: 25,000 new spaces which the Deputy Premier, when she was Advanced Education minister, announced last year. Some of those spaces are going to be in the Okanagan-Shuswap area, and that's remarkably exciting for young people in the Shuswap and in the Okanagan.

Not only do we see the addition of, I think, 4,500 new spaces at UBC Okanagan beginning this fall; we also have expanded programs at a reconstituted Okanagan College, with centres in Salmon Arm and Armstrong, among other places, and of course the addition of Thompson Rivers University, the former University College of the Cariboo. Again, expanded spaces, expanded programs — very, very exciting. The young people coming out of high school in Sicamous, Salmon Arm, Enderby or Armstrong have just great opportunities now to get a world-class education within an hour of their home, generally speaking.

Realizing that very ambitious vision that has been set out in the throne speech has not been easy. There has been a need on a constant basis to exercise some fiscal discipline in this province, something that certainly was not characteristic of that period which I, in my characteristically non-partisan way, would call the dark and dismal decade of the NDP between 1991 and 2001. We needed to reassert some fiscal discipline in this province so that we did have the opportunity to enhance services and to build opportunities, whether it is in the environment or the economy, for our kids and our grandkids.

We have achieved that fiscal discipline, producing now our second balanced budget, likely to be introduced by the Finance minister tomorrow. We have achieved that, notwithstanding a remarkable series of challenges, ranging from the tragic events of 9/11; the SARS epidemic, which dramatically affected tourism in British Columbia and Canada; the BSE crisis, with the movement of cattle out of Canada and into the American market; the avian flu; the forest fires. There was no end of challenges which faced the government and the people of British Columbia in a number of areas.

[1615]

I do recall that when we saw the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the opposition said: "Well, time to back away from our commitment for a balanced budget in 2004-05. Too tough. You can't do it." Well, we have done it. We've brought fiscal discipline, and now we're starting to see the benefits that flow from that. Now, instead of seeing more and more of our dollars going every year to servicing the provincial debt, we now have some choices about what to do with surpluses. We can look at lower taxes on a general or strategic basis; we can look at paying down the debt; we can look at investing in enhanced medical, educational and social services; or we can do some combination of all of those three. The important thing is that we actually have some choices again — choices that we had lost because of the absence of fiscal discipline in this province.

The throne speech, as I have noted, articulates a vision, and we're going to have an opportunity on May 17 to test-drive that vision with the people of British Columbia. We are going to have an opportunity to see whether, in fact, the people of British Columbia want to see the direction and the vision of this government continue to unfold. I'm confident that we will.

The Premier has been a great leader for this province. He has brought that commitment that has seen us now achieve 97 percent of the promises that we made in the 2001 election — 97 percent. That's a mark that I don't think I ever achieved in school. I would have loved to have had a 97 percent success rate. It is not something that has come easily, and it is only something that has come as a result of the very strong leadership that has been exercised by our Premier.

I've been very proud of what we've been able to achieve as a government. I'm proud of what we've been able to achieve for my constituents in Shuswap, and I'm going to be very proud to stand on my record and on the record of the government come May 17.

May 17 will not be my first campaign; it will be one of many campaigns that I have been a part of. Last October was the twenty-fifth anniversary of my first election to office, not provincially but locally in Sicamous and in the Columbia-Shuswap regional district. I've had the opportunity to represent people in the Shuswap for a long, long time, since 1979. I'm happy in submitting my record to the electors in Shuswap to say definitively that the Shuswap is a better place to live, to work, to raise a family, to retire, to invest, to create jobs

— in every way. The Shuswap, I think, is a better place than when this government was elected in 2001.

I've noted the changes in the post-secondary area, and those are some of the ways that we have seen improvement in opportunities for young people. We've also seen the renovation and upgrading of the old Salmon Arm Senior Secondary that I attended back in the late sixties and early seventies. That has now been renovated and upgraded to the new J.L. Jackson Junior Secondary, and that's a nice achievement.

In the areas of housing and health we've seen some very, very positive changes for my constituents. Just about three months ago I attended the opening of Pioneer Square in Armstrong. It's a great, new assisted-living facility for seniors and very much their home, very much a place where seniors can enjoy independent living but with occasional supports from the medical system. They're very, very happy with the range of services that are provided there.

[1620]

I recently attended the opening of the Enderby Community Health Centre. Again, it's part of the new model of services to British Columbians. Also, very happy to recently announce the conversion or possibly the replacement of the old Enderby hospital with new assisted-living units for Enderby as well.

In Salmon Arm we will see, in July, the completion of 75 units of intermediate care that are being built and managed by the Good Samaritan Society. That's very exciting. That will be followed by an additional 55 units of intermediate care plus a conversion of Pioneer Lodge to assisted living as well. There have been lots and lots of changes in the housing and health area, which I'm very, very proud of.

In the area of infrastructure, I want to make a point of saying how our commitments around infrastructure translate to services in my constituency of Shuswap. I had the opportunity to be the minister responsible for the Infrastructure Works program, at least the water and sewer portion of that program, as Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services.

Over the years we've seen a number of important additions in terms of infrastructure works in the Shuswap. We've seen water and sewer grants for the Saratoga waterworks in the Columbia-Shuswap regional district in north Shuswap. Salmon Arm's sewer upgrade to the tune of \$1.4 million was a very important project for the people and the district of Salmon Arm. We've seen a new water-pumping station for Sicamous, water and sewer upgrades in Enderby, and a drainage infrastructure improvement in Armstrong as well.

There have been a lot of changes in the transportation area as well. These are big numbers, but they are also very important to people who live there. There is an area just west of Salmon Arm called Carlin. Carlin School is located there. For years, for decades, parents as they dropped their kids off at Carlin School have had to make a left-hand turn in the passing lane of a three-lane stretch of highway — very unsafe conditions. Fortunately, there were never more than just

minor accidents through there, but it was a very dangerous situation and one that has cried out for remediation for a long time. Happily, the Ministry of Transportation has in the last two years invested \$13 million in that project. Now there's a separate access to the school. Parents no longer have to worry, as they take their kids to school, that they or a school bus might be involved in a serious accident there.

We've also seen resolution of a very important issue for me and for the member for Okanagan-Vernon. That is the Swan Lake interchange, which is the boundary between Okanagan-Vernon and Shuswap. For a long time we've seen logging trucks and others having to undertake dangerous manoeuvres to try to get out onto Highway 97A from Highway 97B or C. That's been a very, very difficult situation for those truckers and for others to try to get across what had become one of the very busiest intersections in the Okanagan.

Again, fortunately for us.... I know that both the Minister of Education — the member for Okanagan-Vernon — and I identified that as one of our very highest priorities for our constituency. Happily, the Ministry of Transportation came through with a \$22.5 million project, which has now largely addressed that issue. There is one more lift of pavement to go on, but the project is very near completion and is a tremendous addition to safety and to transportation efficiency in the North Okanagan-Shuswap.

We're also seeing long-overdue projects both east and west of Salmon Arm and even in small areas, which are very, very important to people — small projects but very important to people. Falkland has long been looking for a pedestrian signal light so that elderly people on scooters, perhaps, or young children crossing to go to school can now get a crosswalk signal to allow them to get safely across Highway 97 and so that they can get safely to school or into the store or wherever they need to go.

[1625]

Similarly, in Enderby there's been a long-term issue on Knight Street, which is the pedestrian crossing for both the elementary and senior high schools. That's been a long-standing issue with the folks in Enderby. In recent weeks we have announced that in fact there will be a full signal light at Knight Street so that kids are no longer going to be in jeopardy as they try to get safely to school.

In the area of community infrastructure, sports and arts. There have been lots of discussions in the throne speech about the importance of physical activity and diet and so on in the health of our citizens. I know there have been a number of very good projects that have been undertaken with the support of the community Infrastructure Works program. Among those, I think it is particularly worth noting, is \$2 million from senior governments towards a new Armstrong-Spallumcheen arena — one I'm sure will be very, very well used. I know that when the old arena was losing its life, there was a lot of concern in Armstrong and Spallumcheen about that. I think the \$2 million that will be coming from senior governments towards that

arena will be pivotal in making that project a great success.

Down in the Armstrong area we've also added, I think, some \$50,000 or \$60,000 to improve the facilities at the Caravan theatre, which provides some innovative arts programs for the North Okanagan-Shuswap. We've invested considerably in the field house and change rooms for the Little Mountain Sports Complex at Salmon Arm, one that my son enjoyed as a football and soccer player. It is a great addition to the storehouse of athletic fields in Salmon Arm and a great project to be supporting. I know that all of us who enjoy racquet sports are looking forward to the addition of the racquetball centre in Salmon Arm opening in June or July, I believe.

We have achieved much in terms of those areas — infrastructure, transportation, health, education. In the full range, I think we have seen the constituency of Shuswap benefit greatly from the fiscal discipline and the innovative programs that we brought to government. Now we're able to enjoy the fruits of all of that work.

Much has been done, as I have noted, and indeed there is more to be done as well. That's why it is so exciting to be a part of the team that will be going to the electorate on May 17 to, hopefully, get a renewal of the mandate that we have.

British Columbia is a province that has been mightily blessed in a great many ways. We probably have the most remarkable array of resources of any province in Canada. One only needs to get to the top of a place like Silver Star and have a look around, and you get a real sense of the ways in which we have been blessed.

We have mineral wealth in our mountains. We have hydroelectric power and, of course, tourism opportunities in our rivers and our lakes and in the ocean as well. We've got oil and gas, principally up in the northeast of the province, but all across the province we have mineral and other resources. Of course, we have — and we should never forget it, notwithstanding some of the challenges we have with the softwood lumber dispute and so on — a tremendously strong, world-leading forest industry in the province, which I think we have helped to put on a world-competitive basis once again.

[1630]

The challenges remain for the forest industry in terms of the softwood lumber dispute, but I know the Minister of Forests is working very hard to try to address those. Hopefully, they will be soon.

We've got great resources, and we've got great people. What we need to continue to do as a government is to try to wed that informed, constructive, beneficial public policy to that great resource base we have and to the great human resource base we have in this province. As we do that, we will begin to further realize the tremendous potential that exists in the great province we are all so very proud of. I look forward to working with you, Mr. Speaker, to achieve an even brighter day for British Columbia.

D. Hayer: It is an honour to rise today to speak to the throne speech.

This throne speech, like others I have heard in this House since being elected to government in 2001, continues a vision that has taken this province from the worst to first in just over three and a half years. That is an unprecedented accomplishment.

When we formed government in 2001, British Columbia had the worst economy in the nation. People and their businesses were fleeing this province. Today people are moving back to British Columbia in the thousands. We have had a record-setting growth. We have a buoyant economy. Last year British Columbia set a record for building permits: \$55 million in new construction.

That speaks volumes for the faith people have in our economy, faith in the way our government conducts the people's business, faith in this province's future. Businesses are coming back to B.C., investing in our province because they can see where this government's policies are taking all of us. Once again, people want to raise their families here, invest here and create lifestyles here that are second to none.

That confidence is based on what we have heard in this throne speech and what we have heard in throne speeches over the past four years. What all British Columbians and all Canadians have heard is a vision of this province that fosters a strong, vibrant economy — a vision that expands job opportunities, a vision that puts more money in people's pockets through tax cuts. It is a vision that encourages education, a vision that protects and enhances health care.

Over the past three and a half years we had to make some tough decisions on this side of the House. We had to tighten our belts and make some short-term sacrifices for many long-term gains. We have now achieved many of those gains. The huge budget surplus we enjoy today shows how quickly those sacrifices have paid off and how quickly gains can be made if we all put our minds to making sound decisions.

Four years ago we were facing a structural deficit of \$3.9 billion. Today we have a surplus of more than \$2 billion. At the same time, we have put much more money into two crucial areas: health care and education. In Surrey we now have a university campus tied into Simon Fraser University. Post-secondary education is now available to the children of my constituents, near the homes where they live.

That will make it more affordable for Surrey residents to go to university, to gain higher education and start on a path to better paying jobs, because they can continue to live at home instead of having to dip into their education savings funds to pay for accommodations. With this throne speech, we have now set a limit on post-secondary tuition fee increases, tying them directly to the rise in inflation. That means that higher education continues to be affordable and accessible to the families in my riding and throughout this province.

In addition, we have heard that over the next three years another \$132 million will be invested in our colleges and universities, and new steps are being taken to

improve financial assistance to students. Higher education does not just apply to university. A new trades and technology training centre is coming to the Surrey-Cloverdale area through Kwantlen University College. This throne speech has just detailed an Industry Training Authority and more seats in computer science, and electrical and computer engineering.

[1635]

In case anybody feels that our younger children have been left out, this government recently announced another additional \$150 million going into the K-to-12 public education system. This investment in our children's future was the largest single investment ever. I am happy to say that the children of my constituents in Surrey-Tynehead will benefit from \$15.9 million of that investment immediately.

With investment in education comes the demand for investment in child care. The government has subsidized child care to the tune of \$160 million in 2003-04. Government also spent over \$35 million for supported child care for a combined federal-provincial total of \$195 million. Finally, this year's budget for children is \$182 million, showing that the government is committed to B.C.'s children.

Another priority of this government is helping women in need by refocusing the funding so that as many resources as possible go directly to helping women and children fleeing violence. Our government has invested \$132 million over the four years in transition house funding and in counselling programs for women in need or in violent situations. There is more to come, with another \$12.5 million annually beginning in the 2005-06 budget.

We have not forgotten the disabled. This government has granted the highest one-time increase in the monthly payments to those on disability assistance in B.C.'s history — the highest ever.

However, the throne speech is also about bright futures for our senior citizens, whose hard work and dedication built this beautiful province and who created the foundation on which we are rebuilding this province. It was through their efforts over the years that we can stand proud that British Columbia is the best place in Canada and in the world to live. This throne speech was also for them. It contained many things for our seniors, responding to the needs and expectations of an aging society.

Included in the throne speech is the appointment of the Premier's council on aging and seniors issues, which will identify pressing needs and opportunities for seniors. We will look into ways to improve the full spectrum of housing and options for home care. We'll consider the issue of mandatory retirement as well as engage seniors and all citizens on what changes should be made to improve the independence and quality of life for our seniors. We also are putting an additional \$100 million annually over the next two years into residential care, with the goal of reducing waiting times for residential care from the current one year down to 90 days.

Another issue that concerns seniors — in fact, that concerns all of us — is the matter of crime. We are now

turning over to municipalities 100 percent of traffic fine revenues. We promised only 75 percent, and we delivered more, to assist communities in the fight against crime. In Surrey, shortly after our government announced that my city will be receiving some \$3.5 million in fines revenue, the city announced a safety-oriented budget which will see 41 new police officers, 50 auxiliary officers and 28 RCMP staff members hired. That is yet another tool for our community to use in this effort to combat crime. Add to that the new safe street legislation. We have gone a long way in just a short few years in the battle against crime — something the people of Surrey greatly welcome.

That takes us to the battle to rebuild our health care: to rejuvenate a system that was broken before this government was elected in 2001 and that simply was not sustainable. We were facing a huge challenge, but we painstakingly had to take some great strides toward resolving these issues.

[1640]

On health care improvements directly impacting my constituents, we have expansion coming to Surrey Memorial Hospital, particularly to the emergency department. With the start on construction of the new regional hospital in Abbotsford, pressure will be taken off Surrey Memorial Hospital, opening up more spaces and making access to immediate health care much better for people in my community.

It angers me to hear the opposition complain and complain about health care. Yet they never moved forward with improvements to the health care system when they were in power. When the NDP were in power, it was suggested in 1995-96 and 2000 to expand the Surrey Memorial Hospital emergency. They never did that. In fact, even though they constantly promised to build the hospital in Abbotsford, they never turned one shovelful of dirt when they were in power. Now they are fighting to stop the hospital — a move that will hurt the residents of Surrey and the entire Fraser Valley. Shame on them. They just don't seem to understand, or perhaps it's because they don't want to understand.

When government embarks on a plan to revive the economy and follows through with the success we have achieved over the past four years, everyone benefits. One of the most significant issues in Surrey is transportation improvements, and those improvements which are environmentally responsible, because they reduce emissions, are now possible because our economy has been turned around.

We are about to see a new bridge linking north and south of the Fraser River in Port Kells, taking pressure off the Port Mann Bridge. We have a visionary Minister of Transportation who is fixing the biggest traffic bottleneck in our province.

In my riding we are currently witnessing a widening of Fraser Highway from 160th Street to 168th Street. We are working on adding more lanes to the Port Mann Bridge, to the Trans-Canada freeway from Vancouver through Langley, twinning of the Port Mann Bridge and completing the South Fraser prime-

ter road, which will mean that my constituents can go to work quicker and get back home to their families sooner.

We have the Minister of Transportation planning for improvements to many of the Highway 1 freeway overpasses and interchanges in Surrey-Tynehead, which will enhance the traffic flow for residents, commuters and commercial traffic.

We have work going on, on the widening of Highway 10 in Surrey and four-laning of the Pacific Highway and 176th Street from the U.S. border crossing to the Trans-Canada Highway in my riding. These two projects alone will save our economy millions of dollars in improved commercial traffic flows, and they will alleviate the stress and congestion currently on the existing routes.

However, this government's concern is not just about improving the flow of goods through British Columbia; it is about improving the flow of goods internationally. We are developing trade and tourism opportunities with the entire world and specifically towards the incredible market growth we are seeing today in China, India and throughout the Asian world.

In fact, I have just been appointed vice-chair of the Asian Economic Development Committee of the government, so our dynamic move toward tapping into Asian markets for our products is particularly gratifying to me. Developing trade opportunities with Asia will not only reduce our dependence on cross-border exports to the United States, but they will have the potential of vastly increasing our exports due to huge populations and increasing consumer wealth in the Asian nations.

I was also particularly encouraged by the positive results of the recent trade mission to China and Japan during the last two weeks of January by the Minister of Forests and a delegation of more than 50 British Columbia entrepreneurs and business people. More exports mean more jobs — yet another reason to be convinced that our strong economy and our first place among Canadian provinces will continue for decades to come with the policies of this government.

[1645]

All that would not be happening if it wasn't for our determination to follow through on the vision this government has shown in the past throne speeches. It would not be happening if the government had not stood firm on its commitment to ensure that our economy returns to its rightful place as a leader in the nation. This throne speech, however, is not so much about what we have accomplished in the past but about what we will accomplish in the future. It is about what vision can do to ensure that this province remains a vibrant, dynamic centre of excellence for business, for education, for health care, for family lifestyles. It is all about the vision that will ensure that British Columbia continues to attract and keep the brightest and the best — that it continues to be the best place to live in this country to raise your family in and to do business in.

This throne speech is the last one of this government's mandate. It is laying out not only what we will

do over the next few months but also what we can do and will do during our next term in office. This speech details where this province will go this year, next year and potentially for decades to come. This is a vision on which we will follow through — a vision that will continue the growth, the prosperity, the security of excellent education opportunities, and will continue the expansion of health care programs for all British Columbians.

We are going into an election in three months. I, for one, am confident that the people of British Columbia, after hearing the throne speech, will return this government to yet another powerful mandate. British Columbians do not want to return to the dark days of being a have-not province — a huge budget deficit, a health care system that was unsustainable and broken, educational institutions that were stagnating because of lack of funds, forestry and mining regulations that strangled the lifeblood of the industry.

British Columbians support our vision of growth and prosperity, our vision of social responsibility, our vision of better educational opportunities and expanded health care facilities. I know that based on the contents of the throne speech, they will support this government on May 17.

J. Bray: I rise as the MLA for Victoria-Beacon Hill very proud to be able to support the throne speech and the exciting vision that this government has laid out for a golden decade in British Columbia.

I have risen in this House many times and spoken long times — sometimes eloquently, sometimes not so; sometimes with great detail, sometimes with less. But I have always been supported in the work I do in this chamber by staff both here at the Legislature and in my constituency office. I would not have been able to do the work as the MLA for the last four years if it weren't for those individuals. So here at the Legislature I would like to thank my legislative assistant, Marnie Llewellyn-Thomas, and at my constituency office, Mike Demers and Carla Perry, who really work very hard serving my constituents and our community here day in and day out. They make a big difference for my constituents in various issues, and certainly they're an important part of the work I do here. I would just like to acknowledge how hard they have worked over the last four years and how much I personally appreciate it.

You know, there has been a lot of talk in the last several weeks in the newspapers and on TV about leadership and, really, the need for leadership in a province like British Columbia. In order to be strong in leadership, you have to have a vision. You have to have a vision that is articulated, that is clear and focused, and that has measurables — outcomes that are deliverable, which people can see and aspire towards. The Premier of this province, through the throne speech, has laid out a vision for the next ten years that I'm very excited to be part of. I'm very excited about being part of a team that wants to ensure that we achieve all of those goals.

Let me just take a brief look at the overall five goals that this government has laid out — not just for the

next year, not just for the next election cycle, but for the next ten years — for every single British Columbian to aspire to. Make B.C. the best-educated, most literate place in North America. Make B.C. a model for healthy living and physical fitness. Build the best system of supports in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk and seniors. Lead the world in sustainable environmental management. Lead Canada in job creation. Those are five strong, far-reaching goals that every British Columbian can benefit from if we achieve them and that every British Columbian can have a part of in moving us forward.

[1650]

Now, it is not surprising that the NDP and Carole James are against that, in that that's what their opposition is, but I do find it hard to understand how Carole James and the NDP could be against the vision that says we want to be the most literate and educated jurisdiction in North America, the most physically fit, the healthiest and have the best human supports in Canada and in North America for persons at risk. I don't know how the opposition can stand there and be against that. I don't know how the opposition can criticize that vision. They might like to poke holes in some of the strategies. That's fair enough. But to actually be against a vision as positive, as inclusive and as far-reaching as that, surprises me.

I listened to the Leader of the Opposition during her time in this House speaking on the throne speech. I listened very intently, because I said: "Fine. If they don't support this vision for British Columbians, I can't wait to hear the vision from the Leader of the Opposition."

B. Kerr: They're not going to tell us.

J. Bray: That's right. They're not going to tell us. The member opposite is correct. They are not going to tell us what their vision is.

Now, I remember when Carole James was elected leader of the NDP, oh, 16 long months ago. I remember she committed then that a few months after the leadership she would bring forth her vision for British Columbians. It didn't happen.

Then I remembered that she said: "Well, around Christmastime" — meaning the Christmastime we just had — "our vision will come forward. Our plan for British Columbians will come forward." It didn't happen.

Then she boldly announced — in fact, I think she had a press conference right outside these doors — that the NDP will bring forth their vision once they see our budget within a week of the budget speech. Now she has suggested that in fact she will not put forth her platform, her vision, until after the election is called.

I only have one question for you, Carole: which election are you talking about? We want to be sure that British Columbians know they have a choice. They can go back to the jobs and timber accord. They can go back to B.C. Hydro boards staffed by their cronies. They can go back to B.C. Ferries boards that are fired

when they actually try to give government advice. They can go back to Bingogate. They can go back to Hydrogate. They can go back to a lost decade. They can go back to when one out of every two mining jobs was lost in this province. They can go back to forestry policies that closed 23 mills in this province around every region. Or they can go forward to the best-educated, most literate province in North America; to the job leader in Canada; to the healthiest and fittest population that's ever hosted an Olympics; to the best human supports for seniors, children at risk, persons with disabilities and special needs in North America.

They can have a choice, but they need to know what that choice is. Well, Carole, we're all waiting. British Columbians are waiting. But British Columbians deserve to have choices. That's what a democracy is. Well, I'm proud of the choice we're boldly putting forward in this throne speech. Let me take a quick look at some of that, because I think it's important to look at some of the details of this plan. It has resonance for the province but also for my constituents. I hope that if Carole James actually does decide to put forth the NDP's platform once the election is underway — to give British Columbians four, five or six days to make their decision, because that's how long she is going to give them — she has the kind of detail in her plan that we have in ours. I know there is a great saying. They say that the best way to confuse a socialist is to ask for details, but I hope that Carole James and the NDP will actually put some details on the table and will explain not just the what but the how.

What is so exciting about this throne speech is that we not only lay out the vision of the what, but we answer the how question in very specific, measurable ways — creative, innovative, leading-edge — that will show British Columbians how together we can arrive at these visions and make B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction in North America.

[1655]

Here are some of the ways in which the throne speech laid out that goal and how we'll achieve it: \$150 million in new funding to ensure school districts provide library services, textbooks, art and music programs, and services to students with special needs; extend the Action Schools B.C. program to every school in B.C. from K-to-9 and eliminate junk food from all schools in the next four years; extend the Roots of Empathy program, which teaches children compassion and understanding and has proven effective in helping reduce aggressive behaviour to every school.

These are very important in my community, and I know that my constituents are very excited by all of those options. It will mean continued and enhanced support for great schools in my community, like Sir James Douglas, James Bay Community School, South Park Elementary, Sundance school, Vic High, Central middle school — schools that are integral parts of their neighbourhoods and of my community. These programs will benefit every single student in every one of those schools. Schools like Central and Vic High have been leaders in empowering students to be involved as

caring citizens and in achieving high areas in academics and sport.

You know what is really great? A school like Vic High was involved with the Victoria Foundation for the young philanthropic program where a group of students was actually given \$3,000 from the Victoria Foundation and allowed to go out in their community and decide how best to donate that to various non-profit groups, to learn that sometimes choices are hard and that you sometimes have to make priorities but that you can make a difference in your community. This throne speech supports students like that and others in my community to be the best that they can be.

As well, \$1.5 billion to ensure that every school in British Columbia is up to the most modern seismic plans available — that's a vision. That also ensures that our most valuable asset in our communities will be safe. Victoria, as you know, Mr. Speaker, has some of the oldest schools in the province, so this is particularly important in a riding like mine. In fact, just out the door and down the block, South Park is a school that's going to benefit now and into the future from this new investment.

Increase funding for colleges and universities by \$132 million over the next three years. That goes directly into spaces for our students to access the best post-secondary education they can get anywhere in the world here at the University of Victoria, Camosun College and Royal Roads. That benefits our community. That's an investment in our children. That's an investment in our future. That's the kind of investment that will pay dividends for the next 20 and 30 years as those young people can stay here, raise their families, invest in their community and support all of us in our old age.

Last year in the throne speech this government committed to the largest single expansion in post-secondary in 40 years — 25,000 additional spaces. Where is Carole James? Where is the NDP on that? How can the NDP be against that? They talk about things like tuition freezes. Well, it is very interesting that while Carole James's one sort of policy platform is that she'll have a one-year tuition freeze — and she'll fund universities about half of what we're giving them for that — her counterpart in Alberta is criticizing Premier Klein, who has promoted a tuition freeze, as a pure political stunt with no actual policy merit. I find it very interesting that Carole James is actually proposing what her counterpart in Alberta calls a simple political stunt with no policy background. I really think that the NDP needs to get together and talk a little bit about the stunts they are going to do and aren't going to do.

Legislation to limit future tuition increases to the rate of inflation effective this September. That is concrete, because it ensures financial viability for the institutions and certainty for students and for parents planning into their future. That's good policy. That's good planning. That's the way in which you manage a large post-secondary program. Real solutions for students with real and predictable funding for institutions strikes the best balance.

Lead the way in healthy living and physical fitness — another one of our visions. There's \$1.5 billion more for health care in the next three years. That's in addition to the over \$2 billion we have already added. That's a direct investment. Remember, Mr. Speaker, that when we ran in the last campaign, our commitment was to put patients first, to put patients at the top of the health care agenda. So that's not money going into administration. That's not money going into groundskeeping to make places look slightly better. That's going into bedside care. That's going into enhanced training for our nurses, into more operating time, into more technology, into more diagnostic services to make sure our patients get the best health care possible. I don't know why the opposition would sit there and be against that kind of investment.

[1700]

For my riding what these commitments have translated to already is the new diagnostic and treatment centre at Royal Jubilee Hospital and improvements to the cardiac ward, which is one of the leading cardiac centres in Canada.

The new psychiatric mental health emergency ward at Royal Jubilee is providing a safe place for those with psychiatric emergencies to be separate from the regular emergency room. Staffed by professionals in the area of psychiatric treatment, it allows them safety, dignity and support as well as support for their families. That's the kind of investment this government makes, based on a vision of ensuring we have the best health care for anybody waiting.

It's interesting that for all the doom and gloom that the opposition over there puts on our health care system and, by doing so, on the professionals that work in our health care system, if British Columbia were a stand-alone country, we would have the second-highest life expectancy anywhere in the world outside of Japan. We have the best cancer outcomes of anywhere in Canada. We have some of the best outcomes for stroke patients. We are leading-edge in areas of genomics and proteomics, including the fact that we now have two potential SARS vaccines discovered and produced here in British Columbia.

I think the opposition should actually pay a bit of attention to what our health care professionals and academics are doing in this province that's not only benefiting British Columbians but is, in fact, potentially benefiting everybody in the entire world. We're focusing new energy in this throne speech on prevention and health promotion. The NDP had ten years to actually work on that. Do you know what they did in the last ten years? Nothing.

What do I think is going to be in Carole James's hidden agenda about health promotion, injury prevention and sickness prevention when she finally releases it sometime in the next several months? Not a thing. That would require vision, a plan, steps and measurable outcomes. That's not something we've seen from the NDP in the ten years they were in government, and it's certainly not something we're seeing from them now.

Launching Act Now, a health and fitness program for all British Columbians. Imagine that — a government actually supporting individual British Columbians to better manage and take charge of their own health in conjunction with their health professionals, their local nutritionists, their local massage therapist, their local GP. That is exciting, and that is going to make British Columbia a leader in Canada in health prevention and health promotion.

Many of my constituents have talked to me about the fact that we need to move from a sick care system into a health care system. Well, this government is the first government in Canada to take concrete, real steps to achieve that goal so that we can actually keep people out of the health care system, because we keep our citizens healthier, keep our seniors safe from injuries, keep our children safe from obesity. We're actually taking the steps.

We've not only got the vision, but we've got the specific steps to achieve that goal. I think being the healthiest jurisdiction to ever host an Olympics is a great vision and a great dream. Why the opposition sits there and is against that is beyond me, but I know that my constituents think that's a great goal and are excited about working with us in order to achieve it.

I'm excited about the fact that we're going to welcome B.C.'s first class of nurse practitioners and graduates this year from UBC and UVic, while the first class of nurse practitioners is going to begin training at the University of Northern British Columbia. The NDP had ten years to get that program going, but they didn't, for reasons that had nothing to do with health care.

We've budgeted \$100 million in 2007 to support the Michael Smith Foundation's amazing work in genome mapping and cancer research. That's an investment that will benefit not only British Columbians but, in fact, the world. As we know, Genome B.C. and the Michael Smith Foundation make their discoveries available to the world, because that's the British Columbia spirit.

We're expanding on B.C.'s reputation as a global leader in public health and research by expanding the B.C. Centre for Disease Control into the Pacific centre for disease control. We're prepared to work with our Pacific Rim partners on all sorts of emerging public health issues here and abroad, to share our expertise in our great public health delivery system to benefit people from Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Beijing and Tokyo. That's what a progressive government that has a vision does.

[1705]

I have a question to Carole James, through you, Mr. Speaker: what is your vision for health care? What is your hidden agenda? Is it to have our health care system managed by the B.C. Federation of Labour? Will Jim Sinclair be the unofficial minister of health? I don't know, and I think British Columbians are starting to ask that question as well. Can the NDP articulate a health vision without the B.C. Federation of Labour's stamp of approval on it? That's a question that I think the pundits up in the media gallery are starting to ask.

I wonder locally.... Okay, that's provincial. In my own riding we have issues that I've been working on for three and a half years. Citizens are wondering why Carole James has been silent on the James Bay Health Clinic. Does she support that clinic? Does she support primary care health reform? Does she support the change in the funding model I was able to secure at the Ministry of Health Services to better fund that program and to better recognize that seniors require an extra level of care and, therefore, the funding should reflect that? I continue to encourage residents in James Bay and the Fairfield area to register at the clinic to ensure the clinic's long-term viability. I hope that Carole James would at least speak locally in support of the James Bay Health Clinic, but so far she's been silent.

Build the best system of human supports in North America. How could the NDP sit there and be against that? Those are some of the things they do their greatest railing at. A new Premier's council on aging and seniors issues to identify opportunities to improve seniors services, examine how to improve housing options and home care and consider the issue of mandatory retirement — these are the issues that legislators need to tackle. You can't sweep them under the rug. We're all getting older, and the portion of us getting older versus those that are coming behind us is diminishing. Where is Carole James and the NDP's vision on those issues? Is she prepared to talk about them? Does she know what the mandatory retirement age is? I don't know. She is not available to talk about those things.

We're going to make sure we give an opportunity for British Columbians — for academics, for policy-makers — to make constructive decisions that will affect seniors care, not just in the next year or five years but for the next generation, for the benefit of our citizens.

You know, the NDP scaremongered around disability benefits for two years in one of the most shameful displays in the history of this thirty-seventh parliament. They actually went after people with disabilities and put them in fear that somehow they were going to lose their benefits when the Minister of Human Resources conducted his review of persons with disability benefits. The actual fact of what happened is that over 6,000 additional recipients came on to the benefit stream as a result of the changes we made and the support we provided the program.

When those members of the opposition were in government for ten years, they had the opportunity to increase the earnings exemption for persons with disabilities so that they could earn more money without it affecting their benefits. They didn't do it. We increased it to \$400 a month. They had the opportunity to expand the number of people receiving benefits. They didn't do it; this government did. The thing I'm very proud of that this government did is we recognized that persons with disabilities.... Because of the extra costs they have and the high cost of living in places like Victoria and Vancouver, we provided the largest single increase in benefits in the history of British Columbia to persons with disabilities.

We now have the second-highest benefit rate in this country, and we did it because one of our fundamental principles when we ran in the last election was to ensure that we provided support to those most vulnerable in our population. That's what we committed to in 2001, and that's what we've delivered on every day since. That move by the Minister of Human Resources and Treasury Board was very welcome indeed in my community.

The Premier's Task Force on Homelessness actually got seven mayors from seven of the larger cities and said: "Fine, let's not talk about this issue anymore. You come to me with the action plans, and we as a provincial government are going to take actions on the priorities you identify for your communities." Four in Vancouver have already been announced, because they were at the later stages of planning. I know that here in Victoria our mayor is working hand in hand with that task force and the Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services to ensure we provide those needs.

I am proud, in this community, of what we've been able to achieve over the last few years. We've been able to double the amount of youth detox available in downtown Victoria. We've hired six additional outreach workers to be able to reach those who are having the greatest trouble accessing services. We opened up, I think, one of the great innovative models in Canada, which is the Victoria Sobering and Assessment Centre. It is properly staffed and provides a place for those who are under the influence of alcohol and who would normally go to hospital or jail. It's a safe, staffed place to sober up that is not an institution and happens to be housed right next to detox should they choose to make a different change in their lives.

[1710]

I am very pleased that in my riding we have a 28-unit apartment called Johnson Street Manor, which is staffed and provides a safe, comfortable, appropriate apartment for 28 people who otherwise always found themselves homeless because of mental health issues, or admitted to Eric Martin Pavilion. They live in the community because they deserve to, because they're part of the community, and we provide the supports to allow them to do it. It's been a tremendous success.

I don't know where the NDP and Carole James are on those types of innovative programs, but I know that this government is committed to them, because this government puts the resources behind them to make sure that they're successful.

I want to know this, because addiction services is a big issue in downtown. You know, under the NDP, addiction services was in the Ministry of Labour. Now, I don't know why you would have addiction services housed in the Ministry of Labour, but it was.

An Hon. Member: It's crazy.

J. Bray: It is crazy. I agree with you.

What's even odder is.... Addiction services requires focus. It requires dedication. It requires ongoing re-

search and ongoing advocacy. From 1996 to 2001 the minister in charge of addiction services, the Minister of Labour, changed nine times. Is it any wonder that they couldn't fund their mental health action plan? They never had a minister long enough to get briefed on it before they changed. From 1996 to 2001 they had over 80 ministerial changes. In fact, it got so bad for the NDP that at one point they had a Minister of Children and Family Development who wasn't even an elected MLA. That's no way to provide services to those most vulnerable. That's no way to put focus through your civil service and deliver services to people who are in need.

We made sure we had stability, and we recognized that addiction services needed to be with mental health services and that those, in fact, are health issues. They're not labour issues, and they're not criminal issues. They're health issues. We're the government that put them together. We're the government that's funding the mental health action plan. We're the government that's actually opening up new residential beds closer to home, out of the Riverview system, so that patients and their families can live in their communities and get the professional support they need to heal.

I'm also pleased that we recognize that on the other side, we need to support our law enforcement community so that they have the tools and resources necessary to protect our streets and make our communities safe. That was one of our commitments when we ran. So I'm very pleased that we have provided the funding to hire 215 additional officers provincewide, especially in rural, remote communities and first nations communities that perhaps had little or no police services in advance.

I'm very pleased that our early childhood development program, something that's very important to me, is going to be receiving an additional \$76 million over the next three years to support the programs we know will make a difference for a lifetime of learning and a lifetime of health by making the investment in our children prior to the year they start kindergarten.

There's \$91 million over the next three years for adult community living services, offering new respite care for families caring for children and adults with developmental disabilities to provide them the kind of respite care they need to continue to be the loving, nurturing caregivers that they are but also to get time to rejuvenate and look after the rest of their family members.

That is a vision, and those are specific supports that make a difference in lives — working with the federal government over the next several months to ensure that the \$650 million that will be available for child care benefits the most number of families, the most number of children and the most number of caregivers possible. We're working to achieve a goal — not like the NDP, which is only working to achieve political stunts.

Lead the world in sustainable environmental management. You know, we live in a province that is blessed with natural resources — people, minerals, forestry, fish, tourism opportunities. We really do have an incredible province here, the best place on Earth. We have to make sure that we manage it properly, but we can't put our

heads in the sand and suggest that somehow mining isn't important or that forestry isn't important.

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

I know when I drive by Royal Jubilee Hospital in my riding that it was built by mining and forestry. I know that Vic High was built by forestry and mining. I know that many of the docklands around my community were built by commercial fishing. So we have to recognize that that is what pays for the services that are important, but we also know that the world and British Columbians expect us to do it in a way that is sustainable and recognizes the importance of our natural habitat. That's one of our five pillars in our vision for the next decade.

[1715]

We're doing that by targeting \$6.5 million to the habitat conservation trust fund to support additional parkland acquisition; \$9 million to establish a B.C. conservation corps so students and graduates can work in B.C. parks and create a new generation of conservationists; \$7.5 million for up to 50 new park rangers and conservation officers; a \$120 million B.C. community water improvement program. Why is the NDP against that? How could you be against safe drinking water for every British Columbian? That's the vision. We're putting the resources and the planning behind it. I don't see where the NDP is on that.

Leading the country in job creation. The best thing for a community is a healthy economy and a healthy job base for families to live and to grow. We've detailed several strategies that will achieve that.

You know, I see that my time is almost up, but I think it's important to note a couple of things. Carole James says that she's going to have a new vision and a new plan; she's just not going to tell us what it is. Well, I don't know how that's going to happen, because I look at some of the people who are going to be running for the NDP — my goodness. When I look at the list, it's the Glen Clark reunion tour — Harry Lali, Tim Stevenson, Leonard Krog, Sue Hammell, Erda Walsh, Pietro Calendino, former staffer John Horgan.

Hon. S. Bond: Same old, same old.

J. Bray: Same old, same old.

And of course Corky Evans. Well, okay, it's the B team. Nonetheless, I find it amazing that the group that brought us fast ferries and Bingogate is now going to bring us some new, bold vision.

It's interesting that Corky Evans — whom you may remember from this House, Mr. Speaker — is going to be one of the key candidates in the next election, because it was Corky Evans who gave, I think, one of the great quotes that described how the NDP governed. He made this quote January 17, 2000: "We made announcements about things we weren't even going to do." So Corky is going to be signing his name to the secret, hidden agenda plan that Carole James, some day in some election, is going to promote to the rest of British Columbians.

Hon. R. Thorpe: It's Jim Sinclair's agenda.

J. Bray: That's right; it's Jim Sinclair's agenda.

Even if she does release her hidden agenda — and I don't have much money betting that she will — how can we believe it when one of her key star candidates has admitted that the NDP make announcements which they have no intention of operating?

I look forward to hearing the debates from my colleagues, and I proudly support this throne speech.

B. Penner: Well, that's going to be a difficult speech to try and follow, but I will give it my best shot. I always enjoy listening to the member for Victoria-Beacon Hill. I thought he did a very effective job in terms of taking apart the Leader of the Opposition's much-purported claim that she'll be releasing their platform in due course. We know already that that's become a moving target. It leads us all to conclude, I guess, that it really is a secret or hidden agenda. Why else would she be holding it back and constantly moving the date at which it's going to be unveiled to British Columbians?

British Columbia truly is a great place to live. We're very fortunate to be here. All of that was adequately and fully reflected in the throne speech, highlighting all of the great accomplishments of our province.

I just want to take a moment here to remind all of us again how truly fortunate we all were to have awoken safely and alive on Boxing Day. On December 26, after about a 200-second earthquake, a tsunami occurred which took the lives of almost 300,000 people. It's hard to believe that 200 seconds could have that much impact, but that's what happened on the day after Christmas. We're very fortunate in British Columbia that on that day, we all awoke safe in our beds.

Unfortunately, there were those people from around the world, I think from 71 different countries, who lost their lives as a result of that 200 seconds. In fact, some people from British Columbia were among the dead, including Rubina Wong from Richmond, British Columbia. Mr. Speaker, as you may know, I was in Thailand shortly after the tsunami struck and had an opportunity to travel to Phuket. I remember coming across the poster that Rubina's boyfriend had put up for her in the hopes that someone had seen her and that she would be found alive. Sadly, that was not to be. She, along with literally hundreds of thousands of other people, lost her life that Sunday morning.

[1720]

This is just a way of demonstrating how fortunate we all are in British Columbia, and we need to occasionally remind ourselves that there are many, many other people around the world who don't enjoy the same circumstances that we do.

What I noticed on this, my third, visit to Thailand is that their economy has improved dramatically. It's no longer appropriate to refer to Thailand as a Third World country. I even wonder if an emerging economy is the appropriate way to refer to the country, because their economy is performing so well.

The significance of this is that in the hours and days that ensued following the tragic loss of life caused by the tsunami and the 200-second earthquake, the government of Thailand said: "We will not accept financial assistance from the outside world. We believe there are other countries and other people who are in more need than we are." That's a remarkable statement and a remarkable achievement for Thailand as a country, and it's something that they rightfully take pride in. Fourteen years ago, when I first had a chance to visit that country, I don't think the same statement could have been said or could have been true, but today it is. To me, that's just a signal of how important it is that you get the foundations right in terms of your economy, because that allows you to do many other things.

In the case of Thailand it allowed them, first of all, to say: "Please send resources to other countries, and furthermore, we ourselves will be contributing to other countries struck and damaged by the tsunami." Thailand, instead of being a net recipient of financial assistance, actually was contributing to others in the region and helping out those other countries that suffered massive loss of life and damage to key infrastructure. That's a significant change and a positive development, and I think it's something we need to keep in mind.

Of course, in British Columbia's case, the B.C. government and Premier Campbell made a commitment of \$8 million of financial assistance to the Red Cross, which is a worthy organization, and I trust that that money will be well spent.

I had an opportunity to make a side trip from Thailand over into Burma and met with the director of the Red Cross in Rangoon, the capital of Burma, now called Myanmar by that particular government. The woman who was the director of the Red Cross in Burma was very appreciative of the commitment of financial resources that the province made and told me a little bit about how that money would be spent in the case of Burma.

It doesn't sound glamorous, but a key piece of assistance that she was looking forward to were large plastic pails. For those of us here, we think, what possible benefit could that have to people recovering from the tragedy of the tsunami? Well, a whole lot, as it turns out, because devices were needed to carry drinking water in. What better way to carry drinking water than in a plastic pail? In addition, the plastic pails will carry fish, rice, medical supplies and clothing. It was just a simple way of carrying items that were absolutely vital in the days and weeks following the tsunami.

I just ask that all of us keep in mind that while we're here in British Columbia and we're doing the important work of the people here in the province, there are still hundreds of thousands of people in other parts of the world working to recover from that tsunami which struck on Boxing Day. I know many people have asked me what we can do as individuals to support the relief effort. I don't have any compelling answer, other than: give to a charity of your choice, and always please remember that there are other people who are more in need than we are.

There is one particular charity that did draw my attention, however, and it's known as the Pattaya Orphanage, which is located about two hours outside of Bangkok. It's a great organization, a great orphanage, that was started several decades ago by a priest known as Father Ray, an expat American. That orphanage has been there helping literally thousands of small children who, until Father Ray came along, did not have a hope. They did not have a prayer. But fortunately for them, Father Ray was there and started this orphanage, which has grown to include a school for the blind, a school for the deaf, a vocational school to help those with physical disabilities get a job. And 100 percent of those students he has taught that came through that facility have got a job if they've gone through the vocational school.

That's a great legacy, and if those tuning in want to take a look at their website in order to make a contribution, it can be found at www.pattayaorphanage.net. Father Ray did pass away about a year and a half ago, but his legacy lives on. I can attest to that, having visited the orphanage.

[1725]

I said that having a strong economy is very important. The people in Burma, while they did not suffer the same amount of loss of life in the initial hours from the tsunami, have been hit in a different way. They've been hit by international trade sanctions. Now, I don't want to get too much off topic, but I feel an obligation just to bring this to the world's attention as best I can. Since those international sanctions were imposed by the United States about a year and a half ago, the Red Cross advises me that somewhere close to 100,000 Burmese have lost their jobs in garment factories in and around Rangoon.

The majority of people who have lost their jobs are women. The majority of those women, because they're in desperate straits to earn a living, have gone into prostitution. The net result of the international trade sanctions has not been to change the government, not to put pressure on the junta. In fact, it's given them a greater excuse to clamp down on the freedoms that people formerly enjoyed. It's been to drive women into prostitution, which can hardly be the intended outcome. I'll just leave people to consider that. I know that it's popular in the western world to say we have to get tough on the junta, but really, what happens is it gets tough on the individual people.

Moving back to British Columbia, I mentioned earlier that the province made a contribution of \$8 million toward the Red Cross. That was possible, in part, because our economy is improving, and it is important to have a strong economic base so that you can handle whatever crises come along, whether they're expected or not. In our case we've been experiencing remarkable job growth in British Columbia. In fact, I think it's something like 197,000 new jobs since December 2001. At the same time, our revenues are increasing, giving the government more flexibility in making choices about what kinds of things to invest in.

I'll just read a couple of summaries here prepared by Statistics Canada. "B.C. continues to have the high-

est job growth rate in the country, with 197,500 jobs created since December 2001. The unemployment rate has dropped to single digits in every region of the province for the fourth consecutive month. In January B.C.'s 6.5 percent unemployment rate was below the Canadian rate of 7 percent." That was from Statistics Canada on February 4, 2005.

Historically, British Columbia has had an unemployment rate higher than the national average, so it's a remarkable achievement for British Columbia to have an unemployment rate that's actually lower than the national average. It's the lowest it's been, I believe, since the early 1980s — the lowest rate in more than two decades. At the same time, B.C. housing starts have increased and are projected to increase even more in 2005, after having almost 33,000 urban housing starts in 2004. We know that there's a significant job multiplier that goes along with every new house that's constructed.

Last year was the best year in B.C. for mining in over a decade. The member for Victoria-Beacon Hill a few moments ago in his speech made reference to how, under the last government, one in two mining jobs disappeared in the province under the last administration, under the NDP. We're turning that around. It's taking time, but the investment's coming back. What's so significant about that is that jobs in the mining sector tend to be very well paying. They tend to be unionized jobs. They tend to be family-supporting jobs. They create a lot of extra spinoff stimulus in our economy that drives other economic activity, which, of course, governments tax. Those tax revenues provide the opportunity for us to provide important government services and programs that we have all come to depend upon. All those are very key indicators, and they signal to me that both the government and the economy are on the right track.

A couple of things specifically mentioned in the throne speech. We heard a commitment that the B.C. government would support the new UN-sanctioned World Trade University, which is looking to locate its world headquarters in Chilliwack. That's obviously something of interest to me and my colleague the member for Chilliwack-Sumas. I know he spent many hours working on this project. It's good news for all of British Columbia, and I think it's good news for Canada, because it will help us draw attention to the role that we can play here in Canada and in British Columbia specifically in being a gateway to the Asia-Pacific. That's why I was so heartened to hear the focus in the throne speech on, again, reaching out and building linkages throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

That focus was lost during the 1990s by the previous government. They had this attitude that people would come to British Columbia regardless because it's such a great place to live. Well, it's true. We're a great place to live, and many people are interested in British Columbia, but we can't take that for granted. People will not choose to invest here if we create a hostile environment for them to do so, and yet that's exactly what the previous government did. They may not have

been deliberate about it, but that was certainly the consequence and the outcome of their actions, whether it was the tax on capital for investment in new projects, whether it was restrictive labour practices or whether it was excessive regulation of all kinds.

[1730]

The people in Asia who are making key investment decisions turned British Columbia off from their radar screens. Instead, they looked at other parts of the world, and we missed out on huge opportunities as a result. I am very pleased the B.C. government is now back on track in terms of identifying Asia-Pacific as a growing alternative to dependency on the U.S. market for our exports.

We've been painfully aware, due to the softwood lumber dispute over the last few years, of how dangerous it is to become dependent upon the U.S. market. The U.S. will continue to be a major market for us — it is currently and will continue to be — but I think we always need to have another outlet, another back door we can go through to sell our products in case that market to the south of us gets restrictive and succumbs to protectionist pressures, which seem to be always present, in one form or another, in various political circles.

I trust that in the weeks and months ahead the U.S. will finally see fit to comply with the World Trade Organization rulings as well as the NAFTA panel rulings. After all, two out of three of the members currently sitting on that NAFTA dispute panel are Americans, yet all three of the members of that panel have said that the U.S. is in violation of international trade law and has imposed tariffs against B.C. and Canadian lumber products without basis and improperly. Despite that, we know that those tariffs remain in place. It's my hope that in the months to come we can see a reversal of that. We'll continue to work on that.

Just getting back again to diversifying markets, I think the port of Prince Rupert — and certainly the MLA that represents North Coast has played an important role in helping diversify our economy — by providing that extra outlet for B.C., Canadian and North American goods to the Asia-Pacific market... By getting our goods to the port of Prince Rupert, with the help of the member for North Coast, those industries that access the market through that avenue are actually closer to their potential markets. I believe the sailing time is about a day and a half closer than from Vancouver. It's not that the port of Vancouver doesn't do a great job. It does, but at times it's near its capacity. There's clearly an opportunity for the port of Prince Rupert, with the help of the member for North Coast, to do a great service for all of North America by providing an extra outlet for goods from our continent to reach their markets around the world.

At the same time, of course, the port of Prince Rupert can provide an access point for goods that we need in North America to enter our continent. Again, with the new CN partnership with B.C. Rail, we're finding that goods and commodities can access the central United States, the Midwest, much quicker than

they did before, in a more seamless way. So again, I congratulate the good work of the member for North Coast in showing perseverance, demonstrating a real vision for what he can do for his community and just helping his community — actually helping all of us here in British Columbia and in Canada — by reaching out to those other markets.

A couple of other things, which I'd just like to reference, appeared in the throne speech and certainly attracted my attention and my support. You may know that at one time I did work as a park ranger. I was quite pleased to see the commitment for an additional 50 park rangers and conservation officers in the province. I think that's an important role to play. We saw under the last government that they doubled the size of parks in British Columbia but reduced the amount of services that were actually provided within the parks. So parks tended to exist on paper, rather than in reality, when you got there on the ground. By having additional enforcement personnel available, we will be able to make sure we maintain our environmental standards and also provide some interpretive services or some extra facilitation. When people are in the park, and they see a park ranger, they can ask questions. That can, I think, enhance their experience in the park by having a two-way dialogue with someone who knows about that area.

A few other key highlights for me in the throne speech. I'm looking forward to the budget tomorrow. A commitment to work to help low-income earners in the province.... For a very long time I felt that we needed to do more to reward those who make the leap from social assistance to getting a job and participating in the private sector economy or even getting a government job, if that's what's available. We need to ease that transition, and I would certainly support efforts to increase the basic personal exemption that people have when it comes to paying personal income tax. I think there's some room to move there as well as lowering the overall tax rate.

[1735]

Those are a couple of key initiatives that I think will pay dividends, again, by more directly rewarding individuals for making that transition from being dependent upon assistance to actually getting out there and getting a job and earning an income.

A couple of other key highlights. I noticed a reference that health care spending will continue to go up. It seems like no matter what happens, health care spending goes up. It's up \$2.4 billion since the 2000 budget, and it's projected now to increase another \$1.5 billion over the next couple of years. I have no doubt that it will go up even more than that, and I also have no doubt that no matter what we do, some people will say we should be spending more. I support that as well, but in order to be able to do that, we have to have an economy that allows us to do that, that helps us afford to do that. That's why it's been so important over the last couple of years that we've taken some of the tough choices we have and made some of the difficult choices we have to get our financial house in order — cut red tape, reduce taxes and encourage investment back into

this province — so that we start to generate more revenue from which we can help fund important services like health care.

It seems like that not-so-complicated message is lost on the opposition. It's lost on the NDP. They just say spend, without thinking about the equation of how you do it and where you get the money from, besides borrowing and driving up our debt again like they did in the 1990s, when B.C.'s debt was double.

That's not a long-term approach. It's not a sustainable approach. The sustainable approach is having a strong, vibrant economy that generates the most jobs in Canada over the last couple of years and gives people more money in their pocket so that they can go out and spend it. As they spend it, some of that money comes back into government coffers. With that money we get back from economic activity we can fund all of those important programs and services that all of us depend on and believe are important. I know we all believe that providing top-level health care services is very important.

A couple of other highlights in the throne speech. I know that there's a big push for literacy. In my community there are a number of schools, including Rose-dale Elementary School, which has implemented a very unique and innovative program that has paid big dividends in terms of having their students accomplish and achieve more through their reading abilities. We all know that in this economy we have — and the world is getting more and more sophisticated — you have to have a good ability to read in order to succeed. That's something so basic that maybe at times it gets overlooked.

I am pleased that our Minister of Education and the Premier have spent so much time focusing on plans to enhance literacy in the province, because if anything's going to hold a young person back from succeeding in today's economy, it's an inability to read properly. That's a great initiative to try and overcome those barriers. I know the province has given books to small children at the kindergarten level, I believe, to take home and, hopefully, encourage their parents to sit down and read with them. Certainly, I can remember benefiting from that when my parents took time to read with me — to instil, first of all, the interest in reading and also the ability.

I salute, as well, the initiative and the goal to make British Columbia the most physically active and healthy jurisdiction in North America in time for the 2010 games. I think that's a fitting combination, with the Olympic Games coming here. It would be a great tribute, a great legacy, if British Columbia were to achieve that goal. I know the member for Maple Ridge-Mission is looking forward to becoming one of those extremely fit British Columbians and will be joining me shortly on the treadmill.

R. Hawes: In Prince Rupert.

B. Penner: In Prince Rupert, along with the member for North Coast — that's correct.

Another goal in the throne speech is for British Columbia to lead the world in sustainable environmental management. This again is something that's near and dear to my heart, having worked to try and oppose the Sumas 2 power project in the Fraser Valley, which would be built on the Washington State side of the border, and working to find reasonable alternatives for generating the energy and the electricity we need in our province.

It's true: British Columbia has become a net importer of electricity since the late 1990s, and we need to do something to turn that around. The good news in British Columbia is that there are a number of leading-edge, high-tech companies that are working on energy solutions — not just on the generation side but also on the demand or consumption side — coming up with semiconductors, computer chips and various approaches to regulate the consumption of electricity so that we get more efficient in our use of it and actually stretching those resources further.

[1740]

I think if we focus on this sector appropriately, we can become a world leader in terms of exporting our know-how to other parts of the world as they also struggle with the challenge of becoming more efficient users of energy. That's an imperative regardless of whether there's a Kyoto accord or not. We all need to become more efficient in our use of energy, simply because the price is going up. Economics tells us that we have to become more efficient.

I've already mentioned that in British Columbia we've seen job growth ahead of the Canadian average. In fact, the largest single number of jobs in any province has been created right here in British Columbia over the last number of years. That goal was maintained in the throne speech. We want to continue to be the per capita job leader compared to anywhere else in Canada. I think that's something we can continue to do, but we can only continue to do that if we continue to attract investment into our province.

Some people might say: "Investment — that sounds like a dry topic. It's dollars and cents. How does that translate into a job?" Without that investment — without that factory being built, without that processing mill being built — jobs don't occur. They go hand in glove. They go right together. You have to have investment in order to get jobs. That's why our government has been so focused on that goal of making sure that B.C. has the right environment to attract that investment — so that, unlike the 1990s, people are moving to the province. They're voting with their feet and their pocketbooks by investing in British Columbia rather than leaving and taking their money elsewhere. We want people to stay here and to spend their money here.

Finally, just before I wrap up.... I know that there is a whole range of other initiatives mentioned in the throne speech. I could go on and on speaking about them, but I'll just mention again the commitment that was actually made just prior to the throne speech. That was about 215 new police officers at a cost of \$122 million.

I know that law and order and safe streets are very important to people in my constituency. I'm sure that's the case right around the province. Something very tangible is being done. We're actually hiring an additional 215 police officers in addition to giving 100 percent of traffic fine revenues back to communities so that they can turn around and hire additional policing staff. All of this should have the effect, I hope, of decreasing the crime rate and providing some extra deterrents for people on the street who may seek to break into cars, break into homes, assault passers-by or do any number of things.

Policing isn't the only answer to solving the crime problem, but it's certainly a key part of it. Another part is improving the economy and providing additional opportunities for people. As I've already mentioned, we're working well towards that goal.

I'm not sure if there are other members wishing to jump into this debate at this time. I do see another member that's interested to join this debate. So, at this point, I'll take my place and wait with bated breath to see what the Minister of Human Resources has to say.

Hon. M. Coell: It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to respond to the Speech from the Throne. As the Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, I welcome this opportunity to underline this government's achievements in working with British Columbians to build and sustain strong, safe and healthy communities.

Over the last year I've had the good fortune to travel throughout this province. I saw how diverse and dynamic each of our communities is. I can say without hesitation that our local governments and communities, both large and small, are truly the backbone of British Columbia. They are diverse, and they are unique. Over this past year, I have seen firsthand how each community strives to provide the best services, facilities and opportunities for their residents.

[1745]

British Columbians in every one of these communities shared the challenges that we faced in our first years of this government's mandate. We have worked hard in partnership with local governments to rebuild the economy and create jobs across this province, and now we can share the benefits of all of the hard work that we undertook. Now that the economy is strong, we are able to step up our investment in communities to ensure that they are able to provide better services for families and people in need.

This opportunity gives all British Columbians new confidence and new optimism. That's what this throne speech is all about. We have rebuilt our economy, and it's time to move past recovery. It's time to help B.C.'s communities reach their full potential — where people can raise their families, work, live and play and where people can enjoy the best possible quality of life.

This year's throne speech laid out five very clear, specific goals for the next ten years. Today I'd like to tell you how my ministry will help our government achieve these goals. The first was to make B.C. the best-

educated, most literate jurisdiction in the continent. We know already that British Columbians love to read. We have 235 public libraries across the province, and we borrow more than 50 million items from our libraries each year. That's up from 10 million 50 years ago.

Libraries provide a lot more than books, videos and CDs. Libraries are still the key repository of information for the public, and we're committed to making sure that all British Columbians have access to the wealth of information that is accessible these days. Our population is growing, and library technology needs to be updated. Through my ministry, this government is committing an additional \$12 million over the next three years to address the growing challenges in our libraries. This includes broadband access and library gateway. All libraries will be connected through high-speed Internet by 2006 — a one-stop entry point to provide all British Columbians with easy access to libraries, databases and other gateways.

The province will also purchase provincewide online access to licensed information databases so that everyone shares benefits equally. A virtual reference, this service will allow library users to ask questions and to get library assistance and information anytime they want through Internet access.

The one-card access. One library card will be used like a passport to information. This single-card identifier will give all provincial residents equitable access to library holdings. Our priority is to make libraries even more accessible to all British Columbians. Meeting that priority means we need to stay on top of rapidly changing information technology. We identified these priorities through a comprehensive consultation last year with representatives from libraries across the province.

No. 2 was to lead the way in North America in living healthy lives through physical fitness. This year's throne speech emphasized how important it is to live in a healthy community. My ministry's role in achieving this goal, I believe, is to ensure that our communities are safe and healthy places to live. This is a very high goal, but we're tackling it step by step.

For example, we have implemented a comprehensive strategy to enhance community policing, crime prevention and public safety. One of the key pieces of this strategy is the traffic fine revenue-sharing. Traditionally, local governments received \$10 million per year under the traffic fine revenue-sharing program to use for crime prevention and building safer communities.

We've introduced a dramatic increase in revenues. We are returning 100 percent of traffic fines to local governments, starting immediately. Local governments receive in the range of \$40 million annually. That's a 300 percent increase over the previous year. This goes far beyond our new-era promise of returning 75 percent of the revenue to local governments. I am very proud that this government has taken such a strong stand in support of community safety.

[1750]

No. 3 was to build the best system of support in Canada for Canadians — for persons with disabilities,

women and children at risk and seniors. One of the most important parts of my ministry's mandate is to make communities safer for women and children who are escaping violence and domestic abuse. Starting this year, women will have better access to 24-7 service in transition houses across British Columbia.

This is a direct result of a \$37 million increase in funding for programs and services over the next three years. This is the largest funding increase for transition houses and other front-line services in well over ten years. It will mean new and better programs and services to help protect the personal safety of women and to help women cope with the effects of violence and break the cycle of violence.

Women in all communities — especially in small, rural communities — will benefit from increased outreach services. More services will be available for women to ensure that they know what services are available to them and to help increase awareness of the importance of preventing violence before it starts.

This government also recognizes that many women face unique challenges that make escaping violence and domestic abuse even more daunting. As a result, we have allocated another \$2 million each year for programs that specifically support senior women, immigrant and visible minority women, aboriginal women and women with disabilities.

Seniors are a growing part of the demographic of British Columbia. Seniors are living longer and healthier lives and are contributing more to their communities and to our future than they ever have before. We need to ensure that housing and care needs of low-income seniors are met so that they can continue to live in the communities that they helped build.

Traditionally, seniors have had only two choices when it comes to housing: living independently in their own homes or moving into a nursing home. I think everyone in this House would agree that seniors should have more flexible housing and care choices.

Since taking office the B.C. Liberal government has provided a third option for seniors, and that is Independent Living B.C. Through Independent Living B.C. we are providing seniors with an unprecedented expansion of assisted- and supported-living options. Seniors can now choose to live independently in a community setting with the health supports that they need nearby.

This government knows that a home is one of the most fundamental needs of every person. This government is committed to ensuring the best system of support for people at risk of homelessness.

The problem of homelessness is one of the most challenging issues facing all levels of government across North America. Here in B.C. we are leaders in social housing. This fiscal year we have provided \$154 million for social housing, the highest budget in the history of British Columbia. Next year — April 1 — that funding will rise to \$172 million for social housing — again, a record for this province.

Our approach is not simply to provide a place to live but to support people who are homeless or at risk

of being homeless, people with mental illness or physical disabilities, those with drug and alcohol addictions, aboriginal peoples, youth and women fleeing abusive relationships. We will support people in need by providing a continuum of service, including counselling, drug and alcohol treatment and job training.

Our goal is to help people break the cycle of poverty and despair. We are working closely with the provincial government and local governments to protect people in need in British Columbia. This is part of the Premier's Task Force on Homelessness. The task force is working to establish a framework for an integrated program to tackle the challenges of mental illness, homelessness and addictions in B.C. communities.

Last December our Premier announced a new agreement for \$84 million to support transitional housing and a range of supports for the homeless and people at risk of becoming homeless. As a result of the work of the task force, four new projects were announced for Vancouver, Surrey and Nanaimo. We look forward to continuing our work with the task force of local mayors and federal cabinet ministers in making more announcements in the near future that will help communities meet these challenges.

[1755]

The fourth area is to lead the world in sustainable environmental management with the best air and water quality and the best fisheries management bar none. Ask anyone what they love about British Columbia, and I'll bet the environment is at the top of their choices. This government recognizes that, and as a result, we are committed to leading the world in sustainable environmental management. This means protecting our natural resources and making sure that British Columbians enjoy the best air and water quality anywhere.

Through the B.C. community water improvement program, the provincial government will provide two-thirds of the cost of projects to promote drinking water and wastewater management. Local governments will provide a third of the funding for a total value of \$120 million in new projects this year. This amount will be increased to 75 percent of the projects' costs for small communities in high-priority projects.

We know that safe drinking water is key to the health of our communities and to the day-to-day lives of British Columbians. Although we've made big strides in water-related improvement projects over the past four years, there's still a lot more work to do. With our financial house in order, we can concentrate on providing safe, reliable, accessible drinking water across the province so that British Columbians enjoy good health and the best possible quality of life.

The fifth area is to create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada.

Immigration. We all know the benefits that immigrants bring to our province. They bring innovation, cultural diversity, investment and the much-needed labour skills that will help our booming economy prepare for future labour shortages. As stated in the throne speech, we have a golden opportunity to become North America's foremost crossroads to the Asia-

Pacific. The creation of an Asia-Pacific trade council will help to advise government on where and how best to target our resources to make this happen.

The provincial government already provides strong immigration and multiculturalism programs to support local communities. My ministry will continue to support immigrants and communities by increasing services to new immigrants, helping them to move into jobs and to match their skills and abilities. The B.C. provincial nominee program, for example, encourages investors who want to contribute to B.C.'s growing economy. It's also for highly skilled immigrants who can work in areas where we face skill shortages. We offer settlement and adaptation programs, including English-language training, to help new immigrants adjust to the life in their new province. As outlined in the throne speech, in the coming months we will be enhancing support for English-as-a-second-language services so that immigrants can truly make British Columbia their new home.

British Columbia's economy has rebounded. Our population is growing, and we need many more people who have experience, knowledge, commitment and passion.

In conclusion, from day one we had a plan. The first step was to put our financial house in order, the second was to work with British Columbians to set clear priorities, and the third was to reinvest in this province and its people. This throne speech is the result of a lot of hard work on the part of this government and of the communities across this province and of all British Columbians. As we look to the months ahead, this government will introduce new initiatives that support British Columbians and their communities, and I must admit that this is the part of public service that's rewarding.

It's been a pleasure to have been elected 20 years. I've met and worked with British Columbians from all walks of life who are serving on local councils and regional governments throughout this province. They have a common commitment to this province, to their communities, to their families, to their friends and to their colleagues. They have set a high standard of public service, and it is their standard that I strive to meet. It has been an honour to have worked so closely with the communities, local governments and the Union of B.C. Municipalities across this province. We could not have accomplished as much as we have over the past four years without their dedication, hard work and commitment, and I look forward to continuing our close partnerships.

Hon. M. Coell moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. K. Falcon moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 6 p.m.