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LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR
Her Honour the Honourable Iona V. Campagnolo, CM, OBC

6TH SESSION, 37TH PARLIAMENT

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CONTENTS

Tuesday, February 15, 2005
Morning Sitting

Routine Proceedings

	Page
Throne Speech Debate (<i>continued</i>)	11869
Hon. J. Les	
Hon. P. Sahota	
Hon. I. Chong	
Hon. R. Coleman	
M. Hunter	

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2005

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

Prayers.

Orders of the Day

Hon. G. Bruce: I call Address in Reply to the throne speech.

[1005]

Throne Speech Debate

(continued)

Hon. J. Les: It's a great pleasure for me to rise in my place this morning and reply to the Speech from the Throne, which was delivered by Her Honour last week. As I listened to the speech, I reflected on what a change we have seen transpire across British Columbia over the last four years.

I think that once in a while it's useful for us to think back and reflect on the province as it was in 2001. We all remember the decade of decline of the 1990s when British Columbians had, frankly, lost hope. They had lost their economic courage and vision that had for so long described British Columbia. We had gone from a province that was accustomed to being an economic leader in Canada to a province that was behind almost every other province in Canada in terms of pretty well every economic measurement that you could imagine. It had gotten to the point where double-digit unemployment was the rule in most areas of the province; where new investment across the province was rare; and where, on a net basis, people were leaving British Columbia. All in all, not a very pretty picture.

When we ran for election in 2001, we drew up a road map. It was called the *New Era* document. It contained in excess of 200 solid commitments. It laid out how the province was going to get itself back to economic prosperity in a way that was deliberate, in a way that was prudent and in a way that committed to British Columbians very exactly how we were going to do that.

When we look at it now, almost four years later, I'm so pleased to be able to report that in excess of 95 per cent of the commitments that were made in the *New Era* document either have been fully completed or are well on their way to completion. That is a tremendous achievement. Never before, I believe, in the history of British Columbia has any government set out so clearly what it was going to do and then followed through so completely, as our government has done.

I think it's clear today, as well, that the results speak for themselves. As I've travelled around the province over the last number of months, it is obvious that there is renewed hope and increased confidence across British Columbia in every area of the province and in every sector of our economy.

Those who measure these things, like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and other groups like that, report consistently that quarter after quarter,

British Columbians and British Columbia business people are more confident about the future than Canadians in any other province of Canada. That confidence is certainly founded on the economic turnaround that has been accomplished with the economic policies we've put in place.

I should review some of the major pillars of that economic turnaround. First of all, as everyone knows, on June 6, 2001, the then Finance minister announced the largest-ever tax decrease in the history of British Columbia. That was followed very quickly by the opposition reminding British Columbians constantly: "Tax cuts don't work."

Well, several years have unfolded since, and it has become very, very clear — it is abundantly clear to anyone who cares about economics — that the tax cuts we implemented on June 6, 2001, have worked very, very well. In every sector of the economy — whether it's investment, small business growth or tax revenue growth from the business sector — no matter what measurement you want to apply, the tax cuts have worked as they were intended to.

[1010]

Perhaps the best measurement of how these tax cuts and our economic policies have worked is in the increase in jobs to individual British Columbians. British Columbia today creates more jobs than any other province in Canada. In the last three years the economy in British Columbia has generated in excess of 197,000 jobs for individual British Columbians.

At the end of the day, we can talk about economic statistics and other issues like that for a long, long time, and some people will find that of interest. But what people find really interesting on an individual basis in every community of this province is: are they able to find a job? Are they able to produce an income that sustains their family and that helps them to create the future they want to have here in the province?

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

Increasingly, it is clear that people across British Columbia are finding work and are finding that their wages are going up. They are, therefore, becoming increasingly confident in their own personal economic future.

Another way that's reflected across the province is the increased price of homes. It is only confident people who buy homes — people who are confident about their individual future, people who are confident about the future of British Columbia. Regardless, almost, of which community you go to in British Columbia today, people's equities in their homes have been restored. There were communities where people were facing negative equities previously, where people saw the value of their homes declining year after year after year. That sorry trend has been reversed as well. People are now seeing the value of their most important investment in their lives increasing, and that, too, leads to a far healthier level of confidence in communities across British Columbia.

We obviously made a very bold set of policy decisions in June of 2001, and as I've already explained, it's my firm belief that these have worked exactly as intended. We got rid of the corporate capital tax. We reduced income taxes by the greatest amount ever in the history of the province.

Importantly, as well, we set in place a deliberate plan to reduce the amount of regulation within British Columbia. My predecessor, the then Minister of State for Deregulation, started out with a very carefully crafted plan to accomplish our *New Era* document commitment to reduce regulation by one-third. To give that some real credibility at the end of the day, the then minister said: "We should be sure that we actually count the number of regulations we have in the province so that we will have a benchmark against which we can measure our progress three years out." It was discovered, after the count was complete, that at that point in time in 2001, we actually had 383,000 regulations in British Columbia. Those are provincial regulations. These were not municipal regulations; these were not federal regulations. These were provincial regulations only. Our commitment was to reduce that by one-third.

As I took over those responsibilities a little more than a year ago, we were, of course, very much in the thick of bringing that to the three-year mark in June of last year. At that point we were able to report that our achievement, actually, was a 37 percent reduction in regulations in British Columbia. I think that, too, has played a very significant role in allowing people to grow their businesses and create more jobs and to do so in a regulatory environment that is results-oriented, increasingly, as opposed to prescriptive, as it was in the past.

We've made very, very significant progress in these last almost four years. Today British Columbia is a province where people have renewed confidence in the future. Today British Columbia is a province where investment is literally flowing into the province again. In many areas, British Columbia has more investment coming in than any other province in Canada, including Ontario.

[1015]

We are a province that is more confidently looking to the future in terms of our role in the world. Given our geographic location on the west coast of North America, it is becoming increasingly clear that we have some significant assets, particularly in the ports and other transportation infrastructure, that are going to allow British Columbia to become a major geographic player on the international stage. Particularly with the emergence of the economies in China and India and other Asian nations, we need to be acting now to take advantage of those opportunities.

When I think of what those opportunities are, there is not a better example of opportunity today than Prince Rupert and the port that is located in Prince Rupert. I know the member for North Coast has been working very, very hard to make sure that within the next several years the port of Prince Rupert actually

becomes one of the most important pieces of transportation infrastructure on the North American west coast.

I want to say here and now that I fully agree with him that Prince Rupert is going to be a major economic player in the future. I have referred, actually, to Prince Rupert as being a future Singapore. I don't think that is excessive hyperbole in any way, shape or form. When you look at the asset that is the port of Prince Rupert and the role it can play, being as it is a day and a half closer in sailing time to the Asian markets than even the port of Vancouver and being a day and a half closer to the important markets in Chicago by rail, it leads to only one conclusion: the future for the port of Prince Rupert and for the community of Prince Rupert is very, very bright indeed.

I want to encourage the member for North Coast to make sure, as far as our government is concerned, that the port of Prince Rupert stays at the forefront and that we never lose sight of the significant economic opportunities available to Prince Rupert and the entire province when we properly develop that facility for the benefit of not only British Columbians but all Canadians. As I've said before, and I'll say it again, Prince Rupert has a great future.

While we need to pay particular attention to Prince Rupert, we also need to pay attention to the port of Vancouver and the Deltaport and the Fraser ports, because they, too, will need to undergo significant expansion to properly deal with the expanded trade opportunities we are going to see from around the world. These opportunities are not just about container handling; they are about the secondary manufacturing that can result. As these containers come onshore and as they are handled and their contents are, for the first time, coming together from various places around the world, we can develop from that an entire new economy. I think, in many cases, that we have difficulty imagining today the exact scope of the opportunities that lie before us.

As I listened to the throne speech last week, of course there were a few things within that document that specifically related to my riding as well — perhaps none more important than the intended future establishment of the headquarters of the World Trade University in my riding. This is a very significant achievement, obviously, for my riding and certainly for the province as well.

We will become the world headquarters for this new United Nations-mandated trade university. People, particularly from developing countries around the world, will be coming to this campus to take further training in international trade. These will be graduate students who are looking for more information and more training related to international trade. The fact that they will be coming to British Columbia gives us, I think, in this province a great opportunity to establish ourselves as a great place to live, a great place to invest and a place that has a very hospitable economic environment. The residents in my riding are very enthusiastic about this new opportunity, but I would say to all British Columbians that the new World Trade Univer-

sity campus, located in Chilliwack, is going to be a significant asset to us and our economy as we go forward.

[1020]

People in my riding have been commenting for several years now that very obviously the economy in my riding, too, has achieved new heights since the election of our government in 2001. Housing starts are at an all-time high. There has been a tremendous amount of non-residential investment and construction as well. All of that, again, is easily traced back to the new levels of confidence that we have achieved together as British Columbians as a result of the various policy changes we've made.

There's another reason for the excitement that is evident across British Columbia today. That is the hosting opportunity that we have in 2010, when we'll be hosting the Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games. That is a world-class opportunity. I want to bring it forward one more time and remind British Columbians how important it is that we do the very best possible job we can of hosting these games. It is a world-class, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for us to showcase British Columbia.

You know, when given the opportunity, British Columbia showcases itself so very, very successfully. We saw that in 1986 when we hosted Expo here in British Columbia, right in Vancouver. We saw how the tourism industry literally took off in the years after Expo 86. I am firmly convinced we are going to see the same kind of effect before, during and after the 2010 Olympics, as well, except that I think the impact will be that much more profound.

We need to remember that as the Olympics unfold in 2010, at least half of the population of the world will be watching this event, right here in British Columbia. I think it goes without saying that no other medium can buy the kind of exposure that the Olympic opportunity brings to British Columbia.

I must say, as well, that the Olympic planning activities are well underway. We have a very competent group in VANOC, the Vancouver organizing committee. As far as venue construction is concerned, all of that is proceeding very, very well. A couple of the venues have already been given the go-ahead to start construction — the Olympic speed-skating oval, for example, in Richmond. And in other venues, the work is well underway. There is no doubt at this point that the venues will all be pretty much complete by 2008, allowing a year or more of potential for those facilities to be used by the various competitors in 2010.

The Olympics are creating a significant amount of excitement across the province. I saw a report last week that support for the Olympics has actually increased very, very significantly across British Columbia since we were awarded the games. That is unusual. Usually, it is the case that host jurisdictions suffer somewhat of a decline in enthusiasm before the events actually transpire. In our case, the enthusiasm and the support have actually increased. I would suggest that this actually bodes very, very well and very positively as we work

towards hosting these games in 2010, which is, as we speak, only five years away.

Related to that, there will be a lot of construction, certainly, but I think it's important to keep that in perspective as well. A couple of weeks ago my ministry released a report that summarized all of the construction and investment activity across British Columbia currently on the drawing boards and actually underway. It was found that there was about \$65 billion worth of construction contemplated and underway in British Columbia today — \$65 billion worth, Mr. Speaker.

[1025]

In that context, it's important to keep in perspective the construction that's actually related to the Olympics, which is about \$600 million, or something on the order of 1 percent. Although the Olympic construction is significant — there's no question about that; \$600 million is significant — in terms of all the other construction that is emerging across British Columbia, both public and private sector, I think it's important that it's kept in perspective.

These are busy times in British Columbia. We are challenged, of course, to ensure that we have the workforce available. It's true to say today in British Columbia that we don't so much have workers looking for jobs as we have jobs looking for workers, and it's a pretty happy circumstance where people have a variety of jobs from which to choose. Classified advertisements in the newspapers now typically run many columns in terms of jobs that are available — again, a very nice turnaround compared to what we saw three or four years ago. Individual British Columbians today actually have an opportunity to succeed again.

Looking forward as a born British Columbian, having lived here all my life, I am most pleased that we have been able to rediscover the potential of this province in a way that fills people with confidence, fills people with hope. In spite of the commentary we hear from our opponents from time to time, I think many, many British Columbians today agree that we are on track again with our economy. We are leading Canada again.

As the throne speech pointed out last week, we have many, many opportunities before us in British Columbia, and we want to make sure we continue to provide those opportunities and government policies that encourage people, as opposed to those policies that tend to shut opportunities down. Our government is committed to allowing people to achieve to the greatest extent possible, to give people as many opportunities as possible in terms of their business pursuits and the jobs they wish to access and also in terms of education, for example, which is an extremely important building block in any economy that aspires to grow and to thrive.

Happily, our government has committed itself to creating an additional 25,000 post-secondary education seats by 2010. We are well on our way to achieving that. There are few things our government has done that excite me as much as that commitment to post-

secondary education, in particular. Of those 25,000 seats, it's important for me personally to point out that 1,700 of those seats are actually coming to the University College of the Fraser Valley to provide important new opportunities for students in the Fraser Valley as well.

It's a great time to be a British Columbian again. We have an abundance of opportunities. We have competent government in British Columbia today. With the opportunities before us, whether they are in the traditional economy, whether they are in emerging technologies — biotechnology and many others — or whether they lie in terms of taking advantage of the Olympics as a great opportunity for the future, there are many, many things that cause British Columbians today to take courage and to hope for the future in a way that has not been available to us for many years.

I appreciate this opportunity to offer those few comments in reply to the Speech from the Throne. It is, of course, the last Speech from the Throne in the thirty-seventh parliament. I am looking forward to hitting the campaign trail in a few short weeks. I think British Columbians will be quite excited to discuss the progress we've made in these last four years.

Hon. P. Sahota: It's a pleasure to rise this morning on behalf of my constituents, the constituents of Burnaby-Edmonds, and to reply to the throne speech delivered last week by the Lieutenant-Governor. I want to talk a little bit about what this means for my constituents, and of course, I want to say a little bit about what it means for this new portfolio I hold, a file that I believe represents a very important sector of our economy, the resort industry.

[1030]

The throne speech sets the tone for the future. It sets the vision of a government, and the vision, in my opinion, is clear. British Columbia is about to enter into a golden decade, a decade full of promise, hope and opportunity.

We can feel confident about the future because we know where we have come from. We know the great adversities we have faced as a province, and in turn, we know how those challenges affected the provincial treasury — from 9/11 to SARS to BSE to the avian flu and forest fires.

Then there were the challenges left behind by the previous administration: the unfunded contracts and an economic climate that was toxic to investment. In my opinion, we have met those challenges head-on. Today the hard work of British Columbians and, of course, my colleagues in this chamber has paid off. It has paid off to the extent that we can now say that the best is yet to come.

Our tough decisions are paying off. B.C.'s budget is balanced. Our economy is growing by leaps and bounds. We're ready to bring the world here, be it for the 2006 World Junior Hockey Championship or the 2009 World Police and Fire Games, which is the second-largest event outside of the Summer Olympics. Of course, the eyes of the world will be on us when we

host the world with the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

The throne speech touched on a number of issues. I want to talk about a few of those that I believe are important to the future well-being of our province.

The Asian subcontinent is a key to the well-being of this province. I have previously spoken about diversifying our markets, especially when it comes to our forest industry. The Premier has travelled to China, and a number of my colleagues have participated in other trade missions to China and Hong Kong. Of course, I had the opportunity to travel with the Premier to India in 2003.

China and India — these two countries are emerging economically on the world scene. I have always maintained that both of these countries are very important for British Columbia's future, as they are the world's fastest-growing commercial economies. I believe that it is important for us as government to show that these two emerging markets are places where we as British Columbians want to do business.

I'm happy to know that the government is responding on a number of fronts. We will soon appoint an Asia-Pacific trade council to advise the government, and our government will establish a network of B.C. trade and cultural centres in major international markets to promote homegrown and made-in-B.C. products. This is the right thing to do and is another step in securing a future that is full of possibility for British Columbians.

Of course, relevant to this is that we will appoint a B.C. competition council to conduct a comprehensive review of B.C.'s competitiveness in every sector, pinpoint the barriers to growth and identify solutions to overcome them. This is crucial to our future. When I was travelling in India, the Indians made it very clear to us that their competition is not us. Their competition is China.

We here in British Columbia should be very clear that our competition is global. As British Columbians, we have to make sure our prospective markets know about the competitive products that B.C. and Canada offer in a variety of industries. As we continue our efforts to diversify and expand our markets and our economy, it is crucial that we remain competitive. Thus a Resort file is also crucial, because it is about diversifying our markets abroad and diversifying our rural communities at home. We have to make sure, through it all, that the industry is competitive and that we create a world-class resort industry.

I want to talk a little bit about that. I want to talk a little bit about the Resort file and the Resort strategy and action plan, which I believe is very important to the economic well-being of our province. Currently, there are about 700 resorts in B.C., ranging from small, remote fishing lodges to world-class destination resorts, together employing more than 26,000 people. I can't emphasize enough the size of this opportunity and the calibre of people and investment it can attract.

For instance, of the \$10 billion generated by our tourism sector, about \$2 billion of that comes from re-

sorts. This \$2 billion doesn't include related direct spending, which also comes close to \$2 billion. Nor does it include annual tax revenues of more than \$178 million.

We have a conservative projection of \$4.1 billion of new capital investment and thousands of new jobs for British Columbians throughout the province, and this does not include what is taking place on private land. All one has to do is look around the province. All over B.C. the resort industry is growing at a phenomenal pace.

[1035]

For example, Big White in Kelowna is making a \$250 million investment in additional resort development that includes a ski and snowboard terrain park, a new day lodge and expanding ski terrain by 200 acres. Peak season will see 1,100 jobs at this resort. Sun Peaks, in Kamloops, is planning the completion of their phase 2, a \$270 million expansion which will see 6,000 additional bed units. Then there's Red Mountain in Rossland in the Kootenays. They plan on investing approximately \$33 million over the next two years to upgrade lifts and expand the ski terrain, not to mention the significant residential investment, bringing people and jobs to Rossland and the surrounding communities.

These are just ski resorts, but the list goes on and on and encompasses a number of different resorts, from golf destinations to marine resorts and wellness centres. We have proposals on the table for resorts in Squamish, Invermere, Blue River, Nelson, Osoyoos and Revelstoke. There are expansion plans at Kicking Horse and the new Greg Norman golf course in Fernie.

This ministry is also working closely with other agencies like Land and Water B.C., key provincial agencies, local government, industry and stakeholders to implement strategies that will encourage growth and investment in our rural communities. As we head towards 2010, I believe our resorts will become economic catalysts that showcase not just our scenery but also our communities, our lifestyle and the other industry sectors that make up the new British Columbia economy. I am proud of the fact that our resort sector is playing a growing and important role in helping to diversify this incredible province and in helping to create a golden decade of growth, opportunity and success.

As I mentioned earlier, I can't emphasize enough the Asia-Pacific gateway strategy mentioned in the throne speech, which I believe will be critical to our success. Of course, integral to this is tourism, which is also part of the strategy and builds on our already successful all-seasons Resort strategy and action plan. These initiatives will create thousands of new jobs, and in terms of the Resort strategy, it's already creating investment in all regions of our province. The Asia-Pacific gateway strategy will also promote our products to the world and open doors for new cultural exchanges, new relationships and partnerships in education.

I also want to touch on another issue mentioned in the throne speech: a new Premier's council on aging

and seniors issues. It will identify opportunities to improve seniors services and examine how to improve housing options and home care — and of course, on the issue of mandatory retirement, make recommendations on how to improve this particular issue.

I have previously spoken about mandatory retirement in this House. I've said what we need is to be flexible and adaptable and to find unique ways to fit the changing world around us. We need to be creative in the face of challenges. It is important that this discussion begin, especially when you look at our demographics. According to the Canadian Urban Futures Institute, 9.8 million Canadian baby-boomers are approaching retirement. The number for this year is 225,000. By 2020 the number retiring every year will be 425,000.

Today there are six workers for every retired person. By 2020 there will be three workers for every retired person. Thus as the workforce decreases, it still has to maintain or pay for the increasing number of people over 65. In addition, we're healthier than ever before, so we're living much longer. In fact, when the age of 70 was selected in the early twentieth century as the age of eligibility for the government pension, life expectancy was 60 to 65. Today Canadians who reach 65 are expected to live another 20 years, which is good news, I think, for all of us.

It is crucial that we remain flexible and adaptable and continue to find unique ways to fit the changing world around us. I am proud of the fact that this government will now give this issue consideration.

The throne speech also spoke to the importance of education. In terms of education the One World scholarship program announced in the speech will assist students from British Columbia to earn their degrees and diplomas in non-G-8 countries and will be of great benefit to young British Columbians. In Burnaby-Edmonds, with so many of my constituents already holding close ties to Asia-Pacific countries such as India and China, this is indeed good news. Not only will it assist students, it will also create new relationships and expand existing relationships around the world and raise our province's profile and recognition.

[1040]

In addition, Chilliwack is set to be the new global home for the World Trade University. This university, in partnership with the United Nations, will offer graduate-level programs in trade-related fields and will host international trade conferences and events.

Our government will also soon increase support of English-as-a-second-language programs and will do more to promote learning in Punjabi, Mandarin and other languages of the Asia-Pacific. We will also launch new initiatives that will make more services and resources available in other languages.

I know full well from listening to my constituents that securing Canadian credentials continues to be a frustrating experience for many from South Asian, Asian and other communities. I was happy to see that our government has not overlooked this problem and has pledged to speed up the process and allow new-

comers to British Columbia to practise in the profession in which they were trained.

These initiatives outlined in this throne speech speak to my constituency, a constituency that is very diverse and multicultural in nature. One of our strongest assets is the diversity of this province. I believe the path set out in this throne speech speaks to our diversity. We are a province that is reaching out to the world. British Columbians have long been recognized as being open to the world. Ours is a province built through the hard work and perseverance of people from different cultures working together. That is why I'm proud to stand here today and support last week's throne speech.

Hon. I. Chong: I would like to begin by taking this opportunity to welcome to this House the new member for Surrey–Panorama Ridge and you, Deputy Speaker, on your return in your role, as well as to offer my very good wishes to those who will be leaving provincial public office — that they have a long and fulfilling life and continue to enjoy the province that is going to be built before them.

From my first provincial election in 1996 to this point some nine years later, I still feel a sense of excitement. I still feel a sense of privilege that the constituents of Oak Bay–Gordon Head have bestowed on me this incredible honour of representing them here in this Legislature. When you think about it, over four million people.... We in this House are 79 of those four million people, and we get to come to this Legislature to speak on their behalf, to represent them, to make changes, to offer policy, to bring their ideas forward and to act on them. That's what is important for all of us to remember, and I, each and every day, recognize, acknowledge and am grateful for that.

Yes, this is an honourable profession, and I'm truly honoured to serve as an MLA. Today as I rise to offer my reply to the throne speech — the tenth one, I believe — I am particularly excited, because this year's throne speech lays out an incredible and, more importantly, achievable vision, a vision for the future. It's a future of more jobs, more investment and a better future for our citizens. It's about a future where we enjoy the benefits of a healthier society, where we have access to quality education, a safer future based on confidence and optimism and, ultimately, a new world of possibilities.

It is about where we wish to take this province. It is about how we wish to engage all British Columbians. I think it's fair to state that when all members in this House seek public office, they do so in order to serve their community and their province. How we get there from here — well, there are certainly different approaches. I believe the approach that our government has taken thus far is the one that best meets the needs of our province.

The throne speech speaks about moving towards a golden decade. Why would the opposition...? Why would Carole James and the NDP object to that? We want a province that is viewed as a leader in this coun-

try, we want a province that is envied as the best place on earth, and we want a province that reaches its fullest potential. Again I ask: what do Carole James and the NDP have against that? Why do they want to take us back? Why do they want to take us back to a decade of decline?

[1045]

Our government sees a golden decade where opportunities exist. The NDP and Carole James prefer a decade of decline. I say we can't afford to go backwards. We can't afford to go back to losing jobs and losing our young people to other provinces. We can't afford to go back to the worst-performing economy in this country. We can't afford to go back to stifling our small business. In short, we can't afford to go back.

When I was in opposition, I had the opportunity to travel around this province, and I travelled to places on the Island here and to places in the interior, even to places like Prince Rupert, where the member for North Coast resides. I remember when I travelled the province, when I went to Prince Rupert. I did so as a member of the Select Standing Committee on Finance. I heard from the people in Prince Rupert and I heard from the member for North Coast, who indicated to me — at that time he wasn't the member, but I know he was considering seeking public office — how important it was to realize the potential of Prince Rupert and of its deep-sea port.

As I travelled around the province, I heard from many communities like Prince Rupert. I heard that they saw potential but that the previous government just didn't let them unleash it.

I also had the opportunity last year, when I was appointed Minister of State for Women's and Seniors' Services, to again travel around the province in another capacity. That was to reach out to a number of our communities who provide services to women who are escaping violence. I visited over a third of our transition houses, I believe around 22 of them, and I spoke to our service providers. I happened to go to Prince Rupert as well, and I saw exactly what they were doing. I saw things in Cranbrook. I saw things on the upper parts of the Island here, even on the lower mainland.

I saw how each and every community said: "We need to be able to provide the services to our community in our own distinct ways." For that reason I am proud to see in our throne speech acknowledgment and recognition of the largest-ever increase being provided to our women's services programs: \$37.5 million over the next three years — a greater than 30 percent increase to those services. I am proud to see that the new Minister of State for Women's and Seniors' Services was able to speak on that issue at open cabinet not long ago.

As well, in my new role as the Minister of Advanced Education I recently attended a new campus opening in Prince Rupert. Prince Rupert seems to have a lot of opportunity. When I was there, I was privileged to participate in this new campus opening. Again, it showed me how we were reaching out and allowing

these communities to realize their potential, but more importantly, it was the first opportunity that I had to open a campus in my new portfolio.

I do want to talk about my new portfolio. Before I do so, I want to talk about what other members of this House have already indicated, and that is about the throne speech as a vision of going forward, about the five specific goals that have been identified to ensure that we will realize this golden decade. Again, I think they're worth repeating.

Those five goals are: to make B.C. the best-educated and most literate jurisdiction not just in Canada but on the continent; to lead the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness; to build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk and seniors; to lead the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality and the best fisheries management, bar none; and lastly, to create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada. Those five goals reach every community, speak to every British Columbian and allow each and every one of us to participate in the golden decade ahead.

As the new Minister of Advanced Education I am extremely excited about that first goal — being the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent — because we are already embarking on that. We are already setting out how we're going to achieve that. We are reinforcing our intention to build a better post-secondary system through an investment plan that will create 25,000 new student spaces by the year 2010. That is the largest strategic expansion of post-secondary seats in 40 years. We're doing that by balancing the needs of taxpayers, of students and of the province and its exemplary post-secondary system. By increasing access we will take our advanced education system to an even higher level.

[1050]

To ensure that students have room to learn we have made an overall financial commitment of almost \$800 million to new infrastructure projects. This investment will ensure that our government delivers on its promise to ensure that Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops is ready to join UBC Okanagan as they become B.C.'s newest universities. This is really wonderful news for all British Columbians, particularly those in the interior.

To fully support new student spaces we have increased funding for post-secondary education, as compared to our original service plan, by about \$132 million over the next three years. Together with the funding increase announced last year, the operating budget for advanced education will be \$195 million higher by 2007 than it was in 2004, and that is over and above the original ministry budget of \$1.9 billion.

Why are we doing that? Well, we're doing it because our students and their families deserve to benefit from the very best post-secondary education available, and we are committed to providing them with access to just this kind of quality education.

Our new funding will provide the capacity needed to moderate rising tuition costs, which are a concern to

many B.C. families. This was a tough but necessary choice, but it is also a choice that had to be made. Today in British Columbia tuition fees are just slightly above the national average. Although tuition fee increases did decline at public institutions this year, we remain concerned about the long term. We recognize the need to keep the cost of post-secondary education down for students as best we can, and we believe that by allowing tuition fees to rise to just above the national average, we are now in a position to ask that tuition be limited to the rate of inflation. We also recognize the impact on our public post-secondary institutions, so we will be engaging them in the coming months to find the best way to ensure that they can meet this objective, beginning this September.

Ultimately, we must be cost competitive to ensure that our students have the same ability as other Canadians to enjoy access to high quality post-secondary education. But we also recognize that no matter how well institutions hold the line on tuition, money can still be a barrier to higher learning.

British Columbia has very comprehensive, flexible student assistance programs that relieve financial pressure for students in need. Our Speech from the Throne signals this government's intention to enable students to earn more while they learn, reducing dependency on debt. I am proud to say that student aid will be further enhanced with an income exemption that will allow our students to earn more than they previously could without reducing their eligibility for student loans and grants. This measure builds on the \$450 million that we will provide for a comprehensive student financial assistance system over the next three years, including loan reduction for students most in need, grants for students with disabilities, debt relief programs and loan forgiveness programs. This program includes provision for over \$300 million annually for funding student loans.

To compete, British Columbia's post-secondary system must ensure students are provided with a world-class education. That is why we were also very pleased to announce plans to make British Columbia the global headquarters for the World Trade University in Chilliwack. This global education partnership will enable our students to benefit from the delivery of advanced education programs in world trade, offering world trade services and organizing global platform events and initiatives such as the World Trade Forum here in British Columbia, in Chilliwack.

Our Speech from the Throne builds on a growing legacy and a commitment to higher learning that is integral to the Premier's literacy initiative and our plans to ensure that every student with a B average or higher can access the education they need to pursue their hopes and dreams. I believe that is an important initiative or area that we need to stress.

[1055]

When we heard in the past few years that students with an A average were still being denied access to a post-secondary space, that was not acceptable. That is one of the reasons why we are making such a large

investment in our post-secondary institutions, our post-secondary system, because it means that students with a B average should have access to a university space.

Allow me as well to take a few minutes to highlight some of our significant achievements. It is not by any means an exhaustive list, but it will give you a good idea of what we have accomplished in three short years. We have already increased student spaces by 3,217 in the year '04-05 on top of the 5,857 spaces over the previous two years. That brings us to a total of over 9,000 seats to date. This has increased access to college and university programs for B.C. students. The seats added this year alone mark the first year of our six-year commitment to add those 25,000 new seats by 2010. This will be providing almost 186,000 seats per year for students in B.C.'s public post-secondary system. The new university and college in the Okanagan, UBC Okanagan and Okanagan College, will add about 5,500 new seats in the Okanagan region alone by 2009-10, Mr. Speaker — one of the fastest-growing areas. And I know you, personally, well know that.

The new Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, on the other hand, will take on the functions of Open University and Open College and the University College of the Cariboo. This special-purpose university will focus primarily on undergraduate and distance education while still maintaining programs to address the applied education and skills training needs throughout the region, and I look forward to introducing legislation in this House in the very near future to ensure that this happens.

Since June 2001 our government has provided more than \$625 million in new funding for capital projects on campuses throughout British Columbia. This included a new campus for Northwest Community College in Prince Rupert, a Williams Lake campus for Thompson Rivers University, a joint College of New Caledonia and UNBC campus in Quesnel, a new trades training campus in Cloverdale for Kwantlen University College and a \$70 million campus to house SFU's operation in Surrey. I hope the member for Surrey-Panorama Ridge realizes how important it was to connect that campus in Surrey to SFU, Simon Fraser University. It's going to achieve an incredible amount of attention, and I know our government members from Surrey in this House are extremely proud of that achievement.

We have also focused increased seats on key areas to address projected workforce shortages, including 825 new seats in computer science and electrical and computer engineering in 2004-05 to meet our commitment to double the opportunity for careers in those fields — this brings the total spaces in those programs to over 7,000, an increase of more than 50 percent since 2001-02 — and 453 new seats for nursing and other health students in 2004-05, bringing the total increase in seats to 2,785 since 2001-02.

We also welcomed the first students to the northern medical program, the Island medical program and the expanded Vancouver-Fraser program in August of 2004, which together have increased the number of

first-year medical students in B.C. by 72. When the full medical training expansion is complete, we will be graduating 224 medical students per year, nearly double the previous total that has been in place for more than two decades. Can you imagine? For two decades we were graduating about 128 medical students each and every year. That is about one in 32,000 people, per capita. No wonder people were saying they were finding it difficult to find a doctor. We will be almost doubling that to 224 per year.

As well, we have created a \$45 million leading-edge endowment fund to establish 20 research leadership chairs, and we've launched the regional innovation chairs — \$7.5 million for regional research opportunities. These initiatives help attract and retain researchers in British Columbia and spur research and new knowledge with long-term technological, economic and social benefits. The regional innovation chairs also promote research and innovation in the heartlands. To date, one research chair has received funding and another 17 chairs have received approval-in-principle at post-secondary institutions throughout the province.

[1100]

I want to reiterate how important research is to this province. For a province to go forward, for a province to continue to reach its potential and advance, we need research. We need to take advantage of those technological advances made and continue to promote research. Here in British Columbia we're poised to do that. We're poised to retain and attract our best and our brightest.

In the area of skill shortages, our new Industry Training Authority has revamped B.C.'s industry training approach and is creating an industry-driven, more flexible apprenticeship system that is attracting more young people into the trades. The ITA has implemented a process by which industry can bring forward proposals for new industry training programs that address specific skill shortages. Three new training programs have already been approved: the residential construction framing technician program, the construction formwork technician program and the reinforcement steel installer program — all of which are in the construction area, which we know is booming.

The ITA has also developed a more streamlined and simplified policy framework to facilitate better access to the industry training system for trainees and employers. Through the implementation of industry training organizations, the ITA will have a more accurate source of sector-specific information on existing and emerging training needs and will be in a better position to allocate training resources accordingly.

We have started some very important work here, and I'm pleased with the progress to date. We look forward to making even further progress to ensure that we can fill our work shortages moving forward.

To build on the good work of the ITA, we have been working with the Ministry of Education to develop a new industry training program for high school students called ACE-IT, the accelerated credit enrolment in industry training program. This program al-

lows students to earn hours towards trade credentials and earn dual credit towards their high school diploma. Many of our young people can enjoy the program and find out early in life whether or not a trade makes sense for them. The end result is that we are giving children choices. I have spoken to a number of young people in this regard — grade 10, grade 11 and grade 12 students — who are excited about this. They believe that they have a future in trades.

[H. Long in the chair.]

What's more exciting is that there are young women, young girls, who are interested in trades training. With 52 percent of our population represented by the female population, I think it's an incredible interest that they're now having and that they can now actually achieve.

In health care we're also making great strides, through \$134 million in capital investment to expand medical training in B.C. at a new life sciences centre at UBC and two satellite medical training centres at UVic and UNBC. The expanded medical program will almost double the intake of medical graduates, as I indicated earlier, and provides opportunities and incentives for medical students to study and practise in underserved regions. Here in Victoria our medical students will be focused on geriatric medicine. That's important with an aging population, particularly here on the South Island.

On the research front we're also doing great work through a total \$900 million commitment since June 2001 to research initiatives in British Columbia. This money has enabled our government to leverage more than \$600 million in additional research funding from other sources. One example of this project is the \$30 million committed to Project NEPTUNE, which leveraged an additional \$31 million from the federal government to create the world's largest cable-linked sea floor observatory. NEPTUNE will allow researchers to monitor fish stocks, anticipate earthquakes, develop safe oil and gas extraction methods and monitor climate change on the west coast. That will be happening here in this part of the province, on the South Island.

To improve choices and access, we have also opened up the system by bringing into force the Private Career Training Institutions Act on November 22 last year and by establishing the Private Career Training Institution Agency to oversee a new, streamlined consumer protection and accreditation model for private career training institutions. The purpose of the new model is to bring B.C. in line with other Canadian jurisdictions by minimizing the regulatory burden for private career training institutions.

[1105]

These institutions will then have the opportunity to reinvest the cost savings associated with the reduction of red tape in the expansion of their programs. This in turn will stimulate growth in this sector for the economy, will expand the range of learning choices for students and help address shortages of skilled workers in

various occupations, such as the health care and the trades technical occupations.

I can show you how committed this government is to advanced education by just looking at my own riding of Oak Bay-Gordon Head and at one of the 27 publicly funded post-secondary institutions in this province. At the University of Victoria, a brand-new medical program opened its doors last month in a brand-new \$12 million building equipped with the latest distance learning technology. The Island medical program will educate doctors on Vancouver Island for the first time, and it is part of our commitment to nearly double the number of doctors graduating in this province. I know that the whole world is watching this bold venture in distributed learning. When I spoke to a number of these students, I can say how excited they were to be able to be educated here in Victoria. Some of them have returned to Victoria for that reason.

Here in Victoria we've also provided \$22 million for the engineering and computer science complex, one of the country's most technologically advanced facilities at the University of Victoria. It will house labs concentrating on robotics technology, alternative energy systems, subsea technology and applied electromagnetics.

Since we took office, the University of Victoria has been awarded nearly \$55 million in B.C. knowledge development fund grants for research infrastructure. These investments support things like Project NEPTUNE, the world's largest cable-linked sea floor observatory on North America's west coast. Information gained through NEPTUNE will lead to earlier warning of earthquakes and tsunamis, something that the entire world is now all too familiar with, unfortunately. Information gained through NEPTUNE will lead to more accurate estimates of commercial fish stocks, another important industry here on the west coast. As well, this NEPTUNE project will lead to earlier warning and improved models of climate prediction.

Then there is also Project VENUS, which is creating a network of instruments in the ocean to observe the waters around southern Vancouver Island. Measurements, images and sound will be delivered to scientists, managers and the public via the fibre optic cables from three landfill sites.

There is also the ROPOS project, approved in December, which will advance new frontiers in ocean science through the Canadian Scientific Submersible Facility. We have also supported a supercomputer that puts B.C. at the forefront of climate change research and that will be an asset to Canada in international climate treaty negotiations.

These are just some of the projects we have funded at the University of Victoria. All told, we have committed almost \$90 million for capital projects at UVic in the past four years, and in that time we have provided nearly half a billion dollars in operating grants to UVic alone.

In the final analysis, I am proud to say that our government is making B.C. a centre of excellence for post-secondary education that is characterized by a vision and a strategic plan that will ensure we realize

the benefits of a golden decade. Throughout the province there are shining examples of how we are helping our students and their families, and I am extremely proud of the tremendous work undertaken by our ministry and our government in this regard.

Before I conclude, I want to pay tribute to the many people in this ministry, the staff that I have had the opportunity to meet as I have gone around to their work locations — from the staff who answer the phones and who deal with students looking for assistance to those who are working on capital projects and expanding our campuses and to the deputy minister and the assistant deputy minister — all of whom have an incredible passion for post-secondary education.

I am extremely proud to be able to be in this particular area of responsibility. I am particularly proud to work with such a fine ministry of dedicated individuals. I would be remiss if I did not also thank the former Minister of Advanced Education, the now Deputy Premier and Minister of Health Services, for laying that important groundwork to enable me to continue with that and to ensure that we do reach British Columbia's potential.

[1110]

In the final closing moments, as well, I want to talk a little bit about my area of Oak Bay-Gordon Head, and how I have seen many of the changes that have happened. As I've indicated, I represent an area that has a very large aging population, and so I was extremely pleased to see the Premier speak on having a new Premier's council on aging.

As I travelled around the province in my previous role, I met seniors who said they felt they needed an opportunity to share their ideas. The Premier always said it's better to go outside government than stay within to find those new ideas, and our seniors have them. Our seniors are living longer, are more active and wish to participate in how we can plan for them — and not just about health care. Housing is important. Transportation is important.

Recreational opportunities. Simply just participating and continuing to volunteer in their communities — these are important to our seniors, who are throughout all of our communities. I can say I have met some incredibly phenomenal seniors who have ideas and who can't wait to offer input. I will be offering a number of names to that council and hope they will have an opportunity to share those ideas, if not by serving on that council, certainly by providing input there.

As we move into this new golden decade, I think we should all be proud of what we have achieved and where we're going. Later on today, when we hear the budget speech, I'm sure that it will be even more good news for this province, and I say wholeheartedly that I do support this throne speech.

Hon. R. Coleman: I am proud to stand and speak in support of the throne speech today.

Reading this again after the throne speech — twice now — there is something that strikes me after nine years in this House. It is the most credible throne

speech, the most positive direction set for this province, that I can find in any time in the history of the province. It is something that we as a government are proud of. We're proud of it because we had to make the tough decisions starting in 2001 and as we move forward to build a great province for our children and our grandchildren.

I want to talk about a number of things today — about the golden decade, with regard to our future in the province — but I do want to spend a few minutes at the beginning of my speech talking about pages 21, 22 and half of page 23 of this throne speech. That is the area of the speech where we talk about safer streets and schools in the province.

When I became the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General back in 2001, the Premier said to me that he wanted somebody getting up every day and thinking about the future of policing, the issues in and around community safety and crime prevention in our province. I met with the members of the law enforcement community in this province, and we started to build a plan. The first thing I found out was how detailed the plan of the NDP was.

The NDP's commitment to policing, community safety and law enforcement was this plan: a blank piece of paper with no relationship whatsoever to law enforcement in the province. They had no commitment whatsoever to communities. They had no commitment whatsoever to law enforcement and did not even have a dialogue with the law enforcement community as to how we could reduce crime in B.C. and build a better and safer future for the children of this province.

As we moved through that period of time, we found out a number of things. First of all, as a result of the previous government having no dialogue or relationship with law enforcement, I found a structure of policing that was thirsting for an opportunity to take it into the future and that had never had the opportunity to discuss it with a minister or with a government to build on that future.

As we moved forward, starting in the summer of 2001, a number of things became pretty apparent. The first thing was that the law enforcement community and policing in general in this province, because they had had no relationship with a government in ten years, were suspicious that they could actually build one with this government.

It took a number of months just discussing with them and looking at the fiscal side of policing as to how we could build a future and fill the positions that were left vacant because of underfunding by the previous government with regard to policing. As we did that, we worked with the leadership of policing in this province — the B.C. Association of Chiefs of Police, the RCMP and those groups of people — to get to where we are today and to the comments that are made in this throne speech.

[1115]

The first thing we did, though, was this. The community had said to us: "We actually think there's a better way to deal with the information management, to

deal with the patterning of crime in our province and to deal with the future of policing in our province than we're doing it today." We also believe we have that system, because we've tested it in three jurisdictions in B.C., but we can't get past first base to have a discussion about it. This system is called PRIME — police records information management environment.

You know, Mr. Speaker, as you look at this throne speech and at what has been done in three and a half years in this province and you see the basis of the strong economy and the basis of the money we put into health care, education, the safety net that we built for our people, the sustainable environment management and at how we built a great economy by working with our partners, you also have to look back at some of the tough decisions and support that were given by the leadership of this province, particularly the Premier of this province, to different things that happened in ministries to get us there.

In the fall of 2001, as everybody in this room will recall, we were facing a huge structural deficit in dealing with the whole aspect of how we were going to balance our budget and build an economic future for B.C. In that environment, we were looking at a possibility of a records information management environment for policing — one that might change the entire dynamics of policing for the future of the province and for our citizens, one that a couple of chiefs of police have said is actually the biggest step in law enforcement in the last 30 years.

Well, in the fall of 2001 we were in a different vein, having to balance this budget and deal with that structural deficit. I went to the Premier of this province, and I said this: "We have an opportunity to move into real-time information management for policing in every jurisdiction in the province, but in order to accomplish that, we have to do a couple of things. First of all, we have to select a technology for every police officer in B.C. We can't have one community that thinks they can have one kind of computer system and another community that thinks they want to have a different kind of computer system. The second thing is that in order to get it into the car and on the street, we can't have communities saying: 'We aren't doing it, because we're not spending the money.'"

The Premier at that time supported this ministry to go to Treasury Board to get the money to pay for PRIME in 2001. It was a groundbreaking move on the part of the leadership of this province and the Premier to support that initiative, because this is what PRIME does for us. It gives us real-time information management, and every police car in British Columbia probably will be furnished with it within the next 12 months. We have it operating in over 20 communities today already.

The important part of this is.... Think about a couple of cases. When we were testing PRIME in one community, we had a break-in at a high school. A bunch of musical instruments had been stolen. The musical instruments and the case were put into PRIME in real time. The following day a police officer driving

down the road in another community policed by a different type of police agency picked up that in a pawnshop in that community, some musical instruments had been pawned overnight. They were loaded into a portal into PRIME.

The police officer went by, found the musical instruments, confirmed that they were indeed from the B and E in another community, got a search warrant and made arrests that afternoon. In the past, that case would probably have taken weeks, if not months — or never — to reach the desk or, indeed, the car of a police officer in a neighbouring community.

A few years ago in this province we had a police officer who probably had one of the toughest things that he has to live with today as a result of doing a job. A police officer stopped a person on the side of the road in a community in the interior of British Columbia. They checked the person for wants and warrants and let the individual go, because there were none. Two hours later that individual killed their estranged spouse.

The police officer on the side of the road couldn't know that there was an order in the courts that the individual could not be in that community. Through a system called JUSTIN in our justice system, we will be loading those things into PRIME so that in the future a police officer will have that information at their fingertips to protect communities better.

If there's a pattern of crime in one community or there are people missing from one community in numbers and they're showing up at a party site in another community, that system will talk to itself. It will actually tell people, so you can set up a pattern of crime, solve a crime more quickly and deal with issues.

[1120]

As we moved through PRIME, we needed to move to actually build a strong future for policing in British Columbia, and it required a number of things to happen. It required the leadership of this province in policing to first of all recognize that integration in law enforcement was the only way we could build such a future. It also required us to look at how we did business and how we could apply dollars and build that financial future for policing. As we came through that and continued to add funds into specific investigations that had to be dealt with by police and resources were reapplied, we asked law enforcement to do one thing more. We asked the RCMP to build a plan for policing for the next three to five years and tell us how much it would cost to fund it properly.

In this throne speech two things happened. It basically confirms 250 additional police officers over the next three years are going to be added to policing in British Columbia at a cost of \$122 million to the province, not inclusive of the 30 percent that the RCMP will also receive in the provincial budget for policing from the federal government. In addition to that, it also confirms that 100 percent of traffic fines will go back to communities. We have done that already, and we're going to continue to do that in the future.

The purpose of the \$41 million in traffic fines is for the people in those communities to see that money go

into crime prevention, community policing or additional police officers on their streets. It is not to be used for something else, as some communities seemed to think they want to do. Because we didn't put strings attached to it, we thought they would take responsibility to their citizens and invest it in crime prevention and law enforcement. Those communities that have maybe chosen not to do that should be aware of the fact that in the future the criticism in their community — when they're short of policing or crime prevention — will come back to them for taking that money and not putting it where it belonged. For the most part, communities are taking that \$41 million and investing it in law enforcement in communities that pay for policing in British Columbia — that is, a group of communities that are over 5,000 or have their own city police forces.

Outside of that, we recognize this: because of the lack of having a plan by the NDP like this, we found that in rural policing in B.C., we wanted to do some improvements. When we sat down with our police force, we said: "Look, what about our smaller communities? What about the Queen Charlottes? What about the areas like Zeballos and Granisle? What about the smaller communities that have significant issues with first nations policing, where they need to have additional officers? Give us those numbers."

We are actually putting police officers in all of these small communities around the province — additional police officers that will reduce crime by visibility but will also do it as a result of the fact that they're going to be targeted by the regional policing model that we have designed to get the best coverage possible for the citizens of British Columbia. It is the first time in almost 20 years that there has been a significant investment in additional policing in the province at that level. What happened in the past was that with no relationship with government, government ignored the requests of police and continued to think, "Well, you go manage it within the envelope you have," which resulted in vacancies not being filled.

As we move forward through this plan to get to where we are today, we did some innovative things in this province in addition to PRIME. In May of 2003 we put together 54 officers from 22 communities between Pemberton and Boston Bar into an integrated homicide unit. We believe that when it comes to investigating serious crime, you need to be able to go across borders and not be isolated in your thinking in law enforcement that a crime doesn't move from one community to the other or that intelligence cannot be shared.

We put together this integrated homicide unit. The reason we did it.... It was part of the plan to build up to where we are today with the additional 215 police officers we're going to put across the province, as talked about in this throne speech. When we became an integrated homicide unit in 2003, 50 percent of the homicides in British Columbia resulted in the Crown laying charges. Today 80 percent of the homicides in British Columbia — that is an increase of 30 percent — result in the Crown laying charges. Because we have

integrated the intelligence, we've put these people together on one team, and the results are phenomenal. It is actually one of the best rates in North America today.

[1125]

As we worked through that last summer, the Attorney General and I sat down with the Indo-Canadian community. There was a significant concern about the number of homicides — drug-related murders — that were taking place in that community among young men. Over 70 murders have occurred there in the last ten years. We have moved forward to have an integrated homicide unit now work with an integrated gang task force which will concentrate on those files so that we can share the intelligence and build the ability to have the success to push back on this in their community. They will work with us on the information side and also in the building of a new responsibility and new belief for their youth in their communities that they can get out of the cycle of crime that some of their peers have had in the past.

We knew we had a difficulty with auto theft, so what we did was again took our police community and put an integrated auto theft task force together, including bait cars. Today we see a precipitous drop in auto thefts on the lower mainland as a result of implementing the bait car program and the auto theft task force. As we have done that and as we have funded that, we have also seen significant results that tell us we will now move that program into other major communities across the province like Nanaimo and Kelowna, the rest of the Okanagan and into the north.

As we worked on this plan to get where we are with the 215 officers, which is in addition to everything I have spoken to so far, we also recognized something else was taking place. We had two other agencies in B.C. that were involved in law enforcement where we weren't getting the best value for dollar as far as being able to task the people the way we wanted to. The first was a relationship between ICBC and the law enforcement community with regards to them sending money to communities to put officers out there at time and a half and double time to do things like CounterAttack and some corridor patrol for traffic safety — some additional traffic patrol.

We sat down with the community, as we knew what we should be doing. We should actually create an integrated provincial traffic unit. If we do that, two things happen. First of all, if we take the funding and put it into that unit, we pay 70-cent dollars instead of time and a half. It also allows us to target people not just into traffic but also in visibility of policing. In addition to that, we would also have more success in our CounterAttack programs.

We're rolling out the integrated traffic unit now, in addition to the 215 officers. There will be between 80 and 100 officers around the province, in every community, that will see the benefit of those folks out there to deal not only with the eyes that watch for crime but the crime prevention that comes from the visibility of po-

licing, which is a much better investment in law enforcement than the other.

The other thing we did is we took a look at our Organized Crime Agency. Many years ago they set up an organized crime agency, which was supposed to be an integrated unit with all law enforcement in British Columbia. It was having some success, but the leadership of policing said: "Why don't we make it an organized crime unit, have an integrated unit under the management of the RCMP — where the leadership of whoever is running the unit could come from any police force in the province — and turn it into a provincial unit?" Again, what that means is we pay 70-cent dollars for the provincial unit, whether the officer is seconded from a city police force or detachment or is a member of the provincial force. We found another \$4 million in that initiative alone to reinvest in investigations relative to organized crime. That is also working on behalf of people in B.C.

As we came through all of this and started to move towards where we were getting to the final plan for policing for the next three to four years, which is talked about in this throne speech, we identified some other things that were significantly important for our communities. We tested something called an ISPOT team. An ISPOT team is an integrated sexual predator operations team. What it does is follow significant sexual predators who are released from the courts, who we know are likely to breach their conditions of release within 72 hours. They're going to go to a swimming pool, to a playground or to another area where there are children and where they're not supposed to be, or there are other significant issues with regards to their release.

[1130]

We know that by watching and waiting, we can save children from being abused. In a recent four-week project we made 17 arrests and laid 54 criminal charges in only four weeks. So we know an ISPOT team works.

Part of the funding that we see in this throne speech is going to permanently put in place an ISPOT team for British Columbia — a team that will track these people, stop them and catch them before they ruin the life of another child. It's an important initiative, and I'm proud of the fact that we were able to put it together in the policing plan and put it in this throne speech to tell British Columbians where we're going.

There is another huge aspect of crime that is actually starting to affect our children, and that is cybercrime. Whether it be Internet luring or child pornography, it is terrible, it is divisive, it is hurtful, and it is disgusting in our society. We've worked on a plan to deal with cybercrime — in addition to the officers we already have and by adding 14 additional officers in this funding that's in this throne speech — to fight Internet luring and child pornography.

This was the NDP plan for protecting your children from that — a blank piece of paper. No direction, no relationship, no thought to communities, because they wouldn't even talk to law enforcement about this type

of thing. Yet, you know, one of the most cherished groups of people in our society is our children and our grandchildren. For a government to ignore the relationship with policing and not build a plan to deal with this, as we go forward, was actually totally and completely irresponsible. We have taken that responsibility seriously as a government and built a plan for policing that is building the future to protect our children.

Through the initiative of some of the members in this House, we have put in place an AMBER alert plan for British Columbia in the last year — one that will allow us, in the case of the abduction of a child where there is fear for the child's life.... We'll be able to alert all our media, all our outlets in British Columbia, to try and solve and take care of that issue very quickly.

Many of you remember that there was actually a child abducted from my riding not too many months ago, who was returned to us a number of hours later — found in Surrey. What people probably don't realize is that we took the resources of the 54 members of the integrated homicide unit and immediately applied them to assist in that major investigation to track that child, when that happened. We were on the verge of an AMBER alert when the child was found. If you don't have the resources that you can move across borders to help a community in a situation like that, you would be irresponsible in policing by not integrating. By having the ability to direct those resources to help people with regards to a crime like that, I believe we were able to save a child.

That's just a description of where we sit as a result of three and a half years in policing, with a relationship with a group of people. Now we have \$30 million a year being applied to additional policing in British Columbia over the next three years — 215 additional officers, as the throne speech says. The significance of that is this: we will have major crime units in regional centres around the province to deal with the relationship that major crime has and major investigation has to the entire infrastructure of policing in B.C. They will integrate back to the organized crime unit, the serious crime unit and the integrated homicide unit in B.C. You will have this intricate relationship between law enforcement, within themselves, because we are the ones that took the leadership to put those folks on the ground in a regional manner for serious crime.

You're going to see a community like Zeballos — which went through a terrible time with a homicide of a young person and which was receiving policing from a community 45 minutes to an hour away — have a police officer in that community. When we started to put the officer in the community, the mayor said: "You have saved my community." The level of crime went down because the gangs that were operating in the community when the police weren't there now know there's a presence in the community to reduce the level of crime. Watch that impact as it starts to get to smaller communities. We build this plan that we've worked on for four years to get to where we could actually measure our results and know exactly where we should

target people to deal with policing and building a future for our communities in B.C. and the safety of them.

[1135]

When we were advised that we were going to be doing the announcement of the \$30 million that had been approved by Treasury Board to go forward with this policing plan that had been worked on, I spoke to some people in policing and the management of policing in this province who were, frankly, as I described it, over the moon. They believed that the previous government — they wouldn't say this, but I can tell you that given the plan was this, they didn't have to — had ignored them in B.C. for too long.

For too long the funding needs and the future and the structure had to be put in place to make it work, and all of these initiatives that we took and additional moneys we put in leading up to the 215 officers had already given them a sense of optimism that they had the opportunity to take care of their communities. But when we said, "You've got it all. Your plan is fully funded for the next three years. The funds are there, and the contingencies for any raises and salaries, so you don't ever have to go back and take it out of the base funding and cut police officers in this province," they looked forward and said: "Finally, since 1981" — 1981 — "we have a government that understands the funding of public safety for the future of our citizens in British Columbia and who we are proud to work with on a plan to do that."

From having no plan at all, we have incrementally built a future for policing over the last three years. Coming into the last 18 months as we built the plan that leads to the 215 officers and the \$30 million a year.... We finished the plan. We now know after doing all of this work with the leadership of law enforcement, who get all the credit with regard to being able to build that plan, that we are fully funding the future of policing in British Columbia in a relationship that is integrated, regionalized and will work for our citizens.

As we do that, let's not forget — because I never will — that as we work through that plan, and as I did it as a minister, there was always one individual who stood there and said: "We're going to do what is right for the communities in this province, and we will support you in building that plan both physically and economically." That was the Premier of this province, who has stood behind policing and stood behind this ministry's objectives from day one to build a great future for British Columbia.

That leads me to this. This throne speech, as I said, may be the quintessential throne speech in the history of this province because of what it delivers back to B.C., what it builds for a future in every aspect of our province. It does it because of the fact that somebody stepped into the fray as the leader of this province and put a team together in 2001 of the members of our caucus and our government to go forward and build a plan and know that there was an end goal for the people of B.C. That was our Premier.

The Premier saw the importance of the power of a strong economy. The Premier saw the importance of

setting a set of goals and a direction for the future of our province. We had the *New Era* document as we came into 2001, Mr. Speaker, and I can tell you that well over 90 percent of everything in that document has been completed or acted upon as a government. You will not find another government in any jurisdiction that I can find that has a record like that in keeping its commitments.

The fact of the matter is that as you move through that, sometimes you run into bumps in the road, and you adjust, but the reality is that the new era did exactly what it was set out to do. That was to lay a foundation of commitments for citizens to measure this government by, which I am proud to let them measure me against, but it also set a new era for hope and prosperity in British Columbia. When you see almost 200,000 additional jobs and when you see how the province has performed, you see the economic stability of a government and its finances so that they can fund things like policing and other aspects. The prosperity is also here because of the leadership of our Premier and the work that our government has done over the last three and a half years.

[1140]

As I look at that, I also marvel at what's been accomplished. Not only from the aspect of taking a group of people like the law enforcement community and empowering them to build a plan with government for the future to protect our citizens.... Look at the rest of it. In the area of health care alone — moving down from 50-plus authorities and aspects of management in health care to six, and taking a government and being able in tough times to still invest an additional \$2.4 billion in health care over a three-and-a-half-year period....

When you think about that, that's an \$8-point-some billion budget when we became government and \$2.4 billion today. Yet our detractors out there — people that actually, I guess, could never add when they were government themselves, could never really do anything more than do a fudge-it budget — say: "Oh, they cut health care." It's an additional \$2.4 billion into health care, it's a better management system for the citizens of our province, and it's building a foundation for health care so that it will be there for us when we, our grandchildren and our children get old.

We said in *New Era* that we would not cut education funding. In actual fact, we have increased the education funding every single year we've been in government. We've done that while we've seen 28,000 fewer students in our public school system. If you are out there today, think about this. The government left the funding in place while 28,000 fewer students were there to be taught and increased the spending incrementally every year as an investment in the education system. They did it why? Because the *New Era* talked about hope and prosperity and how we would, as we built the economy into a strong economy for the future of the province, reinvest in health care and education. That's exactly what we have done through this throne speech and the budget we'll see this afternoon.

We are in the golden decade, but I think it's the golden future. It's only a golden future when we re-elect this government and re-elect this Premier to build the great future that we all deserve.

M. Hunter: That's a tough act to follow.

I am pleased and proud to stand here on behalf of the electorate of Nanaimo to respond to the throne speech that was presented just a week ago. It was a throne speech that was, in my view, an inspirational precursor to this afternoon's budget. To me, not only was it inspirational, but it was visionary, it was exciting, and it was deserving of a province whose potential was wasted for an entire decade — potential which is now.... We're now seeing the light at the end of a very long tunnel.

It is worth recalling. In fact, I think it's our responsibility in this chamber to remind each other and the public of British Columbia of the dismal facts about the 1990s in this province. It was a decade during which the western world experienced some of the fastest and most sustained economic growth ever in the history of humankind. But it was a decade in which B.C. missed out. In fact, British Columbia went backwards. It went from first to last amongst the Canadian provinces. The old advice to people where I came from in Europe was: "Go west, young man." In British Columbia that advice became: "Go head for the hills." Just a reminder, Mr. Speaker, that the hills are to the east, and people did that by the thousands.

As personal incomes declined and jobs disappeared in this province, people and families, old and young, by the thousands fled the economic devastation in British Columbia to find their way to Alberta and Ontario and other parts of North America. It's a history that cannot and will not be denied, and it must be remembered, because the NDP and their union bosses want B.C. to go backwards. But given what's in this throne speech, the visionary message from this government, I'm confident that the people of British Columbia are not ready to step backwards or to have their affairs run by B.C.'s union politburo.

What this government is presenting to the people of British Columbia is a vision of progress and hope. It's a vision of seeking out and taking opportunities to advance the situation of every resident of this place, to set up a framework within which the spirit of British Columbia — its people, its entrepreneurs — can flourish.

[1145]

Let me talk about the elements of the vision, the goals we've set for British Columbia and the golden decade and more that lies within our grasp. The first and perhaps most important goal in the long term is to make this place the best-educated and most literate on the continent.

We all know that a good education pays huge dividends both to individuals and to society as a whole. We all know that literacy skills are the passport to meaningful work and lifelong happiness. They're not the only determinants, but they are very, very important. We also know that we live in a time where success

means being the best. Competition for investment around North America is fierce. A good education system and a truly literate population — and I include in that a numerate population — mean that employers can find qualified employees. Secure jobs mean stability for families.

Let me take time to give credit to B.C.'s educators for the work they're doing, because education is a subject about which everybody has an opinion. They are strongly held opinions, and that's fine. I appreciate that, and I encourage that kind of debate. But we do need to step back from the fray once in a while to thank the teachers in our schools and to thank parents who, under this government's guidance, are again welcome and involved in their children's school affairs. We need to thank school trustees whose task, frankly, is very often a thankless one because they bear the load of making critical decisions about our local education systems and our kids. But it is clear from the improving academic results across this province that this government's significant investments and the efforts of educators around the province in education at all levels are starting to pay off.

I also want to note — because in my community, aboriginal people are a significant part of our population — that it is really gratifying to see that our attention on aboriginal education achievement is also starting to pay off in significant increases in aboriginal graduation rates. We are far from a situation of equality between aboriginal and the general population rates, but we are starting to make some progress, and I think we need to celebrate that.

It's really great to see the involvement of parents and families in the affairs of our schools. In Nanaimo, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that in our community schools, we have a great example of how we can use our educational facilities to provide advantages and opportunities throughout the year to students and others in the community. That is a great example that we can follow as we pursue the throne speech goal of using those educational facilities more than we do today.

Can we do better in education? You bet. Are our students being challenged enough? Personally, I don't think so. When I was educated in another country many, many years ago now, I think I was much more seriously challenged than my own kids were. My grandkids are just starting school, so I don't know. But we must challenge our students. We can't have students in grade 12 spending their days doing things other than studying and preparing for the future.

Our vision for education is one of constant improvement so we can be the best we can be. The renewed economic vigour of British Columbia is allowing us to refocus on things like music and the arts in our schools, as well as providing new resources within the recently announced \$150 million boost to funding. That's a \$150 million boost to funding — new resources within that amount of money for special needs students, young folks who really need special attention and increased special attention. In my opinion, that's welcome and important news. It's part of a program

where we have boosted per-student funding by over \$860 since 2001, despite a drop in student enrolment of 29,000 students in that same period — not something that the B.C. Teachers Federation happens to mention in its public advertising campaign.

We live in an age when education never ends. It used to be that once you had finished high school or university, you were on your way to a lifetime of employment. But that's not so today. It hasn't been for many, many years, and that's why the important focus on post-secondary education.

Look at the growth of Malaspina University College, which has its home base in my city. Not only has it grown its degree programs and technical programs, but also there is growth in adult education. We have people of all ages going back to school to learn new skills and gain new knowledge that they need either to improve their lives or to get better jobs. The 1,100 new seats that are coming to Malaspina University College by 2010 will ensure the continued growth of this important educational icon in my city, both the physical growth and the intellectual growth that Malaspina represents.

[1150]

I'm grateful, and I know my community is, for this government's investment in the Centre for Shellfish Research at Malaspina University College, its significant investment in the new library which will be opening in the coming weeks and in other physical facilities that are making Malaspina University a place of some repute. I am confident that Malaspina University College can, and will, take up the challenge of exploring its potential role as a new special-purpose university in British Columbia in the months ahead.

This government's vision doesn't end with education. We want the residents of British Columbia to lead North America in physical fitness and in healthy living. Why? Because we know that healthy living and physical fitness mean a better health care system. Everyone knows that preventative medicine makes sense, but not all of us can translate that knowledge into our everyday habits. Frankly, I could use some help myself, because I've struggled with my weight ever since a knee operation in my twenties left me unable to play the beautiful game — football. And for the Solicitor General, that's played with a round ball, not any other shape.

This approach to preventative medicine is not about "eat your broccoli." The trivial comments made by some media people around the approach to preventative medicine are just that — trivial. This is about putting emphasis on health care, not illness care. I think this is something we all know makes sense, and I certainly support it. It's important because health care, as we have come to know it.... Health care programs are consuming ever-increasing amounts of our tax dollars as our population grows and ages.

We are benefiting in my community from improvements to our health care system. We have, as a result of this government's investments, a new MRI

scanning machine in Nanaimo. We have new kidney dialysis machines available in Nanaimo. We are weeks away from opening new surgical suites in the Nanaimo Regional General Hospital, which will conclude an 18-year period of promises. These things were going to be built. Now they are being built, and they're almost open. We will have more surgical procedures.

I think it's important to note, as well, that while we improve our health care system in that kind of way, we are also investing heavily — making important investments to boost British Columbia's impressive global record in health care.

Genome mapping — something I know very little about, but I know it is advanced research in medicine that British Columbia excels in. We know that cancer research in this province is providing the best cancer outcomes for people across Canada. That's significant. We know that the SARS vaccine came from a lab in British Columbia. These are global advances that we are investing in as this government. I'm proud of that.

We also have a vision for the best supports anywhere in North America for people with disabilities and with special needs, for children at risk and for seniors. The opposition wants you to believe that we don't care about these groups within our society. The opposition focuses on the sensational, and often, in my view, they have misled British Columbians about the facts. The fearmongering of the opposition on these subjects does not change those facts. This government is addressing issues that arise from the demographics that we face. There will be 22 percent more senior citizens in this province by 2010. That is five short years away, and I'm almost going to be amongst them — almost.

Knowledge about these changes isn't new. The Solicitor General talked about the blank page in law enforcement. The last government had a blank page when it came to dealing with demographics that were already on the radar screen. This is not new; we've known about it since 1946 when the baby boom started. It's disgraceful that no other government before this one had the courage and the guts to start to tackle some of these issues. We're taking the issue head-on, and the new Premier's council on aging is going to be an important institution as we find our way through this maze.

Mr. Speaker, I have lots more to say. But noting the time, I move adjournment of debate.

M. Hunter moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. I. Chong moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned until 2 p.m. today.

The House adjourned at 11:55 a.m.