



6th Session, 37th Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT OF
DEBATES OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, March 1, 2005
Afternoon Sitting
Volume 27, Number 22

THE HONOURABLE CLAUDE RICHMOND, SPEAKER

ISSN 0709-1281

PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

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

6TH SESSION, 37TH PARLIAMENT

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Honourable Claude Richmond

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Premier and President of the Executive Council | Hon. Gordon Campbell |
| Minister of State for Intergovernmental Relations | Hon. Sindi Hawkins |
| Deputy Premier and Minister of Health Services | Hon. Shirley Bond |
| Minister of State for Mental Health and Addiction Services | Hon. Brenda Locke |
| Minister of Advanced Education..... | Hon. Ida Chong |
| Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries..... | Hon. John van Dongen |
| Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Treaty Negotiations..... | Hon. Geoff Plant, QC |
| Minister of Children and Family Development..... | Hon. Stan Hagen |
| Minister of State for Early Childhood Development..... | Hon. Linda Reid |
| Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services | Hon. Murray Coell |
| Minister of State for Immigration and Multicultural Services..... | Hon. Patrick Wong |
| Minister of State for Women's and Seniors' Services..... | Hon. Wendy McMahon |
| Minister of Education | Hon. Tom Christensen |
| Minister of Energy and Mines..... | Hon. Richard Neufeld |
| Minister of State for Mining..... | Hon. Pat Bell |
| Minister of Finance..... | Hon. Colin Hansen |
| Minister of Forests..... | Hon. Michael de Jong |
| Minister of State for Forestry Operations..... | Hon. Roger Harris |
| Minister of Human Resources..... | Hon. Susan Brice |
| Minister of Management Services | Hon. Joyce Murray |
| Minister of Provincial Revenue..... | Hon. Rick Thorpe |
| Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General..... | Hon. Rich Coleman |
| Minister of Skills Development and Labour..... | Hon. Graham P. Bruce |
| Minister of Small Business and Economic Development | Hon. John Les |
| Minister of Sustainable Resource Management | Hon. George Abbott |
| Minister of State for Resort Development..... | Hon. Patty Sahota |
| Minister of Transportation..... | Hon. Kevin Falcon |
| Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection | Hon. Bill Barisoff |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Deputy Speaker | Dr. John Weisbeck |
| Leader of the Opposition | Joy K. MacPhail |
| Deputy Chair, Committee of the Whole..... | Harold Long |
| Clerk of the Legislative Assembly..... | E. George MacMinn, QC |
| Clerk Assistant..... | Robert Vaive |
| Clerk Assistant and Law Clerk | Ian D. Izard, QC |
| Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees | Craig H. James |
| Clerk Assistant and Committee Clerk | Kate Ryan-Lloyd |
| Sergeant-at-Arms..... | A.A. Humphreys |
| Director, Hansard Services | Anthony Dambrauskas |
| Legislative Librarian | Jane Taylor |
| Legislative Comptroller..... | Peter Bray |

Published by British Columbia Hansard Services, and printed under the authority of the Speaker by the Queen's Printer, Victoria. Rates: single issue, \$2.85; per calendar year, mailed daily, \$298. GST extra. Agent: Crown Publications Inc., 521 Fort St., Victoria, B.C. V8W 1E7. Telephone: (250) 386-4636. Fax: 386-0221.

www.leg.bc.ca

Hansard Services publishes transcripts both in print and on the Internet. Chamber debates are broadcast on television and webcast on the Internet.

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Abbott, Hon. George (L) | Shuswap |
| Anderson, Rev. Val (L) | Vancouver-Langara |
| Barisoff, Hon. Bill (L) | Penticton-Okanagan Valley |
| Bell, Hon. Pat (L) | Prince George North |
| Belsey, Bill (L) | North Coast |
| Bennett, Bill (L) | East Kootenay |
| Bhullar, Tony (L) | Surrey-Newton |
| Bloy, Harry (L) | Burquitlam |
| Bond, Hon. Shirley (L) | Prince George-Mount Robson |
| Brar, Jagrup (NDP) | Surrey-Panorama Ridge |
| Bray, Jeff (L) | Victoria-Beacon Hill |
| Brenzinger, Elayne (DR) | Surrey-Whalley |
| Brice, Hon. Susan (L) | Saanich South |
| Bruce, Hon. Graham P. (L) | Cowichan-Ladysmith |
| Campbell, Hon. Gordon (L) | Vancouver-Point Grey |
| Chong, Hon. Ida (L) | Oak Bay-Gordon Head |
| Christensen, Hon. Tom (L) | Okanagan-Vernon |
| Chutter, Dave (L) | Yale-Lillooet |
| Clark, Christy (L) | Port Moody-Westwood |
| Cobb, Walt (L) | Cariboo South |
| Coell, Hon. Murray (L) | Saanich North and the Islands |
| Coleman, Hon. Rich (L) | Fort Langley-Aldergrove |
| de Jong, Hon. Michael (L) | Abbotsford-Mount Lehman |
| Falcon, Hon. Kevin (L) | Surrey-Cloverdale |
| Hagen, Hon. Stan (L) | Comox Valley |
| Halsey-Brandt, Greg (L) | Richmond Centre |
| Hamilton, Arnie (L) | Esquimalt-Metchosin |
| Hansen, Hon. Colin (L) | Vancouver-Quilchena |
| Harris, Hon. Roger (L) | Skeena |
| Hawes, Randy (L) | Maple Ridge-Mission |
| Hawkins, Hon. Sindi (L) | Kelowna-Mission |
| Hayer, Dave S. (L) | Surrey-Tynehead |
| Hogg, Gordon (L) | Surrey-White Rock |
| Hunter, Mike (L) | Nanaimo |
| Jarvis, Daniel (L) | North Vancouver-Seymour |
| Johnston, Ken (L) | Vancouver-Fraserview |
| Kerr, Brian J. (L) | Malahat-Juan de Fuca |
| Krueger, Kevin (L) | Kamloops-North Thompson |
| Kwan, Jenny Wai Ching (NDP) | Vancouver-Mount Pleasant |
| Lee, Richard T. (L) | Burnaby North |
| Lekstrom, Blair (L) | Peace River South |
| Les, Hon. John (L) | Chilliwack-Sumas |
| Locke, Hon. Brenda (L) | Surrey-Green Timbers |
| Long, Harold (L) | Powell River-Sunshine Coast |
| MacKay, Dennis (L) | Bulkley Valley-Stikine |
| McMahon, Hon. Wendy (L) | Columbia River-Revelstoke |
| MacPhail, Joy K. (NDP) | Vancouver-Hastings |
| Manhas, Kam (L) | Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain |
| Masi, Reni (L) | Delta North |
| Mayencourt, Lorne (L) | Vancouver-Burrard |
| Murray, Hon. Joyce (L) | New Westminster |
| Nebbeling, Ted (L) | West Vancouver-Garibaldi |
| Nettleton, Paul (Ind) | Prince George-Omineca |
| Neufeld, Hon. Richard (L) | Peace River North |
| Nijjar, Rob (L) | Vancouver-Kingsway |
| Nuraney, John (L) | Burnaby-Willingdon |
| Orr, Sheila (L) | Victoria-Hillside |
| Penner, Barry (L) | Chilliwack-Kent |
| Plant, Hon. Geoff, QC (L) | Richmond-Steveston |
| Reid, Judith (L) | Nanaimo-Parksville |
| Reid, Hon. Linda (L) | Richmond East |
| Richmond, Hon. Claude (L) | Kamloops |
| Roddick, Valerie (L) | Delta South |
| Sahota, Hon. Patty (L) | Burnaby-Edmonds |
| Stephens, Lynn (L) | Langley |
| Stewart, Ken (L) | Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows |
| Stewart, Richard (L) | Coquitlam-Maillardville |
| Suffredine, Blair F. (L) | Nelson-Creston |
| Sultan, Ralph (L) | West Vancouver-Capilano |
| Thorpe, Hon. Rick (L) | Okanagan-Westside |
| Trumper, Gillian (L) | Alberni-Qualicum |
| van Dongen, Hon. John (L) | Abbotsford-Clayburn |
| Visser, Rod (L) | North Island |
| Weisbeck, Dr. John (L) | Kelowna-Lake Country |
| Whittrid, Katherine (L) | North Vancouver-Lonsdale |
| Wilson, Dr. John (L) | Cariboo North |
| Wong, Hon. Patrick (L) | Vancouver-Kensington |

LIST OF MEMBERS BY RIDING

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Abbotsford-Clayburn | Hon. John van Dongen |
| Abbotsford-Mount Lehman | Hon. Michael de Jong |
| Alberni-Qualicum | Gillian Trumper |
| Bulkley Valley-Stikine | Dennis MacKay |
| Burnaby North | Richard T. Lee |
| Burnaby-Edmonds | Hon. Patty Sahota |
| Burnaby-Willingdon | John Nuraney |
| Burquitlam | Harry Bloy |
| Cariboo North | Dr. John Wilson |
| Cariboo South | Walt Cobb |
| Chilliwack-Kent | Barry Penner |
| Chilliwack-Sumas | Hon. John Les |
| Columbia River-Revelstoke | Hon. Wendy McMahon |
| Comox Valley | Hon. Stan Hagen |
| Coquitlam-Maillardville | Richard Stewart |
| Cowichan-Ladysmith | Hon. Graham P. Bruce |
| Delta North | Reni Masi |
| Delta South | Valerie Roddick |
| East Kootenay | Bill Bennett |
| Esquimalt-Metchosin | Arnie Hamilton |
| Fort Langley-Aldergrove | Hon. Rich Coleman |
| Kamloops | Hon. Claude Richmond |
| Kamloops-North Thompson | Kevin Krueger |
| Kelowna-Lake Country | Dr. John Weisbeck |
| Kelowna-Mission | Hon. Sindi Hawkins |
| Langley | Lynn Stephens |
| Malahat-Juan de Fuca | Brian J. Kerr |
| Maple Ridge-Mission | Randy Hawes |
| Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows | Ken Stewart |
| Nanaimo | Mike Hunter |
| Nanaimo-Parksville | Judith Reid |
| Nelson-Creston | Blair F. Suffredine |
| New Westminster | Hon. Joyce Murray |
| North Coast | Bill Belsey |
| North Island | Rod Visser |
| North Vancouver-Lonsdale | Katherine Whittred |
| North Vancouver-Seymour | Daniel Jarvis |
| Oak Bay-Gordon Head | Hon. Ida Chong |
| Okanagan-Vernon | Hon. Tom Christensen |
| Okanagan-Westside | Hon. Rick Thorpe |
| Peace River North | Hon. Richard Neufeld |
| Peace River South | Blair Lekstrom |
| Penticton-Okanagan Valley | Hon. Bill Barisoff |
| Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain | Kam Manhas |
| Port Moody-Westwood | Christy Clark |
| Powell River-Sunshine Coast | Harold Long |
| Prince George North | Hon. Pat Bell |
| Prince George-Mount Robson | Hon. Shirley Bond |
| Prince George-Omineca | Paul Nettleton |
| Richmond Centre | Greg Halsey-Brandt |
| Richmond East | Hon. Linda Reid |
| Richmond-Steveston | Hon. Geoff Plant, QC |
| Saanich North and the Islands | Hon. Murray Coell |
| Saanich South | Hon. Susan Brice |
| Shuswap | Hon. George Abbott |
| Skeena | Hon. Roger Harris |
| Surrey-Cloverdale | Hon. Kevin Falcon |
| Surrey-Green Timbers | Hon. Brenda Locke |
| Surrey-Newton | Tony Bhullar |
| Surrey-Panorama Ridge | Jagrup Brar |
| Surrey-Tynehead | Dave S. Hayer |
| Surrey-Whalley | Elayne Brenzinger |
| Surrey-White Rock | Gordon Hogg |
| Vancouver-Burrard | Lorne Mayencourt |
| Vancouver-Fairview | Vacant |
| Vancouver-Fraserview | Ken Johnston |
| Vancouver-Hastings | Joy K. MacPhail |
| Vancouver-Kensington | Hon. Patrick Wong |
| Vancouver-Kingsway | Rob Nijjar |
| Vancouver-Langara | Rev. Val Anderson |
| Vancouver-Mount Pleasant | Jenny Wai Ching Kwan |
| Vancouver-Point Grey | Hon. Gordon Campbell |
| Vancouver-Quilchena | Hon. Colin Hansen |
| Victoria-Beacon Hill | Jeff Bray |
| Victoria-Hillside | Sheila Orr |
| West Kootenay-Boundary | Vacant |
| West Vancouver-Capilano | Ralph Sultan |
| West Vancouver-Garibaldi | Ted Nebbeling |
| Yale-Lillooet | Dave Chutter |

CONTENTS

Tuesday, March 1, 2005
Afternoon Sitting

Routine Proceedings

| | Page |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Introductions by Members | 12205 |
| Statements (Standing Order 25B) | 12205 |
| Benefits of physical activity | |
| K. Whittred | |
| Ridge Meadows Hospital services | |
| K. Stewart | |
| Transportation and Hydro infrastructure in northwestern B.C. | |
| D. MacKay | |
| Oral Questions..... | 12206 |
| Compensation for former Woodlands School residents | |
| J. Kwan | |
| Hon. S. Hagen | |
| B.C. Liberal Party election statements and expansion of gambling | |
| J. MacPhail | |
| Hon. G. Bruce | |
| Hon. R. Coleman | |
| B.C. Liberal Party election statements and services for problem gamblers | |
| J. Brar | |
| Hon. G. Bruce | |
| Hon. R. Coleman | |
| Crown counsel compensation agreement | |
| P. Nettleton | |
| Education funding and B.C. Teachers Federation advertising | |
| L. Mayencourt | |
| Hon. T. Christensen | |
| Government action on impaired driving | |
| E. Brenzinger | |
| Hon. R. Coleman | |
| Tabling Documents..... | 12209 |
| Public Service Benefit Plan Act, annual report, 2004 | |
| Budget Debate (<i>continued</i>)..... | 12209 |
| J. Kwan | |
| Hon. B. Locke | |
| Hon. M. Coell | |
| Hon. S. Hagen | |
| Hon. W. McMahon | |
| K. Johnston | |
| Hon. L. Reid | |
| Second Reading of Bills..... | 12225 |
| Crown Counsel Agreement Continuation Act (Bill 21) | |
| Hon. G. Bruce | |
| J. MacPhail | |
| P. Nettleton | |
| Hon. G. Bruce | |

Budget Measures Implementation Act, 2005 (Bill 6)
Hon. C. Hansen
J. MacPhail
Hon. C. Hansen

Committee of Supply..... 12232
Supplementary Estimates (No. 10): Ministry of Small Business and Economic Development (*continued*)
J. Kwan
Hon. J. Les

TUESDAY, MARCH 1, 2005

The House met at 2:03 p.m.

Introductions by Members

R. Masi: With leave from the member for Nanaimo, it's a great pleasure for me today to introduce some very close family members from Nanaimo: my uncle Fred Cormans and my cousin Terry Cormans, accompanied by his wife, Kim Cormans. Would the House please make them all welcome today.

Hon. S. Bond: It is my pleasure today to welcome the B.C. Ambulance Service's CEO, David Morhart, and his executive management team to the precinct. As the members know, the service is undertaking a number of groundbreaking initiatives designed to improve patient care across the province.

Thanks to the dedicated work of the service's executive and the more than 3,200 paramedics across the province we are improving ambulance response times in communities across British Columbia. We are investing in training to ensure that our paramedics continue to be the most highly skilled prehospital emergency care practitioners in North America, and we are also looking at innovative ways of integrating the prehospital care paramedics provide with the care delivered by emergency department staff to ensure the best possible patient outcomes.

[1405]

In addition to welcoming them, we had the opportunity today to actually see our critical care air ambulance team in action. It was absolutely phenomenal. We are so proud of the work that our health care professionals do. I wanted to recognize Keith Kozak and Scott Hay, who we actually met as part of their line of work today. Please join me in welcoming David Morhart and his executive to the precinct.

J. MacPhail: I have three separate introductions to make today.

The first one is Brian Carter, whom I had lunch with today. He's a dedicated coast guard professional here in Victoria. There are also two very lively — I would say live wire, but let's just leave it at lively — seniors joining us today from Nanaimo, Pat Portsmouth and Anne Thompson. Then finally Margaret Scott, my sister-in-law, who is a nurse extraordinaire, arrived today. Would the House please make them all welcome.

M. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence I rise not to introduce a person today but a spirit — the spirit of St. David. Today is St. David's Day. Many of my family are from Wales, and I wanted this House to recognize St. David's Day and say to all the Welsh Canadians who live in British Columbia: Wales forever.

J. Kwan: Visiting us today in the members' gallery are approximately 20 people. They are and represent

the abuse victims of the Woodlands care home for children. They are Greg Schiller, Arlene Schouter, Bill MacArthur, Gary Hill, Lenny Zimmer, Richard McDonald, Fay Sherlock, Dorothy Murray, Ken Milne and Danny Vollans. Also in the east public gallery are Luanne Bradshaw and Phil Traynor; and in wheelchairs are Ron Frank and his attendant, Anton; Barb Westfield and her attendant, Alison; Paul Irwin and his attendant; and finally, Deb Yaschuk and her attendant. Would the House please make these individuals.

Hon. C. Hansen: I would like the House to welcome a group of grade 5 students from Lord Kitchener Elementary School in my riding. They are accompanied by their teachers, Ms. Peterson, Ms. Gray and Mrs. Sidhu, and parents that have come along with them. I look forward to talking to them a little later in the afternoon. Would the House please make them welcome.

Statements (Standing Order 25B)

BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

K. Whittred: Every day thousands of dollars are spent looking for the fountain of youth, but it may be as close as our neighbourhood park. Physical activity has been glowingly referred to as "the magic bullet" because of its proven benefits in preventing disease, improving health and promoting independence and quality of life in old age.

The United Kingdom minister for public health has called physical exercise the best buy in public health. The beneficial effects of regular exercise have been identified as the most effective way to achieve healthy aging.

Today one of the biggest challenges in our health system is the management of chronic disease. Studies show that a wide range of chronic diseases could be avoided through increased physical activity. The U.S. Surgeon General has issued a general national call to action to put increased physical activity on the same level as the use of seatbelts and no-smoking campaigns because of strong evidence that it will produce substantial health gains.

How do British Columbians stack up? How do we compare to other provinces in being active? Good news: B.C. is first among provinces, according to Statistics Canada. However, the data also shows that between 1994 and 2001 the proportion of the population across Canada exercising regularly increased. B.C., however, although it has the highest rate in the country, remained stagnant, so there is opportunity to improve.

[1410]

Another really interesting outcome of the study was on gender differences. During that same time period women in B.C. increased their physical activity by 5.8 percent, while men decreased theirs by 6.6 percent — overall, a good prognosis for women's health but not so good for the men.

A goal that all of us share on both sides of the House is to get to be a senior — in fact, to get to be a super senior, that segment of society over 85, who are the fastest-growing group in the population. Not only do we aspire to be a super senior but one who is healthy, mobile and connected with community. How does physical activity help us get there, Mr. Speaker? It is estimated that 15 percent of heart disease, 19 percent of stroke and 18 percent of osteoporosis are attributable to lack of physical activity.

RIDGE MEADOWS HOSPITAL SERVICES

K. Stewart: Early in our mandate we identified that we must improve emergency care. At our Ridge Meadows Hospital we are undertaking an emergency ambulatory care redevelopment. This \$11 million project will double ER space and bring together scattered outpatient programs as well as free up space for in-patient use. Our partners, the Ridge Meadows Hospital Foundation and the communities of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, are committed to raising \$3 million for this equipment.

Emergency access improvement has reduced average waiting times from an emergency bed into a regular hospital bed from 23 hours to less than eight. Contributing factors include the introduction of a 24-hour home support system, a team focus for discharge planning and the addition of 15 hours of specialized triage nursing each week. The addition of a full-time psychiatric nursing position to the ER will assist with patients who have addictions and mental health issues. Surgical services have opened up a fourth operating room and a general surgeon position has also been added.

Many doctors have commented to me on how much more efficient their new job is with the new equipment at the hospital. This new equipment includes a CT scanner. Local placement has dramatically reduced patient wait-lists for this important diagnostic technology.

Many community groups contributed to the initial purchase of this vital piece of equipment, and the staff hours of support have been recently increased. A digital storage unit operated with PACS technology has also been added. This is North America's largest on-line system for sending diagnostic images to doctors.

An echo machine was received in 2004. This will allow us to do tests in a timely manner without having to send patients to Eagle Ridge Hospital. A mini C-arm has been wanted for some time by the orthopedic surgeons. This now will allow for easier imaging on a portable machine.

At the Ridge Meadows Hospital site, in a new facility, we are also replacing the aging 130 beds at Creekside Manor and Alouette Manor and combining two local health offices in-house. This partnership between Fraser health and the private sector will also create space for future programs and services.

We still have many challenges in health care, but these additions have greatly improved service to the people of Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows.

TRANSPORTATION AND HYDRO INFRASTRUCTURE IN NORTHWESTERN B.C.

D. MacKay: Today I would like to spend a few minutes talking about infrastructure and what happens when a government does the necessary planning to make things happen — unlike the previous administration, who must have known we were getting older but did nothing to plan for the expected demand on health care of the citizens of this province.

I'm pleased to report that the Ministry of Transportation has provided the funds and the planning needed to ensure that Highway 37 north will be upgraded and capable of 100 percent legal axle loading over its entire length from Kitwanga to the Yukon border. This has been done to ensure that the road surface will stand up to the heavy truck traffic expected in the coming years from the mining industry. If you are familiar with the northwest of our province, you will know that Highway 37 is critical to the mining industry.

Another infrastructure issue I would like to speak about is the absence of hydroelectric power along the Highway 37 corridor. Mines use huge quantities of electricity, and in the absence of hydroelectric power they're required to use diesel generation. We all know this is not good for the environment.

A mine near Iskut, more specifically the Red Chris mine, is expected to start preproduction in the first quarter of 2007. It is expected to have a mine life of 25 years. With access to the B.C. power grid it is expected the mine would spend \$459 million on electricity, based on B.C. Hydro's published schedule of rates. There are other properties east and west of the Highway 37 corridor that will also be looking for access to the power grid.

[1415]

With a return like the numbers I just quoted, it makes so much sense to ensure that this piece of the puzzle be completed by B.C. Transmission Corporation as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker: That concludes members' statements.

Oral Questions

COMPENSATION FOR FORMER WOODLANDS SCHOOL RESIDENTS

J. Kwan: Joining us today in the Legislature are survivors of Woodlands School, British Columbians who suffered horrific abuse. These survivors are asking the government to sit down and negotiate an effective and fair settlement process for those who suffered while they were in care of that institution. They're here again today to make their plea to the government.

To the Premier: why is the government forcing these survivors to go to the courts instead of engaging in a fair and transparent negotiation process?

Hon. S. Hagen: As the member opposite knows full well, these matters are before the courts and I can't

comment on them specifically. What this government has done is.... In 2002 the government created a \$2 million trust fund to provide counselling and support for former Woodlands residents and their family members. We worked with the public guardian and trustee to create the Woodlands project team, and we thank the team for their diligent work.

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

J. Kwan: Not a cent from that trust fund has gone to the survivors, and the request by the survivors to have public representation in that trust has been denied.

There is ample precedent for sitting down and negotiating fairly and openly in a tragic situation like this. In a report to the government Dulcie McCallum stated very clearly that Woodlands survivors should not be forced to pursue reparations through the courts and that the government should further investigate systemic abuse. The government ignored that advice.

Again to the Premier: why won't he call off his lawyers and engage in a constructive, open and fair settlement process with the victims of Woodlands, some of whom are here today? They don't want to go to the courts.

Hon. S. Hagen: To this House and to the people of the province, I want to reiterate that because these matters are before the courts, I can't comment specifically.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. S. Hagen: I want to reiterate that the government set up a \$2 million trust fund to pay for counselling and support services for the Woodlands residents and their family members, and we did that in a cooperative spirit. We worked with the public guardian and trustee to create the Woodlands project team, and we want to thank the team for their diligent work.

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

J. Kwan: I remind the government that the former Minister of Children and Family Development said that government has a moral responsibility to treat these survivors fairly. They're asking for a process outside of the court system to deal with their issue. Not a cent from the trust fund has flowed to the survivors. There are some 1,500 survivors in the Woodlands residential school situation. Many of them are aging, and their health is failing them.

Will the Premier today at least commit to meeting with the survivors to see if a negotiated settlement could be reached? Some of them are here today, and they're asking for the government to meet with them.

Hon. S. Hagen: As I've said before, we've set up the \$2 million trust fund, and we're consulting. The group that I mentioned, the public guardian and trustee, is actually providing advice to the foundation that holds the trust fund for the distribution of those funds.

B.C. LIBERAL PARTY
ELECTION STATEMENTS
AND EXPANSION OF GAMBLING

J. MacPhail: As British Columbians know, the B.C. Liberals have broken election promise after election promise, but the B.C. Liberals only admit to breaking six promises. Can the Premier tell us what those six promises are that he admits to breaking?

[1420]

Hon. G. Bruce: Mr. Speaker, I think it's an opportunity for us to look at what's taken place in the last four years. In fact, as a government and as a party running for office in the last election, we put forward the most comprehensive plan any party has ever put to the people so that they would know what they were voting for. We all wait with bated breath for at least one thing that the opposite side of this House would bring forward as part of their platform, as part of what they think they might be able to do for the people of British Columbia, so that they can put it up to the light and we can decide whether or not we want to continue to go forward with a good, competent B.C. Liberal government or to go backward like the former administration that was in this province.

J. MacPhail: This from a minister who is introducing legislation to break yet another contract. My, he's got a good record of election promises. Let me help the Premier: six election promises they've admitted to breaking. He won't tell us what they are, but let me quote a letter he sent to a daily newspaper while he was in opposition: "We must fight to get government out of charitable gaming."

What's the record today? We not only have expanded charitable gaming, but the B.C. Liberals have seized control so that they directly operate all charitable gaming themselves. To the Premier: is this one of the six promises that he admits to?

Hon. R. Coleman: Mr. Speaker, what nonsense — you know? I mean, what nonsense. What we did with bingo was put the conduct and management of bingo in the hands of the Lottery Corporation, at arm's length from government, something your government should have done before Bingogate in Nanaimo. For the last four years the money to charities in this province through charitable gaming...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. R. Coleman: ...has gone up year over year over year. It's up by over \$10 million in the last four years alone.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: To the member for Surrey–Panorama Ridge, your leader is cutting into your time.

B.C. LIBERAL PARTY
ELECTION STATEMENTS AND
SERVICES FOR PROBLEM GAMBLERS

J. Brar: Mr. Speaker, if I may comment on that. The time had been cut before, the very second day I was here.

The mystery continues, and it continues forever. What are those secret six promises the Premier privately admits to having broken? Not only has the Premier broken his promise on gambling, but he has also abandoned the government attempt to monitor problem gambling. Can the Premier explain why?

Hon. G. Bruce: Let me tell you about broken promises. When we came in as government, we had a broken province after ten years of the worst government in the face of Canada, right here, by what you people had done — by what the former administration had done.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. G. Bruce: We had a situation where more people were leaving this great province under that ten-year administration. Mines were closing. Forestry was disappearing. This whole province was in the tank.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. G. Bruce: Now, after four years...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Let us hear the answer.

[1425]

Hon. G. Bruce: ...not only are we having more people move back to British Columbia, we've got a surplus in this province, and we've got a real brilliant, bright future for everybody in British Columbia.

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

J. Brar: I have been through the service plans of last year and this year issued by the Solicitor General's office. In the past the government set targets to reduce

problem gambling and, also, to monitor the impact of its broken promise. This year those targets are gone. Those targets are gone forever.

Can the Premier tell us why the government has stopped measuring the impact of its broken promises? What is he afraid of?

Hon. R. Coleman: We've doubled the amount of money that goes into problem gambling since we became government. We moved — not the previous government; they didn't do anything with it — to point-of-purchase material to have information out there for people with a problem. We set up the 1-800 line so that people could find out where the services are. We put the counselling in place if they needed it. We doubled the amount of money we put into problem gambling, and we will put more money into it if it's necessary. That's been our commitment all the way along.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

CROWN COUNSEL
COMPENSATION AGREEMENT

P. Nettleton: Crown counsel have been prosecuting criminal matters in our court system without the benefit of a contract since April 2003. In its latest assault on contractual rights this government has rejected the Taylor arbitration of 2004 and, more recently, the Jones arbitration of 2005.

My question is to the Premier: how can the public have any confidence in a government that continues to treat those men and women responsible for the prosecution of the law with such contempt and in bad faith?

EDUCATION FUNDING AND
B.C. TEACHERS FEDERATION
ADVERTISING

L. Mayencourt: Over the past couple of days I've had many, many calls and e-mails decrying the blatantly partisan ads run by the BCTF during the Academy Awards. I understand that tomorrow a new set of ads will begin. Carole James and the BCTF have weaselled their way into our school system and are shamelessly exploiting nine-year-old children in their efforts to launch an American-style negative campaign. They claim we've cut school funding. They claim that's had a negative impact on kids.

My question is to the Minister for Education: what's happened to school funding in British Columbia over the past three years, and what effect has that had on student achievement in the province of B.C.?

Hon. T. Christensen: I must say that the teachers union in this province actually deserves a Razzie for their continued negative campaign against public education here in British Columbia. The teachers union has launched an unabashed, political and shameful personal attack on the Premier. I can tell you that I'm hearing, like the member for Vancouver-Burrard, from teachers who as professionals are ashamed to see such bullying in the political context.

The facts are these. Education funding in this province has been maintained and increased year over year. School districts will receive an additional \$150 million next year, the highest single-year increase in over a decade. The facts are these as well. Student achievement in this province has never been higher.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. T. Christensen: Completion rates are higher than they've ever been.

Mr. Speaker: Wrap it up.

Hon. T. Christensen: Our students compete among the top in the world in reading, math and science, and it is our public education system and our students who deserve....

Mr. Speaker: Wrap it up. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

GOVERNMENT ACTION ON IMPAIRED DRIVING

E. Brenzinger: My question is for the Premier. In March 2003 deputy prosecutor Mark Simonds spoke to your sentencing for drunk driving by the court in Maui County, Hawaii. He noted that you met with Mothers Against Drunk Driving, that you had promised as Premier that you wanted to make it harder for people to drink and drive, and that you wanted to see more effective consequences for people who drink and drive.

[1430]

Why is it, Mr. Premier, that you have not fulfilled your promise, given special consideration by the court? Why is it that, two years later, Andrew Murie, CEO of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, describes this province's drunk-driving laws as a mockery?

Hon. R. Coleman: Welcome to the Legislative Assembly to that member who, obviously, has missed the entire debate, discussion and the improvements to drunk-driving laws in British Columbia.

We put in place mandatory treatment. We put interlock in place. We're moving towards a number of other aspects within it. There's a transition plan that's taking place with regards to all of those things. In addition to that, if you are a suspended driver in this province, we'll seize your car for up to 90 days if you want

to drive in this province. You can't find that in most jurisdictions in this country.

In reality, we did a very comprehensive public consultation and put together a package to push back on impaired driving. It was groundbreaking, and it was thoughtful. It is actually something that I believe is making a huge difference with regards to impaired driving in the province.

[End of question period.]

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Just a moment, please. Order, please. The member for Surrey-Whalley seeks the floor.

Point of Order

E. Brenzinger: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: State your point of order.

E. Brenzinger: Yesterday, as you will recall, I requested time for a private member's statement from your office. I was called this morning by the government Whip's office. They told me that making a statement is not "an entitlement" for members and that no statement could be scheduled before April 18.

With all due respect, since when does this government caucus Whip control who speaks in this House?

Mr. Speaker: Your point of order is noted.

Tabling Documents

Hon. J. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present the 2004 annual report of business done pursuant to the Public Service Benefit Plan Act.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Orders of the Day

Hon. G. Bruce: I call continuation of debate on the budget.

Budget Debate

(continued)

J. Kwan: I rise to respond to the 2005 budget. I can't express enough disappointment in this government, a government that has made British Columbians suffer for four years under its extreme agenda of downsizing, drastic cuts and privatization, a government that has sold off our public assets to the lowest bidder, wasted taxpayers' money on failed privatization schemes and posted record deficits for three years straight.

In fact, this fiscal year the total provincial debt is forecast to be \$37 billion, an increase of \$3.4 billion since this government took office in 2001.

Interjection.

J. Kwan: Taxpayer-supported debt is forecast to be \$29.5 billion for this fiscal year, an increase of \$4.6 billion under the Liberals.

[1435]

The government asked about our record. Well, the debt was lower. The tax-supported debt was actually lower when this government took office, and the facts are there before you in the budget books.

This is a government that has allowed surgical wait-lists to soar 40 percent, tuition fees to skyrocket by more than 100 percent and taxes and fees to increase for average families struggling to make ends meet. This is a government that has created a crisis in our health care system by failing to deliver on its promise to build 5,000 new long-term care beds for seniors and the acutely ill.

This government's lack of commitment and foresight has been at the root of hospital overflow, emergency room backlog and outrageous wait times at hospitals across this province. What is the Premier's advice to those forced to navigate an eroding health care system? To eat your fruits and vegetables. That's what the Premier says. Maybe the Premier should have taken these words of wisdom one step further and reminded British Columbians to pack some carrot sticks and an apple to tide them over while they wait in emergency rooms for eight hours to see a doctor.

This budget is clearly a political attempt to paper over the damage this government has caused the people of this province. It is an attempt to give the Premier and his party a drastic political facelift, but this budget is nothing more than a slap in the face and an insult. To throw back a few crumbs here and there to those in society most affected by this government's policies three months before an election is outrageous.

It speaks to what the government's real commitment to the people of the province is: nothing more than political opportunism and pre-election games. To make matters worse, this government is throwing out crumbs without any assurance that such goodies will ever come to fruition. It is obvious that this Premier will not allow a full debate on the budget estimates in this House.

That means no debate on a budget that contains all the election goodies the B.C. Liberals could muster, not to mention a political slush fund — \$236.762 million in an economic development fund with no strings attached to it. Given the very specific budget number for this fund, it is hard to believe this government has no specific plans in store. Or maybe — maybe — they will be using this fund to bribe voters with their own tax dollars in those ridings where Liberal MLAs are suffering.

The Minister of Finance cited municipal infrastructure projects as a way this money may be spent. Throughout the different administrations, there has been a well-established process of dealing with municipal infrastructure projects. But now, on the eve of an election, the government has decided that there is a

new process to deal with municipal infrastructure funding. It is called the slush fund.

It is called the slush fund that this government has installed into the Ministry of Small Business and Economic Development. You know, it is interesting to note in the budget book that funding for municipal infrastructure has actually dropped significantly — from \$92 million in the '04-05 budget to \$5 million in the '05-06 budget and then to zero in the following two years. The Minister of Finance himself said that the slush fund is meant to target the municipal infrastructure.

The government favours a political prioritizing over community consultation in how to spend that money. That's why the slush fund was created. That's why the municipal infrastructure dollars have been shrunk down to \$5 million and to zero in the '06-07 years. No politics there, with the exception that those projects will all be political decisions behind closed doors from this government.

[1440]

I can't help but be suspicious, and you know what? It makes British Columbians skeptical and for good reason. After four years of broken promises, this government is holding out another round of commitments but is refusing to stand behind them. Without full debate on this document, how will British Columbians really know if the budget is good for them, their families and their communities? And without this House passing the budget, how can British Columbians have confidence that the Liberals will actually fulfil these commitments if they're returned to power after the election?

Actions speak louder than words. The actions of the Premier are being heard loud and clear across the province. If this government is so very proud of their budget, if they really want the confidence of British Columbians, then they need to put their budget to the test. My job, the job of the opposition, is to hold this government to account. The integrity of the British parliamentary system depends on the ability of the opposition to hold the government to account.

I have every intention of doing my job until April 18, when this House officially closes for the election campaign. I owe this to my constituents who have elected me to represent them in this House. In fact, every one of us sitting in this chamber owes that to their constituents. I find it shameful that the Premier does not take that responsibility seriously, that he finds it reasonable to close this House down early — to send MLAs off on a taxpayer-funded pre-election campaign instead of doing the work they were elected to do.

I feel the need to remind the Premier that it was he who set the predetermined calendar for this session. I foolishly assumed the timing of this sitting was set as such so that we could actually debate the budget in full before the election. There is lots of time but clearly not a lot of commitment on the part of the government.

The lack of commitment is nothing new from this government. After only four years the Premier has squandered his credibility and spent his political capi-

tal. Now he faces a frustrated and angry province, a province that is looking for change and a different kind of government than we have seen for the last four years — a government that truly cares and that will work to solve some of the major challenges facing our province, a government that will keep its promises and not make excuses and find scapegoats for the problems it has created.

This government promised to provide health care when you need it and where you need it. Well, the outcome of that promise needs no more discussion. The Liberals' failure is understood by the people of this province from Victoria to Penticton, to Nelson, to Surrey and everywhere in between.

Cuts to services, hospital closures, underfunded health authorities, soaring wait-lists and unacceptable emergency wait times: this is the legacy of the B.C. Liberal government. And now this Premier is standing up and trying to take credit for an increase in federal dollars coming to our province for health care. He and the Minister of Health are constantly pointing to the increase in health care funding in this budget. I wonder if the federal government is getting angry at the lack of recognition they're getting for boosting the B.C. Liberal re-election campaign or, worse, that federal dollars are going into the pockets of private clinics instead of expanding our public system.

And what of education funding? It was this government that committed to providing stable funding to the school districts. In reality, it is more like stable underfunding, as this government cut core funding dollars and then provided a series of one-time grants to districts. In case the minister was unaware, inconsistent one-time grants do not meet the criteria of stable funding. As a result, 113 schools were closed down across the province, and in too many cases, students are now forced to travel long distances to get to school.

[1445]

Now, I know the Minister of Education likes to highlight that school enrolment has gone down and that the funding actually has gone up, but let me outline the relationship between enrolment decreases and the cuts to staffing and programs which school districts have had to make because of unstable funding and neglect on the part of this government. The student enrolment decline is about 2 percent overall. However, there has been a reduction in teachers by 7.7 percent. Special education teachers have been reduced by 17.5 percent; teacher-librarians to the tune of 23.4 percent; counsellors, 9.5 percent; continuing education teachers, 34.5 percent; career program teachers, 27.4 percent; ESL teachers, 20 percent; clerical support staff, 10.2 percent; and administrators, 4.1 percent.

After four years of budget shortfalls and forced cutbacks that affect our children's education, school districts are supposed to jump for joy that this government has promised to put back some of what they have taken away. It only took the Premier four years to realize that school librarians might be worthy of funding and that maybe all kids in the class are better off

with special needs teachers and assistants on hand. Really, the Premier's new literacy initiative seems pretty empty after he cut funding to school libraries.

The real issue for British Columbians is credibility. This government has fostered a growing credibility gap, and this budget has done little to mend this yawning problem. The Premier has angered many people on many issues. Of course, I've only outlined a few. Health care and education are just two of them.

What about the environment? With this budget the Premier is trying to convince us that the environment is important to him, and to prove it, he will put up funding for conservation officers and programs. Well, it's a worthy cause but one that rings hollow after the very same Premier made deep cuts to conservation services in 2002. The money that's being put back doesn't even touch a fraction of what's been eroded and taken away from the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. A change of heart? Not likely. It was also this government that allowed for an increase in the commercialization of our parks and a reduction in environmental safeguards.

What is clear time and time again is that this government has no idea how to balance fiscal responsibility with social responsibility. The Premier has decided that it is okay to leave people behind in his zealous attempt to balance the books — that providing huge tax cuts for those who least need them, the wealthy and the big corporations, was the right thing to do. Paying for those tax cuts by axing vital programs in health care and education and increasing taxes and fees for those who could least afford them, low-income British Columbians, was not going to go well for British Columbians. I hope this weighs heavily, and it should, on the conscience of the Liberal government.

I stand in agreement on this issue: a strong economy is important for a province. I agree with the Premier on that. But what is equally as important...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

J. Kwan: ...is that all British Columbians have the opportunity to benefit from a strong economy. The NDP understands that economic growth and compassionate governance are not mutually exclusive. That cooperative approach to economic stability is what is needed here in B.C. with a government that governs for all and not just a select few, a government that does not leave anyone behind. The sad fact is that the B.C. Liberal government has left many behind.

[1450]

Let's just look for a minute at the approach this government has taken to immigrant settlement services. Just months ago this government forced a reorganization on agencies that provided transition ser-

vices to immigrants and refugees, creating chaos and uncertainty in the immigrant settlement services.

The Premier's actions have demonstrated an ignorance of the issues facing new British Columbians and have put at risk some of the most successful immigrant settlement programs in the country. Now he wants to be praised for putting dollars back into ESL programs. He lacks the understanding, though, that program dollars must go hand in hand with a real recognition of the broader context of support services needed for people coming to B.C. from other countries.

The community organizations providing immigrant settlement services have developed a huge volunteer base, an enormous expertise in the field, a huge capacity that they have worked to build in strengthening the services they deliver to the community. This government has sacrificed that expertise, that capacity and that experience, with no evidence that cost savings or service improvements will result. In fact, much of the improvement that the community themselves have worked so hard over the years to build up is now lost. This budget is just another stab at the agencies that have worked hard for over 20 years to provide quality transition services that make life easier for new Canadians and to ensure they participate in a way that would benefit all British Columbians in the future.

Given this government's record of broken promises, the Premier has had both an opportunity and a responsibility to substantively address the concerns of average British Columbians with this budget. Instead, all we get is a political makeover by a government desperate to give itself a new image.

Well, Mr. Speaker, British Columbians just aren't buying it. Let me quote some average British Columbians. Let them speak for themselves on their opinion of this budget and the state of the province. From a Vancouver freelance writer, Surj Rattan, who is 43: "The good-news announcements were rolled out on the eve of the provincial election. Will they be so kindhearted after? This is nothing but a ploy to get re-elected. I'm probably less inclined to vote for the Liberals."

Another quote, from a 22-year-old Vancouver bike courier, Matt Calhoun: "They have let down a lot of people when they came into power. It's too obvious it's a grab for votes."

Erin Walton, 19, sales associate: "It hurt a lot of people, so I don't think it was worth it for the working-class people. One budget does not make up for it."

There is another quote, from Thyrza Blaze, 66, retired: "No, I believe what they are giving back is not as much as they took away."

Another comment, from a dental assistant, Chantalle Royer, 25: "They are doing it for one day to make themselves look like heroes. But it does not make the pain and suffering go away."

These are people responding to the question: after years of cuts and restructuring, the Liberals say the province is ready to spend again; was it worth the pain? The questions were put by the *Times Colonist* to people on the street, to see what their response was after the budget, as well as from people in the *Vancouver Sun*

in the city of Vancouver. This is what the public had to say about this budget and the tactics this government had employed. These are people who are speaking for themselves because the Liberal MLAs would not speak for them in this Legislature.

The government would not allow for line-by-line debate on the budget. Why? Is it because they're afraid to really let British Columbians know what is in this budget? Are they afraid to defend the budget that they claim they're really proud of? If they're really proud of it, well then, let us debate that in this House. Let us go through it line by line and let British Columbians know what this government stands for and what this budget means for them.

[1455]

You know what, Mr. Speaker? After four years of silence from the backbench MLAs, all of a sudden on the eve of the election they say everything is just fine and we're doing just fantastic. You know what? British Columbians know better. More importantly, British Columbians deserve better.

Let's have this debate in this House. Defend your budget, and defend your record, if you're so proud of it. British Columbians deserve better, and they deserve their voices to be heard in this chamber.

Hon. B. Locke: It is my privilege to rise in this House on behalf of my constituents once more, to respond to the 2005-06 budget. Like all of my colleagues in this assembly, I'm aware that this will be my last budget speech during this parliament. It has truly been an honour for me to serve the people of Surrey-Green Timbers in this place over almost four years, and it is my hope, upon reflecting on my record and the record of our government, that they will honour me with the privilege of four more.

Before I begin, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank my constituency staff in Surrey. The work they do truly makes a difference to so many people in our constituency that are sometimes having trouble navigating government. We have many thank-you cards in our office that are a tribute to their good work. So, many thanks to Patricia McLean and Marion Thompson there before her, and a very special thanks to my right and left hand, Donna Kenny. I also want to thank my ministry staff here, Bryan Cox and Lorraine Macdonald. I know that all members of this House feel likewise about their staff, but I truly feel very lucky to have such outstanding supports both at home and here in Victoria.

Looking back to where our province was just under four years ago, it's astonishing to see where we are today. Four years ago B.C. was dead last in Canada in investment growth, dead last in economic growth, dead last in job growth. The NDP had tabled yet another questionable budget to fool the public into believing they had a surplus. But everybody knew what the nineties were all about. They were about mismanagement and friends and insiders.

Their unfounded tuition freeze left students without access to the higher education they needed to pur-

sue their dreams and aspirations. This budget gives them the opportunity, with our commitment to fund over 25,000 new seats by 2009, and now certainty, with our commitment to raise tuition by only the rate of inflation.

Average aftertax take-home pay in B.C. had declined by \$1,700 over the previous nine years — a direct result of the ten years of the NDP tax-and-squander government. While our economy was hitting rock bottom, they were immersed in their usual preoccupation, the financial benefit of the same special interests they answer to today. While an entire continent enjoyed a decade of nearly unprecedented prosperity, our province receded into decay and decline. Ten years was a very long time, and ten years was certainly long enough.

I was born in this province, and I was blessed to grow up in this province. I want more than anything to see my own children enjoy all the opportunities that this province has offered me. I want their generation, like ours, to grow up knowing that whatever hopes and dreams they had for their own lives, they would be able to realize them here at home in British Columbia. I sure didn't want them to pay for my generation's extravagances or mismanagement.

I wanted them to be able to live out the promise that is British Columbia. Yet I knew, if things continued on the course they had — as long as the NDP was allowed to run this province ever deeper into the ground — that all of that hope and opportunity I and my generation had enjoyed would disappear and that my children and actually all children across this province could be robbed of their right as the heirs of British Columbia, the very best place on earth.

[1500]

I couldn't bring myself to stand by and watch the NDP ruin our province any longer, so I decided that I was going to do what I could do to make a difference. I came to know the Premier many years ago as a man of honour and integrity. I believed — as I now know — that if anyone had the vision, the courage and the fortitude to lead this province back from the brink, it was him. What an honour to be on a team tasked with bringing back our province, giving British Columbians choices, hopes and dreams once again.

After the 2001 election, we all knew there was a lot of work to be done. The people of the province had entrusted us with the task of turning British Columbia around and restoring it to its rightful place in Canada and in the world. Holding all other things constant, that task would have been monumental. Then came September 11, and we watched in horror as one of the worst terrorist attacks in our history unfolded before our eyes. We felt the aftershock ripple through our economy.

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

We faced the imposition of tariffs on our largest industry, forestry, which is now and will be in the future our number one industry. Even in urban ridings

like Surrey, we recognize the importance of the forestry industry. Then we had to wage war on the pine beetle infestation that was literally eating away at our forests. Our tourist industry was hit with SARS, our beef industry with BSE and our poultry industry with avian flu. We faced floods and we faced fires.

Through it all, I am proud to say that this Premier and this government persevered. Just three and a half years later, we are number one in Canada in job growth and set to become number one in economic growth; 180,000 new jobs have been gained since 2001, and unemployment is the lowest it's been in B.C. since 1981. We honoured our commitment to truth in budgeting and generally accepted accounting principles, and our Finance minister has just tabled the largest surplus in provincial history.

We launched the largest personal income tax cut in B.C.'s history, putting money back where it belongs — back in the pockets of the same working people the NDP purports to represent. The result was the largest increase in average after-tax income in 20 years. For all the NDP rhetoric about working people, I'm guessing they'd rather not acknowledge that a larger percentage of workers are now earning over \$16 an hour — more than anywhere else in Canada. That's income to support a family.

We haven't governed on behalf of the special interests. We've had the courage to say no when the good of the province as a whole required it. All of us will acknowledge that we haven't been perfect, and all of us hope that the next four years will be easier than the last three and a half. The road to recovery has not been without its bumps and tough decisions, and it has certainly not been without its sacrifices. But I can say with confidence and with pride that recovery is upon us.

To paraphrase Bill Clinton: to those that say the progress of the past three and a half years was just some sort of accident, let me be clear. Success is not a matter of chance; it's a matter of choice. That is truly the British Columbia story. Because of the policies we have pursued and because of the choices we have made and because of the values that drive them, British Columbia is back.

Now, rather than having to decide what must be sacrificed and what ought to be spared, rather than having to look up from the bottom to what appears to be an insurmountable summit, we stand on that summit looking out upon the horizon to that golden decade that lies ahead for all of us. We now have the means to pursue ambitious goals for ourselves and our province; to lead the continent in literacy and ensure that young British Columbians and all British Columbians have access to education that is second to none; and to lead the way in the promotion of the greatest health care method of all — physical activity, fitness and healthy living, a wonderful gift for all of our children.

[1505]

Mr. Speaker, I want to take just a moment here and sincerely thank and acknowledge all of those people that dedicate countless hours in sport — from coaches to team moms, from referees to scorekeepers. The con-

tribution that you make to a child's life is simply immeasurable. As a parent, I thank you. I see that gift in action every day in my own daughters, a gift they will carry throughout their lives.

We have even more ambitious goals: to build the best system of support for people in need in all of Canada and to ensure that when the rest of the province marches forward, seniors, children at risk and people with disabilities aren't left behind; to lead the world in the stewardship of our environment and to pursue economic growth in a sustainable manner that will leave resources intact for the generations to follow; to build on our economic successes; to seize every opportunity before us; and to continue to lead the country in job creation.

We've already seen great progress towards these goals in my home community of Surrey. We've boosted local funding for literacy programs by \$460,000 with a special focus on making sure that kids with learning difficulties, at-risk adolescents, aboriginal students and ESL students aren't left behind. We've seen the arrival of a full-scale university campus in the heart of the city in SFU-Surrey. This government is committed to adding 1,850 new spaces to that campus in the next few years.

We've invested nearly \$40 million to build a new Kwantlen trades training campus in Cloverdale, where 1,800 seats will be added by 2010. By that time, capacity at Kwantlen's campuses in Surrey and Langley will be 20 percent greater than it was before.

We will be adding four new schools, we will renovate or replace three more, and we will expand three others. Per-pupil funding in Surrey will have increased this year by nearly 6 percent over last year. Per-pupil funding for Surrey's growing school district has had a significant impact on our K-to-12 education. I am proud to say that the graduation rate in Surrey has increased steadily over the last five years.

We've worked to ensure that as Surrey grows, it has the resources it needs to meet the social needs it faces. With 400,000 residents, Surrey is a bona fide big city unto itself, and it is facing big-city problems. This government funds 3,200 social housing units in Surrey alone, and with these new government supports, six new developments equalling 385 units have been added since 2001.

I just want to quote comments from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and this is a quote that came around housing: "The 1990s were a difficult decade for British Columbians, particularly for the poorest in the province. There was an increase in poverty in B.C., by any measure. The depth of poverty was also higher and more visible on the street — in the rise of homelessness, panhandling and food banks. Life for the poor is more difficult and precarious than it has been in several decades." That's a quote by the CCPA, the NDP's think tank, from *B.C. Commentary — Falling Through the Cracks: Poverty in British Columbia*, winter 2000.

We've provided more support for Highland House, a new multi-service housing development that com-

bines emergency and transitional housing, skills training and support services all in one facility. We worked with the other two levels of government to form a Surrey Solutions project, a concerted effort to meet Surrey's social and community needs. Surrey Solutions project is a coordinated effort to ensure that all three levels of government — the city, the province and the federal government — are working together to help those in need in our community.

[1510]

We've added three new assisted-living developments to serve Surrey's seniors and 60 new units in my riding alone. We are now moving Maple Cottage Detox to Surrey so that it will best meet the clientele that it serves. Further, we're providing funding to add a new withdrawal management centre at Maple Cottage Detox to help combat the scourge of drug addiction in our community. As well, Maple Cottage Detox will have six youth detox beds to address the needs of youth in our community.

Shortly, this spring, the Phoenix Society will be breaking ground on their new drug recovery house, which is a part of the Premier's Task Force on Homelessness. This new centre will be a model for the rest of the country and will provide service for both men and women.

As promised, we've returned 100 percent of the traffic fine revenue to support local police and crime prevention. This is of particular concern for crime in North Surrey. We are seeing the crime rate decrease steadily in our city. Through the bait car program and those offered by ICBC, we've seen a very dramatic 20 percent drop in car thefts in Surrey. I'm proud to say that we are no longer the car theft capital of North America. In fact, we're not even close. Surrey's auto theft has significantly dropped over those past years.

We've given expanded authority to SkyTrain officers to enforce drug laws, to execute outstanding warrants and to arrest criminals outside of the SkyTrain stations. This is incredibly important to my riding, which is home to two SkyTrain stations in Surrey. By adopting PRIME, a law enforcement information-sharing program, we've given police the means to track criminals provincewide and to protect Surrey residents in the process.

In Surrey, as elsewhere, we're working to ensure that citizens have access to quality health care where they live and when they need it. While I acknowledge the pressures on Surrey Memorial Hospital's ER, we are working to address them — in the short term with the \$28 million that was announced recently. I do want to commend the extraordinarily good work of the men and women who work in our hospital, and especially in our emergency department. The Fraser health authority, working in tandem with the Surrey Memorial Hospital Foundation, plans to expand the ER at Surrey Memorial and to expand the hospital infrastructure.

The Fraser Valley Cancer Centre is already one of the finest and busiest in the province.

We are also home to one of the finest birthing facilities in the province, with every mom and babe in a private room.

We have made significant improvements to our adult and youth psychiatric units. In addition to a budget increase of \$44.8 million, \$60 million has been allocated for the Fraser health authority to purchase new diagnostic and medical equipment.

We're able to make these kinds of investments in our community specifically because our economy is moving again, and nowhere is the rebound in our economy more evident than in Surrey. We've seen a local boom in housing starts, and 2004 marked a record level of building activity in Surrey's history. Just a week ago it was announced that a Korean developer, Jung Ventures Inc., will undertake the largest residential and retail project ever in Surrey.

That development is moving ahead very quickly. In fact, as the announcement happened, the shovels were in the ground. The new \$350 million complex consists of five towers reaching as high as 36 storeys. They will be built adjacent to the King George SkyTrain station in the centre of my riding. The project will include retail stores, 1,400 residential units totalling 1.25 million square feet, a thirty-fourth-floor sky lounge and a 3,000 square foot recreational facility, complete with swimming and fitness amenities. After talking to Mr. Jung and his architect, they clearly said they picked B.C. and Surrey because of our strong economy and because of our strong future.

[1515]

Just like the arrival of an 850-person J.P. Morgan call centre at Central City tower, this is another example of how opening up our economy for investment has paid and will continue to pay great dividends for Surrey. The really great news is that Central City, the building that was not expected to be fully leased until 2010, is now completely filled, just three and a half years later.

One statistic that I am particularly proud of is that the share of Surrey's working-aged population dependent on income assistance has fallen steadily and dramatically since we took office, as more and more people were trained to work. In 2001, 4.6 percent of Surrey's workforce was on welfare. By 2004 that number had dropped to 1.7 percent. As the Premier said: "We all know that B.C. works best when British Columbians are working." So I just have to ask the NDP: why don't you just admit it? You put people out of work. We're putting people back to work, and now the whole province is working better for it. There is no question that Surrey is working much, much better for it.

To keep Surrey's economy moving, we've invested in improving our transportation infrastructure. We've committed to widening Highway 1 and 176th Street. For all of Carole James's rhetoric about building bridges, I bet every one of my constituents who's been stuck in the near-constant gridlock on the Port Mann Bridge will wonder why she opposes our commitment to twin it. Working with the federal government, we've invested over \$30 million to enhance border crossing

infrastructure in the lower mainland and to improve the flow of trade in and out of the province, and in and out of Surrey particularly.

As the throne speech also alluded to, not only do we stand at the doorstep of the United States, we are blessed to stand at Canada's gateway to the Asia Pacific. But we are connected across that vast ocean not just by trade and commerce but by heritage, and nowhere is that more true than in Surrey. In Surrey we have a vibrant South Asian community, and in my riding in particular, it is reflected in the number of South Asian MLAs in our caucus. We recognize and honour the contribution that the people of South Asian origin have made to the social and economic fabric of Surrey and of British Columbia as a whole.

In economic terms, we recognize that our diversity is one of the greatest comparative advantages with which our province and Surrey is particularly blessed. As just one example, over 90 different languages are spoken by kids in Surrey schools. We have a cultural connection to every corner of the earth, and that gives us an unparalleled ability to forge commercial links with markets all over the world. I am proud, as laid out in the throne speech, that this government is committed to promoting diversity, to enhancing this greatest of B.C.'s advantages and to seizing every opportunity it offers in every part of the globe.

In my community and across this province I am proud of the record and that of the government in which I serve. It will be my honour to stand for re-election on it. In less than four years we have made extraordinary progress, and we've endured through some of the most difficult challenges any government has ever faced in our 134 years, since joining confederation, to climb to our rightful place of leaders of our country.

In looking beyond, with 2010 on the horizon, we can see that golden decade. On May 17 the people of Surrey-Green Timbers and the people of British Columbia will reflect on that record. I am certain that when they do, they will reject the fear and embrace the hope; they will reject the falsehoods and embrace the truth; and they will reject the failed leaders and the failed ways of the last decade and seize the golden decade that lies ahead for all of us.

Hon. S. Hagen: I seek leave to make introductions.

[1520]

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

Hon. S. Hagen: It's my great pleasure today to have as guests in the House, 48 grade 11 students from Georges P. Vanier Secondary explorer program from the Comox Valley. Together with the 48 students we have three teachers: Dave Neil, Joan Longtin and John Carswell. Together with them are three parents: Greta St. Pierre, Karen Falk and Jay Dzuba. Would the House please join me in making them welcome.

Debate Continued

Hon. M. Coell: It's my pleasure to rise in the House today and respond to Balanced Budget 2005. As Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the House today and comment on this government's fiscal plan for the coming years. This government's priority from the beginning has been to put our fiscal house in order so that we can concentrate on building strong, safe and healthy communities.

Balanced Budget 2005 is about the future, the decade ahead. In our government, we are making commitments. We have introduced new measures to strengthen the economy. We are making long-term investments in our environment and our communities. We are providing new supports for children, for children with special needs and for people with disabilities. We are investing more than ever in health care and in education. We have managed the largest annual reduction ever in provincial debt: \$1.7 billion. We will leave \$480 million in the pockets of those who need it most.

In 2001 we inherited an underperforming economy. B.C. was ninth in this country of ten provinces in terms of job growth. People were leaving British Columbia, and housing starts were down 15 percent per year. By every measure we were underperforming, and by every measure we were in trouble as a province.

Four years ago we were elected with a plan. It wasn't rocket science. It was common sense. But it was a plan we knew would work — to restore financial management, protect health care and education and revitalize the economy of the province. This year we are seeing that common sense and hard work have paid off, and now B.C. is an economic leader once again in Canada. We have been the first in job creation since 2001 and the first in housing starts since 2004. People are moving back to British Columbia again. We have balanced the budget, and we're putting \$1.7 billion towards debt reduction — the biggest ever in B.C.'s history.

The budget reflects the priorities of British Columbians — 71 percent of the new funding is directed to health care and education. Balanced Budget 2005 provides \$6.5 billion over the next three years for increases to the ministries of health care, communities, children, education, public safety, economic development and the environment.

Effective this year a new non-refundable personal tax credit, the B.C. tax reduction, will reduce or eliminate provincial taxes for about 730,000 British Columbians. These are big numbers, but if we look at some typical examples of what this tax saving means, it's easy to see the real day-to-day effect of these decisions. A senior couple with an income of \$30,000 will now pay \$930 less in provincial taxes than they did in 2001. A family of four earning \$30,000 a year will now pay almost \$1,300 less in total provincial tax than they did in 2001, the year we were elected.

[1525]

This budget reflects our commitment to communities. As Minister of Community, Aboriginal and

Women's Services, this is especially important to me. We are providing over \$40 million annually to local governments through the traffic fine revenue sharing. That is an increase of about 300 percent from previous years. That funding will be used by local governments, as they best deem appropriate, to support safer communities, crime prevention, community policing and other initiatives.

We are also providing \$122 million to add 215 RCMP officers throughout B.C. and to increase support for provincial courts and for corrections.

If we look at the budget speech and the throne speech together, it's clear that we have outlined the big picture and presented a detailed plan of where we go from here. Balanced Budget 2005 supports the government's overarching objective: to help British Columbians realize our full potential as the best place on earth to live, to play, to work, to raise a family, to invest and to get ahead.

We've presented our five goals for the next decade. To make B.C. the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent.... We balanced the budget in 2005, and we provided \$12 million to public libraries across British Columbia through my ministry. This funding will be used for new programs and initiatives, including broadband access, a 24-hour virtual reference desk and a one-card system to provide access to books in any library anywhere in B.C.

British Columbia will add 25,000 new post-secondary spaces by 2010. The province will provide \$450 million for student financial assistance, including loan reductions for students in need, debt relief, a loan forgiveness program and grants for students with disabilities.

Balanced Budget 2005 provides an additional \$622 million for the Ministry of Education, which allows for a \$150 million increase in funding in 2005-06 — the single largest increase in a decade.

We're well on our way to meeting our goal for creating more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada. B.C. now has the second-strongest economic growth rate among the provinces and is expected to continue to outperform the Canadian average in the years ahead. Since December 2001 the province has created 197,000 new jobs. Employment has grown by more than 10 percent, the fastest rate of any province.

There is \$777 million for economic development initiatives across the sectors and regions of this province. For example, over the next three years the province's transportation plan will provide airport, port expansions, highway rehabilitation, improvements to interior and rural side roads and work on the Sea to Sky Highway, the Okanagan valley corridor, the Okanagan Lake Bridge and the Kicking Horse Pass.

There will be more jobs in small business and improvements to the small business corporate tax threshold to allow more business income to qualify for the 4.5 percent small business tax rate. There will be more jobs in agriculture and an additional \$49 million for programs to enhance the province's agriculture and aquaculture industries and to protect safe food.

There will be more and better jobs for British Columbians and more than \$14 million for B.C. Skills Connect for Immigrants in my ministry, a program to help new British Columbians find work in the fields of their expertise. There will be more opportunities to reach markets. Supports the government's Pacific gateway initiative to further develop the province's potential to and from international markets....

Annual health care funding will increase by \$1.5 billion, the largest increase in any government function. Health care funding has increased every year, resulting in a \$3.8 billion annual funding since we were elected in 2000-01. To support physical fitness, Balanced Budget 2005 provides \$50 million for recreational sport facilities and \$60 million for major sport secondary training facilities.

[1530]

Our fourth goal is to build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk and seniors. We are committed to building the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk and seniors. In my ministry, that means an increase of \$37 million in investment for social housing. Next year we will provide over \$170 million for social housing for low-income British Columbians. That's the highest level of funding in the history of British Columbia. We're providing an additional \$37 million over the next three years for transition houses, outreach programs, related services for women and children fleeing abuse and domestic violence — the largest increase in over a decade.

Our fifth goal is to lead the world in sustainable environmental management with the best air and water quality and the best fisheries management, bar none, in Canada. Balanced Budget 2005 provides an additional \$150 million to preserve and protect our stunning natural resource surroundings and to help define our province to the world. I am pleased that British Columbians will benefit from safe, reliable and accessible drinking water and improved wastewater systems through the creation of a new \$80 million B.C. community water improvement program offered through my ministry.

[K. Stewart in the chair.]

In conclusion, I am very proud and honoured to be able to stand here on behalf of the residents of Saanich North and the Islands and as minister responsible. I believe we've turned the corner in this province. We are poised on the edge of an exciting decade ahead. Some have called it a golden decade. I think we look forward to a decade that is one of many decades ahead for British Columbia — back in economic prominence in this province and back where people can be proud and move back to this province. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the budget.

Hon. S. Hagen: I, too, echo the Finance minister's assertions that Budget 2005 is balanced in every sense

of the word, and I believe that B.C. families see it that way as well. But far from being a novelty, Budget 2005 is also consistent with our vision, our goals and the balanced spirit of the new era.

Since day one this government has sought to restore fiscal discipline and revitalize the economy to number-one status in Canada while at the same time leveraging the renewed strength to sustain priority programs and services. It's always been a balancing act, and while it hasn't always been easy, we've protected the services of British Columbians and the services they value most, and we've guaranteed the future of those services by making them sustainable. We've done it year after year.

Look at child care. We already fund a range of quality child care options to meet the needs of B.C. families and their communities. On January 1 we expanded eligibility and increased the child care subsidy. Today's rates meet or exceed all previous levels in B.C. With Budget 2005 we have another \$5 million to further enhance eligibility for the families who need it most.

The next dramatic improvement in child care is at hand: a new federal agreement that will further the quality, flexibility and other strengths of B.C.'s child care system. This will enable us to further B.C.'s vision for a sustainable child care system in which parents can choose from a range of affordable, safe, quality child care options that meet their diverse needs.

Child care aside, the budget shows that 2005 will be a milestone year in many other important areas, with tough decisions made early in our term paying off for vulnerable British Columbians. In the throne speech, the five great goals included building the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, children at risk and children with special needs. Under Budget 2005, my ministry will play a major role in bringing that great goal to fruition.

[1535]

I am very pleased to note the \$91 million increase for adult community living services. Demand for these services is growing for two reasons:

- (1) We have an aging population in B.C. Many families who currently care for their developmentally disabled adult children at home are becoming less able to do so. In turn, they're looking to us for help.
- (2) The developmentally disabled population is aging and living longer.

Budget 2005 responds with funding that will support additional residential beds across British Columbia to meet those growing needs. We'll create more spaces for day services and respite care, and we'll look at developing new and alternative models of residential care, in partnership with the new community living authority, to support more people in family-based settings. In turn, we will support Community Living B.C.'s vision of inclusive, flexible and person-centred service, provincewide, as we pass the torch to that new authority this summer.

Our robust fiscal picture will also mean more for child and family development. There are 15 percent fewer children in care today than when our govern-

ment was sworn in. This is thanks in part to increased adoptions, to kith-and-kin agreements that allow children to stay with extended family and to work with aboriginal leaders and organizations to safeguard children within their communities. We want the best outcomes for all children, and research tells us that means, wherever possible, ensuring that they're in a loving, permanent home, aware of their roots and of who they are.

The budget provides another \$26 million over three years toward family supports and out-of-care options to keep children safe within families and communities. Our overall goal is to keep improving supports and services right across our delivery system, from family counselling to child care placements. This will help keep even more kids safe in their homes and reduce the disproportionate number of aboriginal children in ministry care.

Our commitment to B.C.'s kids extends to expanding our system of support for children and youth with special needs, including the more than 50,000 who need major medical, health, educational and social supports. The province currently spends about \$500 million every year to deliver timely, high-quality services to these children and their families. Over the next three years that will grow by \$134 million, with about one-third of it coming out of my ministry. That extra funding will dramatically enhance services for many children with special needs and their families.

A few examples. By fiscal year 2007, up to 1,000 children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and other developmental behavioral conditions will receive new intervention and support services, such as assistance to develop their life skills. Also, 2,500 more children will benefit from physiotherapy, speech language pathology and other needed interventions and therapies. We'll also enhance specialized supports, ranging from mobility orientation training for deaf-blind preschool children to services that help blind youth transitioning into adulthood. We'll see respite care for up to 800 more hard-working families of children with special needs.

Over all, these new funds will enable children with special needs to get the support they need for a better start in life. To that end, I'd like to acknowledge the Health and Education ministries as partners in maximizing the value of the extra \$134 million for children and youth with special needs. By improving diagnosis and assessment of conditions like FASD and by enhancing support to children with special needs in our schools, we will round out my ministry's efforts to help all children make the most out of their potential.

Prosperity is clearly back in B.C. This will be the golden decade. Budget 2005 will help ensure for children, families and the most vulnerable British Columbians that hope is back as well.

Hon. W. McMahon: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to respond to this year's budget speech. This is an ambitious speech, one that builds on the con-

siderable work this government has done already, and it also lays out a clear plan for the future. As the Minister of State for Women's and Seniors' Services, it's my responsibility to help deliver some of the promises made in both the budget and the Speech from the Throne.

[1540]

One of our government's key commitments is to build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, women, children at risk and seniors. Let me tell you how my ministry intends to help meet that goal.

At the end of 2004 this government provided \$600 million for services for women or services used primarily by women. These services are largely delivered through five ministries: Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services; Ministry of Health Services; Ministry of Children and Family Development; Ministry of Human Resources; and the Solicitor General. Through all the tough financial decisions this government had to make over the past four years, we've held firm to our commitment to make sure women get the support they need.

Women are doing well in British Columbia. Female labour force participation is at an all-time high. Of the 197,000 new jobs created since December 2001, a total of 37 percent are full-time jobs for women. B.C. has the highest rate of small businesses run by women in the country. A total of 36 percent of small businesses in B.C. are owned by women. More than 57 percent of university students are women. What's important in these numbers is the trend. The trend lines clearly show that we're taking a larger role in the economy and in leadership positions.

This government is a firm believer in the adage: "What's good for business is good for the business-woman." As a result, we've put a strong focus on the economy.

B.C. is a leader in working to bridge the digital divide. With each community that is connected, more women have access to and can enjoy the benefits of high-speed Internet connectivity. This year we published a resource guide for women in B.C. who want to start their own business. The Industry Training Authority is increasing awareness and access for underrepresented groups to consider industry trades or technology. Clearly, this group includes women.

Looking ahead, my ministry will introduce a new mentoring program for women. This will ensure that women who have never been in the workforce or who are entering it after a long absence have the kind of support they need to move towards independence.

For many women, the first issue around work is child care. We recognize this, and we've responded to what women tell us. As a result, we have increased the number of child care spaces eligible for provincial government funding from 45,000 to 77,000. There are 32,000 more day care spaces eligible for funding, and 10,000 more children are eligible for day care subsidies. Funding for child care subsidies and capital improve-

ments is now higher than ever. Over the next five years, in conjunction with the federal government, an additional \$650 million is planned to be made available to young families all over the province to assist with child care.

Over the past four years one of this government's priorities has been to get our fiscal house in order. We know that by getting our financial standing on a solid foundation, we will be better able to ensure sustainable supports are in place for women and children escaping violence and abuse. From the start, we maintained the \$33 million a year for transition houses and counselling and outreach services for women and their children escaping violence. We've been providing over one million hours of transition house counselling and other support services per year.

Our new budget will see an increase of \$37.5 million in funding for programs for women and children over the next three years. This represents the largest funding increase for these programs in more than ten years. With this funding, transition house providers will be better able to meet the needs they have identified in their communities to improve 24-7 accessibility.

This new funding will increase safe shelter by adding beds to transition houses. It will fund new safe-home programs and provide reliable, sustainable funding that will increase services to women and their children at vulnerable times. Each transition house will have a staff person dedicated to working with children to help them cope with their trauma. More counselling services will be available for women and children.

[1545]

There will be an expansion of outreach services around the province, bringing violence prevention initiatives to local communities. Outreach workers will make sure women know that services are available to them. Two million dollars will be directed to new initiatives to provide more support for senior women, immigrant and visible minority women, aboriginal women and women with disabilities to help them meet their special needs.

Providing supports for women escaping violence and abuse is a multifaceted effort. The province provides a continuum of support. Ministry of Human Resources bridging programs also serve women who have suffered from violence and abuse, those who have additional barriers — such as language or culture — and former sex trade workers. These programs focus on pre-employment life skills to assist clients to overcome some of the barriers that prevent them from making successful transitions to sustainable employment.

This government has made women's health issues a priority. B.C.'s Women's Hospital and Health Centre is the only facility in Canada that is devoted primarily to the health of women and their newborns and families. It's Canada's busiest and largest maternity hospital. Health care providers at B.C.'s Women's Hospital deliver 7,000 babies a year. With the University of British Columbia, B.C. Women's also provides scientific expertise as the B.C. Research Institute for Children's and

Women's Health. B.C.'s Women's also houses the B.C. Centre of Excellence for Women's Health.

We've recently unveiled a provincial women's health strategy to improve the health of girls and women. We worked with the B.C. Medical Association to help women in rural areas of our province deliver their babies closer to home. The maternity care network initiative provides financial incentives for physicians to work in group practices if they have maternity patients, and the family physician obstetrical care incentive encourages doctors who have small maternity practices to continue providing obstetrical care. It's so important in rural British Columbia. That's an area I represent, and I know that's been well received.

Midwives in small and large B.C. communities also have an important role to play in providing maternity and infant care. This year the first two classes of nurse practitioners will graduate.

We are also very focused on cancer prevention and diagnosis for women. We were the first province to implement a provincial breast screening program, and last year the screening mammography program of B.C. conducted more than 225,000 mammograms in over 100 communities throughout B.C.

We also screen for cervical cancer, and it's working. The incidence of cervical cancer has declined significantly in British Columbia since physicians have been conducting regular tests for their patients.

Many of the benefits we enjoy in British Columbia today are a direct result of the hard work and commitment of seniors. We live in a very fortunate time. Many seniors are still very strong, fit, energetic and active, able to enjoy a long and comfortable retirement in relatively good health. More than one-third of seniors are physically active. The good news is that succeeding generations are even healthier than their parents. Most of us can continue to look forward to a good quality of life for many years yet.

However, as our overall population ages, society will have to accommodate a new set of priorities and issues. British Columbia has one of the most rapidly aging populations in Canada. Between 1991 and 2001 the median age in B.C. increased 3.7 years, making us the oldest population in Canada. Between 1991 and 2001 the number of seniors 80 and over increased by half, from 87,000 to 134,000 people. By 2030 the senior population is expected to triple. That's close to 1.35 million seniors in British Columbia.

This demographic shift is going to have a tremendous effect on our social policies and on the way governments deliver programs. From health care to urban planning, from mandatory retirement to lifetime learning, from technology to social supports, the senior population will drive much of the agenda in future governments.

In response to this, the Premier appointed a new council on aging and seniors issues. The council will identify pressing needs and opportunities to improve seniors services; examine how to improve the full spectrum of housing options and home care; consider the issue of mandatory retirement; and engage seniors and

all citizens in a fruitful dialogue on what changes, if any, should be made to improve seniors' independence and quality of living in the modern world. I think I should actually qualify what I said, and that is that the council will be appointed. It hasn't been at this time.

[1550]

We are working on several new initiatives specifically targeted to seniors. As I mentioned earlier, this government recently approved a new set of initiatives, including \$2 million for new programs and projects to address violence against women and to focus on seniors. Abuse of older women is a real and serious threat and one that we are taking very seriously.

Government will work with community, school advocates and others to examine new uses for those underutilized school spaces across B.C., including, possibly, seniors centres. We have influenza vaccination programs to help seniors. We are working to develop individualized care plans between seniors and their families, enhancing and improving both quality of life and health care. We're committed to providing more surgeries, medical procedures and services and to helping to reduce wait-lists — including more than 400 hip and knee surgeries, more than 3,600 diagnostic procedures and more than 500 cataract procedures. This government has allocated the largest subsidized housing budget in B.C.'s history, \$154.4 million.

In conclusion, being Minister of State for Women's and Seniors' Services is an honour. I have the opportunity to work with British Columbians who are the core of our communities and our families. I am proud of the work we've done over the past four years. We've laid the groundwork that will show us continuing to provide the support that many British Columbians need.

K. Johnston: I'm delighted to be able to have the privilege to rise today and speak to Budget 2005. I must say it's a wonderful, great feeling we have today in British Columbia. Everybody is extremely positive as we move toward the future. All I get on the feedback on the streets is: "Things are great," "Keep going," and "British Columbia is indeed back."

I want to respond a little bit, before I get into the budget. I had an opportunity earlier this year, as part of the Public Accounts Committee, to go to a conference in eastern Canada as the Deputy Chair. I went with the Chair, the member for Vancouver-Mount Pleasant. I have to tell you that this was a public accounts meeting of all of the public accounts committee chairs and deputy chairs across every province in Canada, with the auditors general there as well. I just wanted to talk a little bit about the positive nature of that meeting.

British Columbia — actually, the Chair of the committee — pointed out our transparent, open and accountable government through a presentation about our performance principles. These are principles that guide how ministries report out and guide really in-depth information about transparency and openness. It was a whole-day presentation. Frankly, the room was awed at the nature, progress and leadership that British

Columbia has shown in little things like using generally accepted accounting principles for reporting out, balanced-budget legislation and, as I said, the performance principles. We have eight guiding principles in British Columbia to guide the government in reporting to the public on its performance.

I want to point this out. Everybody from across Canada was looking to British Columbia for this innovation and leadership, because we are transparent and have an open and accountable government. During the budget debate I found it interesting — some of the stuff out there in the street and the press saying: "Well, you know, this is just a budget for an election." Mr. Speaker, this is a plan that's been in place for three years, a plan that's open, transparent and totally accountable. I just wanted to pass on that story of the public accounts committees, because the rest of Canada believes we're open, accountable and transparent, and we are.

[1555]

The Budget Transparency and Accountability Act requires that all ministries and government organizations make public their service plans and their annual service plan reports. There are no surprises when it comes to a very, very positive balanced budget. On November 16, 2004, the auditor general released a report titled *Leading the Way — Adopting Best Practices in Government Financial Reporting, 2003-04*. In that report, the auditor general stated, "I commend the government" for its resolve to build a strong financial planning and reporting framework, and "We commend the government for its resolve in ensuring that British Columbia's public accounts are the best in Canada."

It's truly clear that the days of NDP fudge-it budget shell games are over. This government has raised the standards and integrity of accounting and reporting practices of government.

A couple of years ago — actually, almost three years ago now — in my budget speech of 2002, after only nine months in office, I personally, as MLA for Vancouver-Fraserview, asked my constituents for their patience in giving this government the opportunity to make things happen, to turn things around after the horrible decade we had with the NDP. I said in that speech, and I will repeat: I think we're doing the right thing today for the future of British Columbia tomorrow. I know that by making these tough decisions and taking these tough stances, there will be brighter days ahead.

Well, the days are brighter, and the sun is once again shining on British Columbia. The plan laid out is indeed working. The *New Era* document of 2001 laid out over 200 promises and commitments to the people of British Columbia that were brought forward during the election in 2001. To date, over 90 percent of those commitments have been delivered on or are in the process of being delivered on.

Of course, the opposition, the critics, the world out there and the negative naysayers will talk about the small percentage of commitments still in progress or yet to be completed, but I believe the integrity of gov-

ernment has been restored in British Columbia. In November 2004, Standard and Poor's upgraded B.C.'s credit rating to a double-A. The reason for their increased confidence in British Columbia, according to Standard and Poor's, is B.C.'s record in the following: consistently meeting budget targets, solid economic performance, enhanced fiscal transparency, and low debt-to-GDP ratios.

These are good things, but the plan is by no means fully achieved. The Minister of Finance has tabled a budget that kicks off a golden decade in which we have set five great goals: to make British Columbia the best educated, most literate jurisdiction 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, those with special needs, children at risk and seniors; to lead the world in sustainable environmental management with the best air quality, water quality and fisheries management; and to create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada.

The feedback I've received from my constituents is extremely clear. Whether going door to door, meeting community groups or just getting input on the street, the message is clear: stick to the plan. Stick to sound fiscal management, and maintain and increase the support to health care and education. This budget assures that we will stick to the plan.

It's always easy to set goals and not follow through. What does this budget do to validate the goals set for the golden decade? To make British Columbia the most educated and most literate jurisdiction on the continent, Balanced Budget 2005 supports the highest education budget and highest per-pupil funding in British Columbia history. We have increased spending on education. We will increase spending on education by \$2 billion. More of our students than ever before are now completing high school, and they are getting the best marks ever. Public school enrolment is dropping, while funding is increasing.

[1600]

Balanced Budget 2005 supports the highest education budget and highest per-pupil funding in British Columbia history. Per-pupil funding will increase to \$7,079 — up more than \$860 per student from 2001-02. This funding will improve access to school libraries, music and art programs, and resources for special needs.

In the area of post-secondary education, Balanced Budget 2005 recognizes that we must address the issue of skill shortages that will impede our economy and impede our growth. The government will continue to implement the largest expansion of post-secondary training opportunities since the 1960s. Over the next three years close to \$6 billion will be allocated to the Ministry of Advanced Education. British Columbia will add 25,000 new post-secondary spaces by 2010.

I'm personally excited about our goal to lead the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness. It is well documented that our physical activity standards in our youth are not up to par. They have

lagged behind from the heady days of the sixties and seventies, when there weren't so many distractions for the youth.

I'm also very excited that the incentive as we drive towards 2010, the Olympics, the kind of energy that's going to be put forth by so many people in our province, the kind of excitement that's going to come forward.... I'd like to put a plug in now for Vancouver-Fraserview. The Killarney ice rink is looking to be the practice facility for the 2010 hockey teams here. I'm hopeful that the parks board in Vancouver will make a very positive decision down the road sometime in the near future that will look at Killarney ice rink very closely as a practice facility for Olympics 2010.

Balanced Budget 2005 includes the second-largest funding increase for health care in British Columbia history. Health care spending under this government will increase to \$13.3 billion — up almost \$4 billion since we came to office. I wish somebody could explain to me how an almost 40 percent increase in spending on health care over a period of six years is considered a cutback.

How is an increase in spending on education to the tune of \$2 billion considered a cutback? It's strange NDP math, and nobody should pay any attention to it.

I would love to get an explanation from Carole James of this new NDP math. But quite frankly, we can't really find her, and we haven't heard from her, so I guess it's probably not going to happen. We are hopeful that she will emerge and tell the people of British Columbia what exactly they plan to do or not do, but we're not holding our breath. Frankly, we haven't quite figured out, I believe, who the leader of the NDP is — whether it's Mr. Sinclair or Ms. James. I'm sure that will come clear in the coming days.

Balanced Budget 2005 provides \$465 million for Pharmacare and for training more doctors and nurses. An extremely important issue in Vancouver is the issue of seniors care. There is a commitment to direct over \$200 million more to improve access to home care, residential care and palliative care.

The need is great in South Vancouver, as it is in all of British Columbia. I'm hopeful that projects like the Royal Arch Masonic Homes Society extended care annex project will receive consideration. We'll see the kind of support that the demographics demand. This addition of 100 extended care beds would add to the campus-of-care concept in South Vancouver, and as I said, I think it's extremely worthy of consideration.

All of us in British Columbia have a duty to improve our own health. Building a support system for British Columbians is a major purpose of this government. Balanced Budget 2005 improves the quality of life for British Columbians most in need.

In 2003 we brought in the Fair Pharmacare program to shrink prescription drug costs for about 281,000 low- and middle-income families and seniors. Now we are dedicating \$120 million over three years to reduce MSP premiums for lower-income individuals, families and seniors. In total, the change will reduce or eliminate MSP premiums for about 215,000 people.

[1605]

A few months ago persons with disabilities saw their monthly assistance increase by \$70 a month, the largest one-time increase in British Columbia history. Persons-with-disabilities monthly assistance rates are now the second-highest in Canada. A commitment has been made of additional funding of \$91 million for adult community living services, \$48 million for emergency shelters and support services, \$37 million for transition homes and outreach programs, and also \$134 million to enhance services to children and youth.

The goal to lead the world in sustainable environmental management is often an overlooked and underrated goal for many people in this world. Many people have not had the importance of sustainability register on their radar screen. I think the recent federal budget acknowledged the importance of sustainability in our communities.

Folks, we are all having a very negative impact on this Earth, so we need to take better care of this Earth. We need to take better care of our own back yards. The protection of drinking water, our land, the animals on it and fish is extremely paramount. The addition of conservation officers will, hopefully, assist in the area of stopping poaching, which I think is a disgusting activity that seems to be increasing in frequency.

Automobiles have a devastating effect on emission levels and creation of bad air, especially in the GVRD area of our province. The government is taking action to address this problem by enhancing provincial sales tax relief for alternative-fuel vehicles — hybrids — including an exemption from provincial sales tax, at the point of sale, of up to a \$2,000 maximum for hybrid electric passenger vehicles. If you notice, these days almost all carmakers are coming out with hybrid vehicles. They understand where the market is going. Good for the government for getting in front of this issue; it is important.

The final pillar for the five great goals of the golden decade is to create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada. B.C. now has the second-strongest economic growth rate in Canada. Since 2001, 197,000 new jobs have been created. We all know the way to job creation is through the small business sector. Small business is 90 percent of all businesses in British Columbia and the majority of private sector jobs. They, too, are working people. Almost one million jobs in British Columbia are derived from small business.

Strengthening small business is critical. Balanced Budget 2005 will immediately increase the B.C. small business corporate income tax threshold from \$300,000 to \$400,000. This means small business will pay lower taxes on earnings up to \$400,000 a year. This will generate reinvestment, expansion and more jobs in the small business sector. Incentives for hard-working British Columbians involved in small business are very important.

This government recognizes the contribution made to our economy by lower- and modest-income British Columbians. That is why Balanced Budget 2005 introduced a new non-refundable personal income tax

credit. The B.C. tax reduction will reduce or eliminate provincial income taxes for about 730,000 British Columbians. Most individuals earning up to \$16,000 a year will pay no provincial income tax. Those earning up to \$26,000 will pay lower tax. A senior couple with a net annual income of \$30,000 will now pay over \$900 a year less in provincial tax compared to four years ago.

A cornerstone of sound fiscal management is debt management. By committing \$1.7 billion to paying down the provincial debt, British Columbia is showing leadership in that area. This is the single largest annual debt reduction in B.C. history, and there will obviously be tremendous savings by that debt paydown. Starting on the long road to being mortgage-free is an important strategy, not just for families but for government. Instead of paying interest to the bank, we have the opportunity to put more money into health care and education. Keeping debt affordable for the future generations of British Columbia is an important strategy — good news for our future.

[1610]

Community safety is on the top of all minds. Certainly in Vancouver we have nightly stories of misadventure and major crime — everything from petty crime to savage attacks and cowardly attacks on elderly women. This government has provided an additional \$122 million to add 215 officers throughout B.C. and to increase support for the courts and corrections. Initiatives such as AMBER alert, ISPO and integrated homicide teamwork are all important initiatives.

Traffic fine revenue is being turned back to municipalities, and \$7.8 million will go back to Vancouver for policing and crime prevention. I think it's extremely important that hopefully some will be directed to community policing as well. We also have coordinated police, PRIME-BC, tougher impaired driving enforcement and penalties and legislation to stop citizens from being harassed as they walk the streets.

Balanced Budget 2005 provides \$6.5 billion over the next three years for increased ministry funding for health care, communities, children, public safety, economic development and the environment, reflecting the ongoing service priorities of British Columbians. There is 71 percent of the new funding directed to health care and education. The balanced budget sets a course of continued sound fiscal management, it sets a course of vision, and it highlights the leadership abilities of the government led by the Premier.

Leadership is not about hiding in the legislative gallery. Leadership is not about some rope-a-dope strategy of ducking and hiding and keeping away from your critics. Leadership is not about letting Jim Sinclair, the real leader of the NDP, set policy — the same Jim Sinclair who said that he would like to take B.C. back to the dark days of 2001, back to the dark days of fudge-it budgets and NDP hacks at the trough, and back to the days when the most profitable business in British Columbia was the household moving business because so many people were leaving.

Leadership is putting your vision in front of the public, standing on principle. To quote another: "Lead-

ership is action, not position." Over the past four years our Premier has shown the courage to take action, the courage to lead and the courage to stand for what he believes in: to make this province the best place on Earth to live. With the ongoing leadership of our Premier, British Columbia truly has a bright future ahead.

Hon. L. Reid: Over the past four years, as Minister of State for Early Childhood Development, it has been my honour to work with this province's many communities and highly committed individuals to profile, enhance and build innovative initiatives supporting British Columbia's early childhood development. Much has been accomplished despite many challenges.

B.C. has a diverse population of well over 250,000 children, birth to age 6, many of whom are situated in remote communities with limited access to programs and services. This government has made considerable progress towards returning this province to its full social and economic potential. Evidence-based investments in early childhood development have helped bring to fruition this government's vision of healthy people and responsible families living in safe, caring and inclusive communities.

Our early childhood development successes are based on key strategies that enable communities to develop and deliver services within a consolidated, coherent, community-based delivery system, to build capacity within our communities through empowerment, to recognize ability and potential, and promote resiliency regardless of the challenges presented. We convert evidence-based research into best practice and provide funding according to programs. We create opportunities for preschoolers to receive services in public school buildings.

Hon. Speaker, that's the base, and it gives me great pleasure to rise and respond to the 2005 budget in the province. My hon. colleague noted — and certainly we have heard it many times in this chamber — that Mr. Sinclair would somehow like to return us to 2001. It's not possible that that would be useful or helpful to the babies of this province. It's not possible that that would be a wise decision on his part. It simply would be a fruitless endeavour to ensure that the potential of these youngsters is not recognized as we go forward. That is not the desire of this administration.

We have many first-dollar industries in British Columbia. I say welcome home to the mining sector. I say welcome to forestry. Those are the industries that produce dollars today that we can invest in the youngsters, in the families of this province. The Premier is passionate about the notion that if you want a stronger economy in British Columbia, it will be because and only because you have stronger families. I accept that notion; I honour that notion. That's vitally important.

[1615]

Just last evening at the B.C. Chamber of Commerce event we talked about natural gas and about mining in British Columbia. I sat with the Energy minister to advance the issues that are important to British Columbia. It is about ensuring that there are sufficient dollars to

flow to families in this province. That is the purpose behind balancing the budget in British Columbia. Balancing it for its own sake misses great opportunity. Balancing it to do things that matter in the lives of British Columbia families — vitally important.

I began my budget speech in the year 2000, the year my daughter was born, by saying how much debt she in fact would carry forward if the previous administration was allowed to continue their decade of despair, their decade of darkness, when it came to fiscal matters, when it came to balancing a budget. They made enormous mistakes, and today it's our responsibility — our obligation, I believe — to bring down that debt load so that the children of this province do not carry that forward for the next 30 or 40 years — vitally important.

Budget 2005 invests growing provincial revenues to develop the capacity of families and communities to care for and protect vulnerable children, youth and adults with developmental disabilities. The Ministry of Children and Family Development in British Columbia will spend an additional \$331 million by 2007-08 to enhance programs and services for children and their families and adults with developmental disabilities.

This is a cumulative 9.2 percent budget lift on the 2004-05 base budget of \$1.497 billion over three years; \$80 million, or 5.3 percent, in '05-06; \$113 million, or 7.5 percent, in '06-07; and \$138 million, or 9.2 percent, in '07-08. In all, the province will spend an additional \$241 million by '07-08 to enhance programs and services for children and their families that are delivered by various ministries.

What does it actually mean to children and families? Here's one example: better, more comprehensive diagnostic services for hearing, vision and dental health. We're investing \$76 million in early childhood screening initiatives. Children will be screened for dental, hearing and vision impairments before grade 1, an enormously important announcement. Those who need treatment or specialized assistance will receive it through a network of nurses, dentists, doctors, audiologists, optometrists and other professional service providers.

That will get children in this province off to a better start. It's important. If you have a child with a hearing impairment or a speech impediment, their self-esteem and their self-confidence is compromised. That is not the way for them to begin a relationship with a public school in this province that will last for 13 years.

Imagine starting grade 1 with an undiagnosed problem. Imagine the stigma of that. Imagine the difficulty you would experience as a child in a classroom: the painful frustration when you can't read; the frustration on behalf of your teachers when they can't reach you — hugely unnecessary frustrations for children and for families in British Columbia. That sort of experience affects a child for a lifetime — no question.

Now imagine the difference it would make if that problem were caught and treated early — how much more that child would thrive at school. With better education and more self-confidence, that child would

grow up a better prepared and more productive adult and, frankly, a happier parent.

We're talking about the paths of people's lives beginning in early childhood. Research from around the world illustrates that early assessment, treatment and support can make a world of difference in children's lives and families' lives and hence in our communities. Every one of us benefits when children — all children — have the opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

We know from countless studies, as well as from experience, that early diagnosis and intervention gives kids a head start in life. When they start school ready to learn, they're more likely to finish high school, more likely to find good jobs and more likely to raise their own families successfully. That builds stronger, healthier and happier communities that are great places to grow up.

When we talk about the future, we're talking about our children. The work we do today, the actions we take and the decisions we make will all affect our children in the years ahead. I know that everyone here shares our commitment to ensure that all our children get the best possible start. Of course, it's parents and family members who make the most important contributions to a child's healthy development. But government also has a role in making sure that B.C. continues to be the best place to raise a family.

[1620]

Today we are moving forward with a series of initiatives for B.C. children, starting from the day they're born. We're investing over \$130 million over three years to enhance services to children and youth with special needs and to their families. This new investment will mean shorter waits for everything from therapies to specialized equipment to respite care for families. That means that moms and dads will get more support and days off to recharge themselves.

Like the early screening program, this new strategy is comprehensive and coordinated across government. It includes over \$40 million to the Ministry of Children and Family Development for direct intervention and key family support services. We know that these are wise investments in our most precious citizens.

The same philosophy underpins the government's commitment to early learning and child care as part of a broader national plan that includes substantial federal funding. We are committed to reinvesting that new funding to provide more accessible, affordable, inclusive care that emphasizes early learning, that emphasizes early childhood development. Parents will have more choices. Funding will be targeted to those in need, and we will see the dividends for years to come.

These are all incredible investments in the future of this province. There have been a number of individuals within the ministry and the early childhood development branch who have been instrumental in the provision of this level of programming across British Columbia: Loreen O'Byrne, the director; Dena Carroll, manager of early childhood development; Marie Watts, policy analyst, supported child development program

and infant development program; Tara Richards, again, a policy analyst; Lisa Martin, early childhood development consultant in the family resource programs; Candace Porter, early childhood development consulting, Building Blocks and early intervention programs; Anne Fuller, early childhood development consultant and our provincial adviser for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder; Savannah Murphy, policy analyst; Andrea Westphal, administrative assistant; and Terre Poppe, administrative assistant. I put their names on the record because I wanted to be sure we recognize the individuals who work tirelessly on behalf of the goals of this administration and on behalf of producing programming that matters in the lives of children. I believe it's vitally important.

I had the absolute privilege last Wednesday, Thursday and Friday to be part of the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Conference here at the Victoria Conference Centre. One thousand delegates came to this conference committed to working more comprehensively and cohesively to ensure that we can indeed bring down the incidence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in British Columbia. I'm delighted to tell you we are well on the road to having enormous success in that area. Community circles and community partnerships across British Columbia work each and every single day to ensure we do the best we can in terms of preventing and reducing the incidence — vitally important.

This government has had great success, as well, with community partnerships across British Columbia. Success by 6. Many of my colleagues will have heard me speak about this unique partnership of United Ways of British Columbia, the British Columbia government, savings and credit unions of British Columbia and B.C. communities. It's an outstanding example of public, private and voluntary sector partnership for the benefit of children — absolutely vital. It is an initiative focused on community involvement and cross-sectoral communication. It's an initiative dedicated to ensuring that children ages zero to six have access to supports and programs that work on their healthy growth and development.

Some examples: parenting programs, Mother Goose programs, early literacy, family resource centres, nutritional programs, information and referral to families to improve access to services, programs for pregnant moms and families with infants, child development and toy-lending libraries. Community capacity-building — that is the essence of my presentation today, as I respond to this budget.

All of these investments matter in the lives of children that each and every one of us in this chamber knows. Each and every person in British Columbia knows they are somehow touched by a child somewhere in their lives. If we truly want to honour the Premier's commitment that this is about a stronger economy, we will honour stronger families in British Columbia. We will work incredibly hard to ensure that every single opportunity is in place so that these little souls have the best opportunities to go forward. At the end of the day, that's what it's about.

The largest single repayment on debt ever in this province has garnered for this administration, for each and every year out, \$125 million dollars that they would not have had otherwise. It's an enormous sum of money. Invested wisely, it will continue to support programs that my colleagues in this chamber believe in heartily. That amount of money could easily support new policing efforts, new family support programs and new health care programs. That is a stream of dollars that will now flow to this province. Had this administration not taken the decision to pay down the debt, we simply would not have had those dollars at our disposal.

[1625]

There is great opportunity before us if we continue to make wise investments as we go forward in British Columbia. The opportunity to ensure that every little person in this province has the best possible start frankly warms my heart. I thank you very much. It's been an honour to respond to the budget for 2005.

Seeing no further speakers, I would move adjournment of the debate.

Hon. L. Reid moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. I. Chong: I would call second reading of Bill 21.

Perhaps we can get a few minutes' recess to allow the members who wish to debate this to come back in the chamber.

Deputy Speaker: We'll have a five-minute recess.

The House recessed from 4:26 p.m. to 4:29 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Hon. G. Bruce: I call second reading of Bill 21.

Second Reading of Bills

CROWN COUNSEL AGREEMENT CONTINUATION ACT

Hon. G. Bruce: The Crown Counsel Agreement Continuation Act extends the Crown counsel agreement until March 31, 2007. It rolls over the 2001 agreement, continuing the same terms and conditions while at the same time providing our Crown prosecutors with a 13 percent wage increase starting next year. That means the salary range will rise to a starting wage of approximately \$56,000 and increase the top pay to almost \$140,000.

This bill sets aside the arbitration award handed down by Mr. Jones on February 18, and it's in keeping with the salary component of that award. This is not a decision that government enters into lightly, but we wanted to be consistent with the governmentwide wage mandate, a wage mandate that all other public servants have been under.

[1630]

In fact, we've now concluded 81 negotiated agreements — most recently, the six involving colleges and post-secondary institutions, and prior to that, with workers at B.C. Place. Government had earlier rejected arbitration from the Taylor panel, noting our current bargaining mandate. We're respecting that, and all of our professional public servants who've negotiated agreements under that mandate, with this bill. Quite simply, this is about fairness for the workers who have already worked out a negotiated settlement and for our ability to manage the system and retain flexibility around staffing provisions.

I should note that government MLAs also took a 5 percent pay cut in 2002 — a cut that remains in place today and has meant a reduction in pay of \$10,800 over the last three years. We have a responsibility to all British Columbians to manage their tax dollars and the province's finances for the benefit of all. We're providing a pay increase at a time when government can afford it while at the same time helping us continue to attract and retain some of our best lawyers.

There have been several incidences of impasse and conflict in this sector. Three of the past five negotiations have required third-party intervention going back to the 1990s. That's why this also sets out the ability to appoint a commission to inquire into the relationship with Crown counsel. The intention is to improve those conditions and structures while at the same time considering the public interest and having stable relations between the employer and B.C. Crown Counsels Association.

The Crown Counsel Agreement Continuation Act provides a way through for all parties. It respects the governmentwide wage mandate, it provides a significant wage increase, and it preserves the terms and conditions of the existing agreement while at the same time allowing for a process to improve and build upon the relationship with the Crown prosecutors.

I move second reading of Bill 21, the Crown Counsel Agreement Continuation Act, 2005.

J. MacPhail: I speak to Bill 21, Crown Counsel Agreement Continuation Act, introduced yesterday by the Liberal government. I must say that I am very saddened to have to rise in this House and address Bill 21. Let me begin by saying that the NDP opposition will be voting against this legislation.

I know that this government wants to treat this as strictly just a labour issue — just another labour issue. Certainly, this legislation repeats the worst of the B.C. Liberal government's deplorable record on breaking contracts. That is what this is. It's breaking a contract by legislation. This government is really good at this. They probably have the best record on breaking contracts by legislation of any government in existence.

This government has now interfered in negotiations ten times directly by legislation, breaking contracts with nurses, paramedics, teachers, health care workers, doctors, college instructors, ferry workers and forestry workers. This is the government, after all, that tore up

contracts of the very people that the Premier had given his personal word to. The Premier said: "I will not tear up contracts."

Given this record of this government, we in the opposition are not at all surprised that this Liberal government has now turned its sights on Crown prosecutors. But as always, it comes as a shock to us, and we are saddened. This latest show of contempt by the government is especially disturbing. Let me explain why.

First, this is the first time that the government is breaking a contract with the very people required by law to defend the rest of us. That is a new record for this government. The very job of the 400 Crown prosecutors who are being mistreated by this legislation, who are being treated so badly by this government, is to stand up in court and defend the citizens of this province. This is the group of people that British Columbians rely on to prosecute the criminals who threaten our safety and well-being.

[1635]

Crown prosecutors work on behalf of British Columbians in such complex cases as the Pickton trial, the Air India case and, of course, the unprecedented case involving raids on ministerial offices in this very Legislature. Those are some of the high-profile cases, but Crown prosecutors prosecute much lesser-known criminals and work on much lower-profile cases every day, defending the interests of British Columbians and our society in general. Crown prosecutors are a key part of the very system we depend on to ensure that criminals are dealt with and public safety is protected.

We know how this government likes to talk so much about protecting public safety and getting tough on crime and criminals. Yet here they are, with weeks to an election, ramping up expectations about how they're going to protect the public by hiring 215 more police officers. At the very same time that they're promising the public that, they're creating a bottleneck in the very courts that are needed to put the bad guys away.

What do you think police do except turn over to Crown prosecutors to convict the criminals? And what does this government do? They attack the Crown prosecutors and make our system worse. So much for public safety. So much for any promise they may make that they care about public safety. Bill 21 just throws that promise right to the wind.

Let's just look at what this Liberal government has done to Crown prosecutors since they were elected. In 2002 the Liberal government eliminated 15 Crown prosecutor positions. In 2003 the Liberal government reduced the Crown prosecution budget by \$5.5 million. This B.C. Liberal government also eliminated the Crown victim witness services program and all 35 staff positions of those who worked with victims of crime.

This was the government that got elected on a promise to protect crime victims, but once they were elected, what did they do? They laid off victim service workers, the people who work in our justice system to help rape and domestic violence victims through tortuous criminal trials. Here we are, weeks before an-

other election, and once again we see the B.C. Liberals, pre-election, trying to talk a good line to the public about crime and safety but doing exactly the opposite. They're harming any public safety initiatives.

They talk about all the police they're going to hire to catch criminals — going to hire — but then by this action, they create a bottleneck in the very courts required to actually prosecute criminals. They're fostering animosity and distrust among the very people that British Columbians depend on to see that justice is done: our Crown prosecutors.

It is this very bad-faith approach by this government to the Crown prosecutors that is the second reason I am so saddened by this legislation. Even for this government, with its world-class atrocious record for breaking contracts and breaking its word, this latest example of contract-breaking is a special case. This time this government has had an arbitrator that they chose, which this government appointed, who has actually ruled that this government bargained in bad faith.

Of course, that would be the second arbitrator who had to be called in after this Liberal government ignored the recommendations of the first arbitrator awarding wages and working conditions to our Crown prosecutors. Let me go over the facts — facts that, of course, this Minister of Labour completely overlooked; in fact, facts that I think the Minister of Labour's opening remarks did not speak to the truth about.

Interjection.

J. MacPhail: Absolutely. He was a stranger to the truth in his opening remarks, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Careful, hon. member. Let's temper our remarks.

J. MacPhail: I'm trying to stay in order, Mr. Speaker, and that is parliamentary language. I understand the Minister of Labour being upset with being confronted with the facts. So let's just keep going on them, shall we? Of course, these are the facts that the government likes to ignore, as we just saw, and to deny, but here they are.

[1640]

In February 2004, under this B.C. Liberal government, an arbitration panel recommended the government award Crown counsel an immediate 13 percent pay increase to cover a new three-year contract, retroactive to the expiry of their last contract in 2003. It was an arbitration process that the government agreed to and entered into by contract with their eyes wide open. But the government didn't like what it saw. That arbitration award, called the Taylor arbitration award, didn't tell the Premier what he wanted to hear. So the government rejected the arbitration panel's recommendations — not recommendations; they were an arbitration panel's decisions. They weren't recommendations. I misspoke. An arbitrator makes decisions, and that's why parties agree to arbitration.

The government rejected the arbitration panel's decisions, and they appealed. As a result, a second arbitrator, Mr. David Jones, had to be brought in. The Jones arbitration states in a very forceful way, with very clear language, that the actions of this B.C. Liberal government in rejecting the first arbitration award were wrong. Mr. Jones went so far as to find that none of the reasons given by the government for rejecting the Taylor arbitration stood up to scrutiny as being "reasoned."

Mr. Jones made it clear that the B.C. government is in flagrant breach of agreement — flagrant breach. As far as the pay issue went, Mr. Jones recommended that the increase of 13 percent be implemented immediately and be retroactively paid with interest to the Crown prosecutors as of April 1, 2003. But this government doesn't like what that arbitrator decided either. We know that with this monolithic, massive, arrogant majority of this government, they're used to getting their own way. If they don't like what an independent judicial process brings about, they just bring in legislation. All the Liberal government members go: "Aye, aye, captain. Let's destroy another contract. Let's destroy our public safety system. We don't care. We've got a massive majority, and we're arrogant."

This is not a government that can admit when it is wrong. So what did they do? They simply brought in Bill 21, the legislation we're debating today. We don't like the first arbitrator's decision; we don't like that second arbitrator's decision; we don't like Crown prosecutors. Let's legislate against all of them. When in doubt, bring down the legislative hammer. That's this government's approach.

Never mind that they, along with the Crown prosecutors, agreed to the arbitration process in good faith in the first place. Never mind that they've now had not one but two arbitrators tell them that this is what they must do. Never mind that by acting in bad faith, they are actually breaking the law. Now, there is some irony for you. The B.C. Liberal government — all 75 of them — is breaking the law, and they're doing so in a manner that opposes the very people who uphold our laws — the Crown prosecutors. Without Crown prosecutors, there would be no upholding of our laws whatsoever, and the Liberal government is breaking the law to attack those people. Isn't that setting a fine example?

[1645]

You have to wonder why they agreed to participate in the arbitration process in the first place when this government had no intention of following the decision of the arbitrator. Well, I guess if you haven't been living in British Columbia for the last four years, you might wonder that. But sadly, it comes as little surprise to British Columbians. When it comes to keeping their word, this Liberal government's record has been shameful. It's clear to anyone who's been paying attention that they cannot be trusted, and they have lost the trust of the Crown prosecutors. The B.C. Liberal government can't be trusted to make good on a contract. They can't be trusted to keep their intentions or their promises, and they can't be trusted to obey the law.

When you look at the promises they made to the people of British Columbia in the last election, you wonder what whoppers are in store for us this next election. What could compare to the whopper on gambling? They were going to stop the expansion of gambling that had hurt families and then proceeded to unleash the biggest expansion of gambling in B.C. history. Or the one about B.C. Rail....

Mr. Speaker: Order, hon. member. We're on second reading of Bill 21. Let's try to stick to the content, please.

J. MacPhail: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for your guidance. Let me make it clear that I'm trying to make a point here that this is another broken promise to join with others. I'll try to just keep my remarks to the broken promises.

How about the one about B.C. Rail? In 1996 they told the truth, and they lost the election. In 2001 they promised they would not sell B.C. Rail and then insulted British Columbians by calling the outright sale a 990-year lease.

Most disturbing of all, this is the government that promised better care and more resources for children. It was, they said in 2001, their number one promise. Instead, they delivered massive cuts, chaos and scandal at the Ministry of Children and Family Development. In fact, it's Crown prosecutors who are left to defend families who have been affected by domestic violence. It's Crown prosecutors who are left to defend children who have been harmed or maybe have fallen through the cracks because of this government's actions.

This is the record of this government. Oh sure, they've tried to paper over this record with the promissory notes of a pre-election budget — the whopper budget. But British Columbians aren't easily fooled. They know that an extreme political makeover exists. They know one when they see one. British Columbians know that this government's record is one of breaking promises, picking on the most vulnerable, tearing up contracts and going back on their word. All of this is fully demonstrated in Bill 21, this legislation.

This legislation is the most recent example of this government's confrontational, extreme approach to justice and extreme approach to governing. But it isn't just the most recent example. It's also an instance where this government must face the fact that an independent arbitrator has ruled that this government is acting in bad faith. So what does the government do? They legislate any resistance, any criticism, any invoking of the laws of the land out of existence and impose their arbitrary will on Crown prosecutors.

The people of British Columbia who have suffered under this government have known this for four years — British Columbians with disabilities who were subjected to the mean-spirited, wrong-headed and wasteful review; seniors who were promised health care when they needed it, where they needed it. They were assured of long-term care beds and believed they would be treated with respect. Instead they've seen

promise after promise broken and their concerns ignored.

Children and youth at risk, from the moment this government was elected, have seen valuable programs cut, services decimated, and scandals and chaos leech millions of dollars from the ministry charged with their care. These are the people that have been most hurt by this B.C. Liberal government. This government's confrontational, inflexible approach to contract negotiations has seen them bring down the hammer — the legislative hammer — no less than ten times since their election four years ago.

[1650]

Of course, as we see here today, this isn't a government that likes to hear the truth about itself. This isn't a government that actually understands today that they're making the safety and security of British Columbians worse by creating a huge bottleneck in our justice system.

Crown prosecutors today will understand that this British Columbia government doesn't want them to work in this province and that this government has no respect for them. I expect many of them will say: "Why should I do public service as a Crown prosecutor? The government has broken faith with me. My workload is only going to get heavier." Sure, there are 200 more police on the streets, but the Crown prosecutors are saying: "We're the ones that are going to have to convict them." And this government has said: "We don't like you. We don't want to pay you appropriately. We want to break the law so you don't have the rights that most other people get in terms of contractual rights."

One of the two arbitrators said that the only fair comparators that a government should use — and the government agreed to this.... The only fair comparators that anybody should use in determining the wages and working conditions of a Crown prosecutor are Ontario, the federal government and Alberta. Each and every one of those, even after this legislation, makes far more than what the Crown prosecutors will. Oh, and the government of the day agreed with that direction. I guess they agreed with it because they knew they weren't going to abide by it anyway. They're like children. They go, "Oh, whatever," and then do whatever they want.

The Premier, and this Minister of Labour, is even trying to pretend outside this House that what he and his government are doing is fair. We just heard it from the Minister of Labour, saying that this is fair. Well, in answer, I can only quote the words of David Jones, one of the two arbitrators who have ruled on this. Here's what he said: "That kind of response that this government loves to cling to in spite of all the facts is not rational, legitimate or in good faith."

To any other government that kind of chastisement would be devastating, but not this government. In fact, through this legislation, they invoke their arrogance to stick another finger in the eye of the arbitrator.

Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation deals with the wages of the Crown prosecutors. It breaks faith and breaks the obligations of the government about paying

a fair wage to Crown prosecutors. But the arbitration reports dealt with many, many other issues and awarded many other terms and conditions to the Crown prosecutors — terms and conditions that make their jobs safer as they, the Crown prosecutors, make us safer; that deal with reclassifications; that deal with Crown prosecutors working in remote areas of this province doing their job.

That's all swept aside by this legislation. All of those terms and working conditions that were awarded by the arbitrators are swept out of existence by this legislation. Who could blame the Crown prosecutors for being angry, frustrated, disappointed, jilted and speaking with their feet?

[1655]

P. Nettleton: I, too, rise today to speak to Bill 21, Crown Counsel Agreement Continuation Act. I do oppose this act in the strongest possible terms. I have listened with interest to the comments of the Leader of the Opposition, and I echo her concerns and her assessment of this legislation presently before us.

The thought occurred to me, while listening to the Leader of the Opposition, that it's really unfortunate that this bill serves to further politicize an issue which should not be politicized. I know, from my own experience in the criminal courts as a defence attorney, that Crown counsel work very hard. What tends to happen in many cases in the provincial courts is that Crown counsel will go into their offices early in the morning and walk out with files that are barely manageable in terms of being able to carry them into the courthouse and have to work their way through the files over the course of a very, very busy day. Then, of course, they meet with witnesses and do other work over the course of a day. Theirs, indeed, is a difficult task, and remuneration is an important part of keeping those people — who do very valiant work from day to day in our courts, on our behalf — in those positions rather than their being attracted away to the private sector.

The present Attorney General, who at the time was the critic to the then Attorney General in February of 2000, had some fairly strong words to say with respect to Crown counsel and their importance. There had been a refusal by the government at that time to adopt and implement the Owen recommendations to provide a workable, effective process for resolving employment issues with respect to Crown counsel. In writing to the then Attorney General, the Attorney General made the comment in part that....

Instead of supporting them or offering constructive leadership in resolving the issues that were before them at that time, he indicated to the Attorney General at that time: "You wring your hands and pass the buck." He went on to say, "Crown prosecutors have repeatedly asked that you implement the recommendations in the report authored by Stephen Owen" — a report that had been commissioned.

Mr. Owen had made a number of recommendations with respect to resolving those issues. The Attor-

ney General ended his discourse by saying: "I urge you in the strongest possible terms to take immediate responsibility for this issue and do everything in your power to ensure there is no further disruption to the administration of justice in the courts of British Columbia." That certainly was his position at that time, and he understood the importance of Crown counsel, as outlined by the Leader of the Opposition, with respect to the important role they play in terms of the administration of justice.

I'll make quick reference, if I may, to the Taylor arbitration report of 2004. That report indicated that B.C. Crown counsel had fallen behind Crown counsel in three jurisdictions that they should have been compared to, including Alberta and Ontario. He went on to indicate that "a market adjustment increase must take place." Those were his words — Mr. Taylor. They recommended, as well, a 13 percent increase in salaries effective April 1, 2003. That's almost — what? — two years ago now.

He recommended, as well, non-pecuniary issues such as work conditions, level, process of advancement, professional development — things that have been or will be swept away with this legislation. I know that the government has made repeated reference to the monetary issues, but there are non-monetary issues involved here that this legislation impacts, which appear very petty at best and very mean and vindictive at worst.

[1700]

In any event, that arbitration report of 2004, the Taylor arbitration report, was rejected and the government went back, in fact, to Mr. Jones, who reported out in February of 2005. They weren't particularly happy or interested with the report of Mr. Jones, as indicated by the Leader of the Opposition.

That report, in part, talked about the recommendations of the earlier report, the Taylor arbitration report. It made reference, of course, to the 13 percent raise in pay over the three-year term of the contract, which should have commenced April 1, 2003. He went on to talk about how, in rejecting the Taylor recommendations, the government — that's this government — was wrong and lacked good faith — pretty strong words with respect to the conduct of government.

Those aren't my words or the words of the Leader of the Opposition. Those are the words of the Jones report. It indicated that by rejecting the Taylor recommendations, it was not rational, legitimate or in good faith — very strong words indeed. Not a single rationale for rejection was reasoned. I would argue, in fact, that in anything we've heard here today from government, particularly the Minister of Labour, there's been nothing rational or reasoned or legitimate or in good faith about the government's position as they ram this bill down the throats of Crown counsel throughout this province.

The effects of Bill 21. What are the likely effects with respect to Crown counsel? Well, first of all, it will effect a rollover of the contract, which originally was

terminated in April of 2005. We now know that the salary increase, which was due from 2003, will not, in fact, take effect until 2006.

Earlier I'd made reference, as well, to the non-pecuniary issues and recommendations which this legislation legislates away — an important issue. I've heard from Crown counsel that it is the right to job action that has been, or will be, legislated away with this legislation. In fact, the Taylor and Jones recommendations are effectively legislated away with the passage of Bill 21.

Crown also pointed out... I'm not surprised if they're suspicious with respect to the good faith conduct of this government, or lack thereof. They've made the point that this can, in whole or in part, be repealed by order-in-council so that the 13 percent increase provision in section 2(2) could be repealed before its implementation, as outlined in clause 6. Those are some of the concerns that I have and that Crown counsel and others have.

From their perspective — that is, the perspective of Crown counsel — it is particularly frustrating to see no challenge in this Legislature to the latest insult to contractual rights, as outlined by the Leader of the Opposition, apart from the Leader of the Opposition and myself. I think that it's certainly not a good sign in terms of the administration of justice and those that are key to ensuring that justice is administered properly throughout this province.

In closing, I would also ask: why is it the government would not let at least the non-monetary benefits be left to stand? An example would be the seniority protection provisions — a thing like their right to have their gowns cleaned and things of that sort. There are huge costs associated with that. I know that when you look at the remuneration for Crown counsel and you think of the costs associated with living — particularly in the larger centres but not just in the larger centres.... Even places like Fort St. John, where there is quite a strong housing market, the costs associated with living are enormous. This puts enormous financial pressure on the people who are vital to the administration of justice in this province.

[1705]

This is a lesson that this administration has not learned. Despite the earlier pleadings and implicit promises of the Attorney General under the former administration with respect to Crown counsel and their importance and the need to address their concerns, we find that, in fact, those concerns and promises and commitments have been abandoned. The anger that flows from that is understandable. The frustration that flows from that is understandable, and what will soon become understandable, I expect, to the public at large are the implications in very practical terms: an exodus from this profession, from this role, as Crown prosecutors move into the private sector and there are other difficulties associated with morale. Those are some of my concerns.

The other point that was made by Crown in communicating with me over the last few hours was, in

fact, that other Crowns may indeed be looking at jobs in other jurisdictions where their counterparts enjoy a much better relationship and are remunerated in a fair manner, in a proper manner, in a good faith manner, in a rational manner. I could go on. Those include places like Alberta; Ontario; the feds, of course; and the private sector. It's unlikely that there'll be any change in terms of the direction of government, but again, it's incumbent upon me to oppose this legislation, to warn the public what the implications are in very practical terms for this government's commitment to imposing this legislation on the justice system and on Crown prosecutors.

With that, I thank you for this opportunity to address Bill 21.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. members, we are at second reading of Bill 21. The Minister of Labour closes debate.

Hon. G. Bruce: Just several comments as I close off the debate on this particular bill. The government very much respects the job that the Crown counsel, the government lawyers, do for the people of British Columbia and the work that is entailed in all of that.

In respect to this situation, where we have had a mandate we've been working through of zero, zero and zero, I think it is important to again underscore the fact that we have actually had 81 negotiated settlements through the public sector of zero, zero and zero. That includes judges and doctors and nurses — the whole spectrum. I think it's approximately a quarter of a million people who've been affected through this.

The situation, of course.... As the province is starting to turn today and become much stronger economically, we feel we're in a situation of going forward. That's why, in looking at this, I think it's important, as others have mentioned, in regard to the history of the past and in respect to labour relations.... Yeah, there have been some real difficult decisions that have been made. In spite of that, though, we've actually seen, if you do it in a comparative sense.... The last year of the former administration, the year 2000, saw 80 strikes in British Columbia. In 2002 there were 18 strikes; in 2003 there were eight strikes.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. G. Bruce: I know that the Leader of the Opposition may not like those statistics. But, in fact, when you look through labour relations in the province during the last three, four years.... In historical terms, they have actually been the most peaceful labour relations we've had in British Columbia. We've had some innovative and different ways of the private sector resolving issues.

[1710]

I just want to mention a couple of them, because the Leader of the Opposition brought them up. In regard to the ferry situation.... The ferries, after a

difficult period.... We ended up with an arbitration process that they went through, that both the company and the union agreed to, and came out with a seven-year contract and a whole different manner of operation in which we are seeing a much better ferry process and ferry service for the people of British Columbia going forward.

Yet although we are seeing a new development and a new way of running the ferries without the political interaction, the Leader of the Opposition and her party and her leader want to take us back to how it was or how it was going to be, given that they were to be government.

They would bring the whole political interference back into the running of the ferry system. I remind you of that fiasco, with hundreds of millions of dollars — I think it was \$500 million — of ferry fiasco in that respect.

We have a new way of delivering ferry service in the province. When we look at the forestry situation and the IWA, where this government, by request....

Interjection.

Hon. G. Bruce: I think we should talk about it. I think it's very, very important that we talk about it.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Hon. members, please direct your comments through the Chair.

Hon. G. Bruce: When we look at that situation, and given the incredible impact that would have been visited upon every community and every family in this province — every single family — it did take leadership. It did take intestinal fortitude by this government to stand up, when both parties had asked us to stand up, to develop a process that they both agreed to with an arbitrator that they both agreed to. In that respect, they went forward and came out with an agreement, albeit a difficult challenge in regard to the changes in the forestry agreement and also changes in the whole forestry issue. But there's a difference between following the crowd — as the former administration did, being controlled by labour — and providing some leadership and doing and undertaking difficult things.

That brings me to this situation. When you have a concern that's been expressed — and I understand that — and a situation where we are looking across the country.... They mention the fact of how we compare with Crown counsels across the country. I think it's instructive to take a look at that as well.

The current situation in British Columbia for starting in the Crown counsel was nearly \$50,000; it was \$49,782. With this award of 13 percent in 2006 for 2006-07, that will increase it to \$56,254. That also, in respect to the maximum range, takes us from \$123,000, or almost \$124,000, to \$139,966 — \$140,000.

When you compare that to the other areas in Canada — Alberta — that they were mentioning, that would see our minimum at \$56,000, where the minimum in Alberta is \$55,000.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. G. Bruce: That would see a maximum at \$140,000, with Alberta at \$124,000. That would show us, with the federal government, between \$56,000 in British Columbia and the federal government at \$53,000. The maximum of \$140,000 to the federal government would be higher, I grant you that, at \$147,000. Ontario clearly is above us — I understand that — at \$66,000, and the high level is at \$172,000.

Vacation days, which I believe these people need.... In British Columbia they have 20 to 35 days off. In respect to Ontario, they have 15 to 30 days. Federal government has 15 to 30 days, and Alberta has 15 to 30 days.

Our Crown counsel does a good job. They have a slightly shorter work week of 35 hours compared to Ontario, which has 36¼; the federal government, which has 37½; and Alberta, which has 36¼.

Granted, what we are comparing in this instance is an award that's been made today, and we do not know at this point what it will be in regard to Ontario, the federal government and Alberta going forward. But I think it's important to note that on the basis of what we have worked through in government in attempting to get this province back on track, after virtually the most disastrous government in the history of this country — the former NDP administration — we've worked hard.

[1715]

These have been difficult situations to be placed in. We find ourselves in this situation here. In an effort to be fair and to be balanced to all people in this province who have worked under the zero-zero mandate, it was government's determination in this instance that the mandate would hold. In that particular aspect of things, it is zero for the first two years and an award of 13 percent for the final year — that being '06-07.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 21, the Crown Counsel Agreement Continuation Act.

Second reading of Bill 21 approved on the following division:

YEAS — 43

| | | |
|-------------|---------|----------|
| Coell | Les | Wong |
| Chong | Locke | McMahon |
| Christensen | Bell | Barisoff |
| Wilson | Bray | Thorpe |
| Murray | Hansen | Bond |
| Bruce | Brice | L. Reid |
| Abbott | Neufeld | Coleman |

| | | |
|------------|----------|------------|
| Anderson | Jarvis | Nuraney |
| R. Stewart | Hunter | Chutter |
| Mayencourt | Trumper | Johnston |
| Bennett | Belsey | Krueger |
| J. Reid | Stephens | Masi |
| Lekstrom | MacKay | K. Stewart |
| Whittred | Sultan | Hawes |
| | Kerr | |

NAYS — 4

| | | |
|------|-----------|------|
| Kwan | MacPhail | Brar |
| | Nettleton | |

[1720]

Hon. G. Bruce: I move that the bill be referred to committee for the next sitting after today.

Bill 21, Crown Counsel Agreement Continuation Act, read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration at the next sitting of the House after today.

Hon. G. Bruce: I call second reading of Bill 6.

BUDGET MEASURES IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2005

Hon. C. Hansen: I move that Bill 6 now be read a second time.

[1725]

Bill 6 amends several statutes to improve financial management and introduce changes related to Budget 2005. The Financial Administration Act is amended to clarify the definition of public money as it relates to moneys held or collected by a government corporation.

The act is also amended to improve accountability where ministers are responsible for agreements with other levels of government. At the moment, the chair of Treasury Board is required to approve all such agreements, even where there is very little money involved.

The South Moresby Implementation Account Act is amended to support the agreement made between the federal and provincial governments for the establishment of the South Moresby Park.

The Special Accounts Appropriation and Control Act is amended to provide for a new special account, called the production insurance account, effective April 1, 2005. This agreement provides funding to indemnify farmers for crop failures under the British Columbia crop insurance program. The act is also amended to eliminate the habitat conservation fund special account, which is no longer used.

The Wildlife Act is amended to improve governance of the habitat conservation trust fund. These amendments will ensure that the trust fund remains independent from government. Therefore, the Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection will

no longer be the trustee for this fund. Instead, a board composed of stakeholders with a variety of expertise will make the decisions as to where and when trust fund money should be spent. The new trustee will be bound to follow the directions of this board. This new governance structure will allow the habitat conservation trust fund to continue to provide funds to assist in maintaining healthy ecosystems and diverse populations of species that rely on those ecosystems.

The Budget Measures Implementation Act, 2005, also provides for two consequential amendments. One is the amendments to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which is amended as a result of the changes to the habitat conservation trust fund. Secondly, the Insurance for Crops Act is amended as a result of the new production insurance special account.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 6.

J. MacPhail: My remarks will be very brief, because, of course, we're debating a piece of legislation to deal with budget items that aren't legal. We're dealing with budget items to set up a crop insurance fund that isn't legal, because the budget hasn't been passed, and we're not going to be able to debate that budget line by line.

We're dealing with a governance structure on a fund that isn't legal until the budget is passed. We're dealing with the Special Accounts Appropriation and Control Act that deals with budget items that aren't legal yet, because the budget isn't passed, and the minister isn't going to pass the budget because he doesn't want to have scrutiny shone upon his budget line by line. In fact, when you do shine the light on their supplemental estimates, the ministers don't have any answers anyway and withhold information from this House. Minister after minister after minister comes to this House and refuses to give answers on even the supplemental estimates to the '04-05 budget.

Here we are debating a piece of legislation that is meaningless, given the government's other actions of running and hiding from a line-by-line budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: The question is second reading of Bill 6. The Minister of Finance closes debate.

Hon. C. Hansen: Just in closing debate, to follow up on the comments of the member for Vancouver-Hastings, I can assure this House and everyone that's watching the broadcast of the proceedings that we will ensure that everything to do with the budget is proceeded with in the legal manner. We will ensure that before any spending is undertaken in the coming fiscal year, it will be done with the full consent of the Legislative Assembly.

With that, I will move second reading of Bill 6.

Motion approved.

Hon. C. Hansen: I move that Bill 6 be referred to the Committee of the Whole House for the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill 6, Budget Measures Implementation Act, 2005, read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration at the next sitting of the House after today.

Hon. G. Bruce: I call Committee of Supply.

[1730]

Committee of Supply

The House in Committee of Supply; J. Weisbeck in the chair.

The committee met at 5:31 p.m.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF SMALL BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT *(continued)*

On vote 34(S-2): ministry operations, \$108,900,00
(continued).

J. Kwan: I'd like to focus in on the remaining aspect of these supplementary estimates. That would be the \$68 million, which I think has been reduced to \$66 million, in the Ministry of Small Business and Economic Development.

First of all, let me just say this, Mr. Chair. We are less than three months away from the election, and we're about to pass almost \$110 million in funding for the Ministry of Small Business and Economic Development. Here's what we know so far. Some \$66 million is to be allocated towards "enhancing economic development throughout British Columbia," and \$40 million is going to the B.C. Olympic Games secretariat, which my colleague from Vancouver-Hastings canvassed previously.

I'm going to focus in on the \$66 million for this set of debates. I should say that both of the amounts to be expended can in some ways, I suppose, be seen to be commendable in terms of gestures, and the opposition agrees with increased funding in these areas. Where we're challenged, of course, is the little information that's available around it. Perhaps we can try and shed some light on these dollars here today.

Let me ask the minister a fairly straightforward question. Can the minister provide a detailed breakdown of what economic development projects will benefit from this \$66 million increase in funding?

Hon. J. Les: I'm happy to provide that background information for the member opposite.

There was considerable discussion today around the now almost expired Canada-B.C. infrastructure program, which I'm sure that the member agrees has been a very successful program over the years. We should keep

in mind that almost \$800 million of capital infrastructure was provided by that fund and by that program.

However, over the course of time there was approximately \$2.7 billion worth of applications that were made to the several ministries involved in that program. In other words, we have a considerable backlog or overhang of projects that were never funded. This \$66 million will deal in part with that backlog, and we are processing applications as we speak to take advantage of this \$66 million.

[1735]

Specifically, what we're looking for.... These are, in the case of my ministry, non-green infrastructure projects. They are things like cultural and recreational facilities, infrastructures to support tourism, rural and remote telecommunications facilities, high-speed Internet access, local public institutions, local transportation infrastructure — to name just a few. I am sure that the member opposite is fairly familiar with these types of projects. As I said, we certainly have never had any shortage of projects like this to fund around the province.

J. Kwan: Let's be clear. Earlier today I canvassed with the Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services about spending in that ministry under the Canada infrastructure program. That is to deal with municipal infrastructure needs; 75 percent of that money went towards what's referred to as the green initiatives. That was clearly established, and 25 percent of that Canada infrastructure program was targeted towards community initiatives — what one might call soft infrastructure programs.

But the entire pot of dollars, which we debated earlier today, totals \$266 million and is with the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services. We're talking about something different here. I want to make sure that this \$66 million.... In the supplementary estimates (No. 10) document that was just handed out earlier, it actually states \$68.9 million. So the numbers actually differ from what I heard the minister say earlier in his opening statement. In his statement earlier today he said \$66 million.

First of all, let's clarify: which is the right amount here? I presume the printed document is the right amount — \$68.9 million. Are we correct? Let's start from there first.

Hon. J. Les: I'm happy to shed some light on that for the member. The \$68.9 million figure is composed of two components. One is the \$66 million that is going into the community development initiative, and the second is \$2.9 million to fund the western economic partnership agreement funding, which is a joint program with the federal government.

J. Kwan: Then let's focus on the \$66 million first. The \$66 million has nothing to do with the Canada infrastructure program. Isn't that correct?

Hon. J. Les: That's correct.

J. Kwan: Yet it funds what the minister calls community infrastructure programs that local governments demand and need. Is that not correct?

Hon. J. Les: That's also correct.

J. Kwan: If these are municipal infrastructure programs, why doesn't this \$66 million fall under the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, under the municipal infrastructure program? Why is it different, and what's different about it that the government deems it necessary to have two separate streams?

Hon. J. Les: Mr. Chairman, quite simply, what's different about this \$66 million is that it is not part of the Canada-B.C. infrastructure program arrangement. It is subject to no agreement with the federal government. It is entirely a discretionary fund that we have been able to come forward with as a result of the significant surplus that government has enjoyed this year.

However, as I've already pointed out, it is going to be funding the same kinds of projects that we have received many applications for over the years under the Canada-B.C. infrastructure program of the non-green variety.

J. Kwan: What's the approval process for this \$66 million infrastructure program?

[1740]

Hon. J. Les: The approval process, of course, is slightly different because there is no federal involvement with the distribution of the \$66 million. But the vetting process through the ministry staff is the same as it was previously for the CBCIP funding program. The projects are looked at in terms of completeness; in terms of whether the municipal and, in some cases, NGO partners have been able to arrange their funding; and of whether the projects can actually move forward. Once that process is complete, I am working with three other ministers of the government to do the final selection process.

J. Kwan: Which other three ministries and ministers of government participate in the final selection process?

Hon. J. Les: The Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services; the Minister of Agriculture; and the Minister of Water, Land, and Air Protection.

J. Kwan: Why those three?

Hon. J. Les: The three other members were basically randomly selected with no particular criteria in mind.

J. Kwan: How many of the projects have been committed out of this \$66 million?

Hon. J. Les: None.

J. Kwan: None of them have been committed? This is a new slush fund that the government has developed for this minister prior to the election. It's \$66 million to throw out the window to, I suppose, change the image of what this government is about. That's perhaps one of the aims here.

The Minister of Finance goes: "Oh, you can't commit it. The House has to approve it first. Sorry." This minister has actually just tabled a budget which the House is not even going to get a chance to debate, let alone approve. He has no problems whatsoever saying that all of those programs are out there for the world to see. And for this government to say what a great job they're doing....

But here in this secret slush fund — \$66 million — there are no programs, no projects that are identified for the public to see or to scrutinize where those monies go. Somehow the Minister of Finance says: "Well, we have to follow the process of making sure this vote is approved in the House." He doesn't have that problem with his budget he just tabled, because this government and this minister will not allow for line-by-line debate in that budget. What hypocrisy, Mr. Chair.

Let me get this clear. For this slush fund \$66 million has been set aside, and no projects have been approved as of yet. It is all behind closed doors as to who gets to approve those that involve ministers — this particular minister, the Minister of Small Business and Economic Development; the Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services; the Agriculture minister; and the Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection.

What role, if any, do the municipalities or NGOs who would be part of this program have to play in the decision-making process?

Hon. J. Les: Of course, the role of the municipal sector and NGOs is the same as it's always been. They make the applications, they consult with their communities, and they determine what their needs are. They've been making applications for many years, in some cases, for some of these projects. I don't think there's any surprise there. I'm sure the member is quite well acquainted with what that process is all about.

[1745]

J. Kwan: Formally, programs like this fall under what is called a municipal infrastructure initiative, and yes, the partners who are at play have a voice around that, especially local governments. The government deliberately took this amount of money out of the municipal infrastructure programs and into this slush fund — deliberately. Less than three months before the election, here we have \$66 million to be expended on projects yet to be announced by the minister and this government, projects selected by cabinet ministers — entirely political processes.

It is interesting to note that in the budget.... Under the municipal infrastructure grant side in the '04-05 budget, there was \$92 million for municipal infrastruc-

ture programs. For this year's budget it drops down to \$5 million, and then in the next two years after that, it drops down to zero. What the government is doing with that is taking what were normally the municipal infrastructure programs, which go through a process of selection that involves local government — away from that kind of approach — to a purely political approach within government, and decisions are to be made by the cabinet minister. That's what we have here with this slush fund.

Is it the case that the minister does not yet know which projects are going to be approved? Or is it the case that the projects that are to be announced have not yet been announced and that perhaps the government's just waiting for a time closer to the election — even closer than this — to make those announcements?

Hon. J. Les: First of all, directly to the question: the applications are in. As I outlined earlier, our staff are working on these applications to make sure that they're complete. Once the legislation authorizing the expenditures has been approved by the House, then the various announcements, presumably, can be made over time.

I would point out to the member as well, however, in response to a couple of other statements that she's made.... She refers to us taking this funding outside of a certain process that she's referring to. I don't think that is accurate. This is funding that's completely additional to and separate from any structure like the Canada-B.C. infrastructure program.

Also, as I think the member is aware, in the future it would appear that there will be an infrastructure agreement that we're going to be signing with the federal government. It's called the municipal-rural infrastructure program. I think the Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services made reference to it this morning as well. I think it's a bit less than accurate to suggest that infrastructure funding will be drying up in the several years ahead of us.

J. Kwan: Yeah, obviously this is separate from the municipal infrastructure program. This government is creating this fund for a slush fund, a pre-election slush fund, so that the government can go out and announce projects just a couple of months ahead of an election — all political decisions, absolutely behind closed doors.

If that's not true, then I challenge the government to be open and accountable about it. Put forward the projects that the government has on the list for consideration. Let the public deem and view these projects and evaluate them. Invite local governments to the table to make the decision around which projects should be approved. I'll put that challenge to the government, if it is not just a politicized process that the government has engaged in here less than three months before the election.

Obviously, this is different from the municipal infrastructure program, because this is the government's slush fund initiative less than three months before the

election. Actually, let me just hear the answer. Let me hear the answer to that challenge.

Interjection.

J. Kwan: The minister says: "What was the question?" The question was quite simple. There were cat-calls when I said that this is a slush fund and that this is a political process the government is engaged in. They said: "No, that's not true. This is very straightforward. It's municipal infrastructure."

Well, if that's the case, then be open and accountable. Let the public see. I challenge the government. Will the government let the public see what the applications are for this funding and then let municipalities have a role to play in this approval towards the \$66 million?

[1750]

Hon. J. Les: Every project that is going to be funded by this program will be publicly announced. I'm sure the various communities — and there will be quite a number of them around the province — that will receive funding for projects they have applied for will be delighted to receive this funding. I'm sure they will be delighted to share some significant part of the surplus budget situation that we enjoy today in British Columbia.

I was speaking just a few days ago to the president of the Union of B.C. Municipalities, and he, too, is delighted on behalf of his membership that we have set aside some significant additional funding to support municipal infrastructure of various types.

I'm not sure what problem it is exactly that the member opposite has, other than the fact, I guess, that we seem to be enjoying economic good times in British Columbia and that we're able to make this funding available to actually allow British Columbians to participate in the economic good times in the province.

J. Kwan: As I predicted, the minister would not take up the challenge.

They want to use this fund for their political gain. Oh, I won't dispute for a moment that local communities will welcome the dollars wherever they are to be spent. I won't dispute that. What I will dispute is the government's approach to dealing with this fund. There are questions around transparency, and there are questions around openness that this government campaigned on in the last election.

They claim that they're open, transparent and accountable, but when challenged to act in that way, they fail to meet the challenge. The minister just demonstrated that by refusing to take up my challenge to him to make available the list of projects that is under consideration and to allow for local governments to have a role to play in choosing the projects that would be approved for this \$66 million. Case in point, Mr. Chair.

On the question around the time line, the minister says that they're in that process right now and that they're engaging in trying to evaluate which ones are

complete and ready to go. What exactly is the time line to roll out this \$66 million?

Hon. J. Les: It's clear to the member opposite as well, I think, that we're debating supplementary estimates to the '04-05 budget. In keeping with that, this money will be expended before the end of the fiscal year.

J. Kwan: Indeed, to meet the electoral cycle. Of course. When was this funding identified to be available?

Hon. J. Les: Obviously, this funding will not be identified in a technical sense until this legislation passes the House. More generally, it has become clear over the last several months that there would be considerable surplus, but it was only very recently that Treasury Board made certain decisions setting aside this funding, for example, for this specific purpose.

[1755]

J. Kwan: Well then, yes, the timing is such that less than three months away from the election, Treasury Board — government — identifies a pot of money they must expend, and they want to throw the money out there. They want to put this money into a slush fund so that they can hand out pre-election goodies before the election. The people who will get to choose and select the approvals for these initiatives or these projects would be cabinet ministers and the entire political process along with that. Isn't that interesting? This is what the government is doing. By the minister's own admission, in terms of the time line that's laid out, that's what this government is doing.

I'm interested in knowing: what are the criteria for approval of this initiative?

Hon. J. Les: The criteria these various projects are evaluated under are such things as air and water quality, as was partially discussed this morning; energy efficiency; short-term and long-term job creation; economic and community development; communities-in-transition type of funding, where communities are looking to develop new infrastructure to support economic development; community safety improvements; and innovation and best practices. There are partnerships, sometimes, that can be engaged in — any number of criteria like that.

In addition to that, of course, we ensure that the communities have their part of the funding arrangement in place — whether that's a community approval process, whether they need a borrowing bylaw, whether they've gone through a counterpetition process. All of that needs to be completed before a grant becomes eligible for approval and announcement.

J. Kwan: I have a whole bunch of other questions around this area.

Noting the time, I move that the committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 5:57 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

The committee, having reported progress, was granted leave to sit again.

Hon. J. Les moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: The House stands adjourned until 2 p.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:59 p.m.