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6TH SESSION, 37TH PARLIAMENT

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THURSDAY, MARCH 3, 2005

The House met at 10:01 a.m.

Clerk of the House: Pursuant to standing orders, the House is advised of the unavoidable absence of Mr. Speaker.

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

Prayers.

Petitions

B. Lekstrom: Today I rise to submit a petition on behalf of the member for Skeena, the Minister of State for Forestry Operations, who is at home recovering right now. I know that all of us in this House and in our province wish him the best in his recovery.

[1005]

This petition reflects the hard and dedicated work of one of his constituents, Yvonne Nielsen — a person who, as a result of an automobile accident, is brain-injured herself. This petition calls on the government to put in place a card for people with disabilities that will allow them easier access to services for people with disabilities across the province, wherever they may live. This petition reflects the hard work and dedication of Yvonne. She has worked tirelessly over the past three years garnering support for this initiative, so that all of us can make life a little better for all of those people who live life on a daily basis with a disability.

V. Roddick: I seek leave to table a petition.

Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

V. Roddick: I am presenting a petition delivered to me by my constituents concerning the lack of overall agricultural bylaws in Delta South, which would include environmental greenhouse guidelines.

Orders of the Day

Hon. R. Coleman: I call continuation of budget debate.

Budget Debate (continued)

R. Stewart: I rise today to speak to the 2005-06 budget. This will be my last budget response during this, the thirty-seventh parliament of British Columbia. It has been my honour to have been able to serve my constituents in Coquitlam-Maillardville for the past four years. It is my hope that my constituents will reflect on the work that I've done on their behalf and the work that this government has done in the past four years, and that they will send me back to this House with the privilege of serving them for another four years.

I want to take the opportunity to thank some people who have worked with me during this time — my constituency office staff: Linda Kingsbury, Stephanie Nightingale and Vicki Collins. These individuals have worked very hard on behalf of countless constituents, and I've heard from a great many of those constituents about how dedicated and helpful my office and my staff have been to them. To them I offer my own deep gratitude for their service over the past four years.

I also want to acknowledge my family. This job is a very challenging job, and it takes members away from their families for long periods of time. My family has faced some of those challenges and other challenges as well. I want to thank my wife and my children for their constant support of me in the task that we have taken on as a family to represent Coquitlam-Maillardville in this House.

As I look back over the past four years, I'm actually amazed at how far we've come as a province. Four years ago B.C. was in last place in economic growth. Four years ago B.C. was in last place nationally in job growth. While the entire continent enjoyed a decade of almost unprecedented economic prosperity during the nineties, B.C. experienced what many economists refer to as a lost decade.

[1010]

We had seen a decade when B.C. had slipped — no, actually tumbled — from the most promising province in Canada to dead last in so many economic indicators. We had seen a decade of debt-building deficit budgets, including the infamous fudge-it budget upon which the NDP had been re-elected in 1996. We had seen a decade when investment had been driven from this province, when young people had been forced to leave the province for jobs and opportunity. We'd seen a decade of mismanagement, a decade when the only opportunities seemed to flow to government's friends and insiders.

The previous decade saw average aftertax take-home pay in British Columbia decline by \$1,700. That's the kind of change that we saw many people having to endure. I personally know of families who suffered greatly because of the challenges created by an economy that was completely going in the opposite direction from North America's economy, from government policies that seemed almost determined to drive away investment.

Like many of my colleagues, I was born in this province. In fact, I've lived my entire life in the riding I am honoured to represent today. My wife and I are raising our four children here in B.C., and like most parents, we want the very best for them.

As the nineties were drawing to a close, we had some important decisions to make for our family. Like all parents, I want our children to inherit a future of hope and prosperity rather than the legacy of debt that my generation had rung up because of the irresponsibility of the NDP government. B.C. is no doubt the best place on earth. Our children deserve to inherit a future of opportunity right here in this province.

When the people of B.C. entrusted to us the task of turning this province around, I knew that the task

would be enormous and difficult. Since then the people of B.C. have faced a large number of challenges from outside. We know that on September 11 of 2001 the economy of the world changed as the largest terrorist attack ever to strike North America was undertaken. As we were reeling from that, we faced challenges from BSE — mad cow disease; from a softwood lumber dispute that has dragged on with the United States; from SARS; from avian flu; from mountain pine beetle.

We had the worst forest fire season on record. I had the opportunity during that summer — two summers ago — to visit the devastation that was visited upon the people in Kelowna and the interior of this province. I got to see the resilience of the people there. I got to see the volunteer efforts that were undertaken to help so many people who were facing such loss.

There's no question that in the past four years we've had difficult decisions to make. As I said, I knew that the task we had undertaken would be difficult. The decisions we've had to take — and I preface that always with the fact that we had to take them — were difficult decisions in many cases. I acknowledge that I didn't want us to have to make some of those decisions.

Nonetheless, we had an enormous structural deficit to deal with. We had government structures that were completely unsustainable. Decisions had to be made so that the people of this province could rely on the government services they'd come to rely on, at the same time as we would ensure that we paid for them — that we didn't borrow the money from our children to pay for programs we wanted today.

I remember protests in that first year. I remember the throne speech day, for example, in 2002, when there were protestors outside — thousands of them — against some of the challenging decisions that we had had to take.

I compare that to throne speech 2005. On throne speech day 2005, just three or four weeks ago, there was another kind of protest outside, as construction workers, construction crews and construction equipment paraded down Government Street in support of this government's policies. I was heartened to be able to stand there among former colleagues from when I was in the construction industry and the development sector and realize that many of the changes that we've had to undertake, many of the challenging decisions we've had to undertake, have come back now and are finally paying dividends, with greater employment, with opportunity and with growth in our economy. I think that one throne speech day is a day I will long remember as we saw, as I say, a different kind of protest.

[1015]

I'm proud to say that we weathered all those storms we faced and that we kept to the plan that our Premier had laid out. Now, just three and a half years later, we are number one in Canada in job growth. We'll soon be number one in Canada in economic growth. We've added 180,000 new jobs since 2001, and B.C.'s unemployment rate is the lowest it has been since 1981.

We have made a commitment to truth in budgeting, and we have moved to ensure that all government

accounting is now done according to generally accepted accounting principles. That's an important thing to say: generally accepted accounting principles. In the past, those things haven't applied to government accounting the way they should, and we have instituted that. I think most people don't understand the significance of that — that we would apply generally accepted accounting principles to make certain that we have truth in budgeting and accounting.

We've instituted the largest personal income tax cut in B.C.'s history. This has put money back in the pockets of working people. Plus we can now boast that B.C. has a larger percentage of workers who are earning over \$16 an hour — more than anywhere else in Canada. Having made all of those contributions, this budget the Finance minister has tabled contains the largest surplus in provincial history. With that surplus comes the largest paydown of the provincial debt in our history.

Now, we're setting out on some very ambitious goals with this budget. We want to build the best system of support for people in need in all of Canada. We want to ensure that when the rest of the province moves forward with opportunity, seniors, children at risk and people with disabilities aren't left behind. We want to lead the world in the stewardship of our environment. We want to pursue economic growth in a sustainable manner that will leave resources intact for the generations to follow. We want to build on our economic successes to seize every opportunity before us and to continue to lead the country in job creation.

These are positive goals. This coming election, I hope, will be about the positive, about the future of this province. Sadly though, we've already seen some strong indication that some groups want this election to be about the negative. The opposition seems to want to make the election about vicious personal attack.

I saw some of that philosophy of vicious personal attack in the last session of this Legislature, when on March 24 the NDP made a vicious attack on myself and my family. They made an accusation here in the House, and they made similar comments outside the House. At the time I was in the hospital and unable to be in the House. Within a day the NDP had come to realize that their accusation was false, and on March 26 they bowed to pressure and withdrew the accusation and distributed an apology to the media.

They don't seem to want that apology on the record of this House. I have waited for almost a year now for any member of the NDP opposition to demonstrate the character to stand in this House and withdraw the comments in this chamber. The accusation was made here, and it should be withdrawn here. The NDP owed me an apology, to be sure, but they also owe an apology to this House. However, it doesn't seem that we're going to get one.

At the very least, I want the record of this House to reflect that the NDP withdrew their accusation, and it seems that the only way that will happen is if I put that on the record myself. I ask that the record show that on

March 26, 2004, the Leader of the Opposition said in a media interview: "I made a mistake in the allegations. Therefore, I am offering an unqualified apology to the MLA for Coquitlam-Maillardville."

Oddly, the Leader of the Opposition also said in the same interview that as a result of her party's attack: "I certainly hope British Columbians will not hold the institution of parliament in contempt." Therein lies my hope. My hope is that our democratic institutions can once again be viewed by the public as deserving their respect. My hope is that the calling of politics will become less vicious and less daunting so that good people will be able to consider running for political office as a valued calling.

[1020]

I applaud our Premier for the steps he's made to that end. I call on the opposition to turn away from the vicious personal attacks they've started and to return to the proper debate of public policy.

As I said a few minutes ago, though, it doesn't look like we're going to see that from the opposition in the coming election. So far, we've seen terribly negative ads that seem to play upon the fears of British Columbians and that I believe will put democratic institutions in a negative light in many people's minds.

I've heard from many of those people, who have already told me that the election, as it's being played out right now, doesn't look very good. I hope we can get back to public policy and away from that. I hope that for our communities, because there are so many good people in our communities.

I want to take a moment here and sincerely thank and acknowledge all of those people that dedicate the countless hours of volunteer time in sport, from coaches to other volunteers, and in school — the parents and volunteers that help make our schools as good as they are. We know that the contribution we can make to a child's life through volunteerism is immeasurable. As a parent I thank all of those volunteers.

There's one coach that I want to acknowledge particularly. His name is Domenic Mobilio. Many British Columbians would know Domenic because of his talent and skill on the soccer field playing with, among others, the 86ers. Former teammate Steve Millar describes Domenic as far and above the most natural goal scorer Canada has ever had. Steve talks about Domenic's pure magic in front of the net. Sadly, we lost Domenic suddenly this last fall. For most Coquitlam residents, Domenic was known as the head coach of Coquitlam City Soccer. Domenic was also a dedicated coach at Archbishop Carney Secondary School in Port Coquitlam. Yesterday, by coincidence, I introduced in this House a group of students that included one of Domenic's cousins.

I ask my colleagues to recognize the skill and commitment of an outstanding athlete and a dedicated coach and mentor. I know I join with all my colleagues in sending this assembly's heartfelt condolences to the Mobilio family as well as to all of those in our community and British Columbia's soccer community who

knew Domenic and the wonderful contribution he made.

In so doing, I also want to acknowledge thousands of other people across this province who make enormous contributions to their communities. I have spoken before in this House about the volunteer coaches that are essential to amateur sports. I truly believe that as we move forward toward the 2010 Olympics, we will come to recognize even more and more the tremendous contributions that volunteerism makes to our youth.

Of course, there are many other volunteers in our community, volunteers that make enormous contributions. One of these groups is our Scout leaders. As we have just celebrated world Scout movement founder Lord Baden-Powell a few days ago, I want to acknowledge the Scout leaders in our community. I had the pleasure of attending two ceremonies in my riding on February 22, Lord Baden-Powell's birthday. At both of those events I met many of the young Scouts of Coquitlam and some of their outstanding Scout leaders.

Scout leaders play a very important role in an organization that does a great deal in the development of boys and girls in our province. This year Maillardville will host a big celebration associated with Scouting in British Columbia, as 2005 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the francophone Scout movement in B.C.

It was in 1955 that Jean Lambert launched the francophone scouting movement in the heart of Maillardville, in the parish of Notre-Dame de Lourdes. In 1957 Suzanne Lambert founded the francophone Girl Guides, a group that integrated with the francophone Scouts a decade ago. I want to acknowledge the contribution that Jean and Suzanne Lambert and other early Scout leaders in my community have made to three generations of young people.

I want to also acknowledge one of my own Scout leaders in the francophone Scout movement who passed away on November 5. Fay Roset was born in Rosthern, Saskatchewan on December 30, 1937 and lived much of his life in Coquitlam. He was one of the Scout leaders I knew as I was growing up in Maillardville.

[1025]

I ask my colleagues to acknowledge Fay Roset, a former master of the fourth degree of the Knights of Columbus, a committed leader in the Première Maillardville Scout troop and a committed volunteer in many ways in his church and his community.

I was pleased to be able to host the Minister of Education as he came to our community about a week ago. He visited programs in school district 43, including Ranch Park Elementary and the CAB-A, which is the alternative education program run by the school district. We also toured Centennial high school and saw the improvements and the additions to that school and the seismic upgrading that's going on. We got a chance to meet with the school board; almost all of the trustees were there.

We also had a chance to meet with the district parent advisory committee and some of the PAC mem-

bers. I want to speak for a moment about the PAC members who were there and who met with our Education minister. These folks are, again, tireless volunteers that are committed to the education of young people and committed to the important contribution that they can make toward improving the success that we achieve with our outstanding school system.

The district parent advisory committee in Coquitlam is a leader in many ways, and I acknowledge all of those members of that group and all of the members of PAC groups across Coquitlam and, indeed, across this province.

I was able to host another minister a couple of weeks ago at Riverview Hospital. The Minister of State for Mental Health took a tour of that facility with me. I, of course, have toured it many times in the past, as it's a very large facility in my riding.

Yesterday I made a statement in this House about Riverview Hospital and about some of the challenges that we face as we try to evolve the delivery of mental health services in British Columbia. Riverview Hospital is almost 100 years old. The buildings we toured included buildings that were built in the twenties and thirties. Some of these buildings are incredibly antiquated. They do not have adequate services, they aren't seismically upgraded, and they are considered by some to have serious fire risks associated with them. They were built in a different decade, a much different era for mental health, back when Riverview was called an asylum.

Now mental health has changed a lot, and I'm proud that British Columbia has adopted a mental health strategy and that this government has moved us so far forward in the delivery of mental health services in British Columbia.

In the last election we actually saw NDP attack ads in my community newspaper on the issue of Riverview Hospital. One of the ads pretended to be a news clipping from 2003 — two years later — suggesting that we had by that point shut down Riverview Hospital, sold it to developers, booted all the people out on the street and left people with mental illness with no place to go. Well, of course, that's not the case. It has now become clear that our government is tackling the issue of mental health and addictions in a responsible manner like no other government in the history of the province.

What was the history of the province on this issue? Well, in the nineties we did boot some people out of Riverview Hospital. We sent some patients back to their communities without adequate support, and that's a really sad reality. It's a sad reality that the NDP attack ads against the Liberals at the time were actually very close to what the NDP had done with Riverview Hospital.

Most important is the patients. The patients of Riverview Hospital will come first and must come first. I'm proud that the Minister of State for Mental Health made that commitment again as we toured the facility.

This morning I received an e-mail from a British Columbian not from my riding, and I want to read portions of that e-mail now.

"I just wanted to thank you for your member's statement on mental health today. I just finished watching as much as I could of the Legislature on television. I cannot stand the hypocrisy of the NDP party, so I can only watch so much of it at a time. I was always very much against what went on at Riverview Hospital, and I appreciate that you reminded us all of that horrible decision and how those people were tossed out into the streets in the last decade. I appreciate the recent decisions of government that make mental health care more accessible. We do need to care for those who cannot care for themselves. That is our duty as a society."

[1030]

This person, whose name I will not put on the record, to preserve privacy, has stated a concern that many British Columbians share. I often get asked how many of our society's challenges with homelessness and addictions are the result of the decisions of the nineties that put mentally ill people back on the streets without adequate support.

We also had the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health visiting my community, and she was able to visit Dogwood Pavillion and Foyer Maillard, which is our senior citizens' centre. She even visited Chimo Pool. Chimo Pool has served my community for many years, and I am proud that our government has contributed \$2 million to the replacement of Chimo Pool with a more up-to-date facility that is also more environmentally friendly. I myself played water polo at Chimo Pool and worked as a lifeguard there for many years. The new facility that will be partly funded by our government will be very welcome in our community.

Education spending is raised in a great many formats and in a great many contexts as being really important, and I agree. We have done more for education as a government, I believe, than any government in the past. We have protected education spending, and now, of course, we're doing as we promised. We're increasing education spending. We've added \$150 million to education spending. We're ensuring that with these investments will come better results for students. We already have record high-school completion rates in the province, and we're going to continue to improve the results we get with education.

The same thing is contained in this budget on health care. We have added more money for health care than any government in the history of this province. I acknowledge that we still have challenges in health care. We inherited an enormous challenge with long waiting lists and a system that was not sustainable. I am proud of the work that we've done in the province, and I am particularly proud of the work that's been going on in Coquitlam and in the Tri-Cities on health care and health care delivery.

Now is the time to look ahead to 2010 and beyond at the golden decade that lies within our grasp. On May 17 the people of Coquitlam-Maillardville and the people of British Columbia will reflect on the record of this government in turning the province around, in instilling fiscal responsibility to protect future generations and in ensuring that our health care and educa-

tion systems are there to serve the people of this province.

I am certain that when they do, they will reject the fear and embrace the hope that lies ahead. They will turn away from the vicious personal attacks of the NDP and embrace a positive future for this province. I am saddened by the way in which the NDP wants to run the election, but I'm very proud of our record. I'm proud of the way in which we are going to go about convincing the people of British Columbia of the benefits that will come from the golden decade that's ahead. They will decide — those people in British Columbia and the people in my riding and elsewhere — that B.C. is back, and it must never go back.

D. Hayer: I have stood often in this House to speak of the success and accomplishments of this government under the leadership of our Premier, Gordon Campbell. Today I take special pride in what I'm about to say.

In less than four years we have seen the economy of this province soar from number ten to number one in our nation. We have seen a record-breaking housing boom and a remarkable return in investment, jobs and opportunity. We have seen thousands of people and hundreds of businesses come back to this province, all in less than four short years since this government took office.

Why is that, Mr. Speaker? It is because this government promised to get our financial house in order. It promised to kick-start the economy. It promised to take us from the have-not province to the national leader. When we were first elected in 2001, the economy was job one, and we have delivered. We have brought our economy back from the worst to the first in Canada. We now have the strongest economy.

[1035]

When we delivered our first budget back in 2001, we made it clear that while there may be some short-term pain, there would be long-term gain. The budget I am speaking to today makes it very clear that all British Columbians are benefiting from the long-term gains we promised.

One of those gains will be in health care in Surrey. When this government came to office in 2001, the province was spending \$9.5 billion on health care. Today that figure is \$11.8 billion. By the end of our three-year plan, it will increase to a record-setting \$13.3 billion for a total increase in annual spending of \$3.8 billion. That's 43 percent of the total budget. In other words, 43 cents of every dollar we spend goes into health care.

It sends a signal to all British Columbians that this government truly cares about our health care, understands the demands that all of us place on the system and is taking steps to cope with those demands. Those investments are being made at Surrey Memorial Hospital, all to alleviate the crowding and to improve services in our emergency ward, the busiest emergency centre in the province.

The crushes that are currently being faced by my hospital, Surrey Memorial, have been severely im-

acted by the huge growth in new residents and by the aging demographics of our population. That is why I was happy to hear the Premier call for the \$28 million surplus from Fraser health to be spent immediately on planning for and providing for an increase in capacity for Surrey's emergency ward.

I have said many times in this House that there is a need to expand not only the emergency ward but also the bed numbers in my hospital. Over the past four years I have met on many occasions with doctors, nurses, health care workers, union reps, patients and other individuals concerned about the Surrey Memorial Hospital; with the volunteers, the foundation board of directors, the president of Surrey Memorial Hospital Foundation — who do a great job for all of us at Surrey Memorial Hospital; and with the Fraser health authority, the Minister of Health and my fellow MLAs to talk about the pressing demands for expansion.

Therefore, I was very encouraged to hear the Minister of Health say last week that we are going to move forward rapidly and aggressively to address the pressures we face at Surrey Memorial Hospital. As well, this government has increased the funding of the Fraser health authority by \$200 million this year. That is a 16 percent increase.

Four years ago the South Fraser health region, which Surrey Memorial Hospital was part of at the time, was the most underfunded on a per-capita basis of any health authority at that time. It frustrates and angers me to hear the opposition complain and criticize our health care system and the situation at Surrey Memorial Hospital. They never moved forward with improvements to the health care system and to the Surrey Memorial Hospital in the decade they were in power. Now they are politicizing the efforts we are making to resolve the crisis in Surrey. Shame on them.

Construction began in December 2004 on the new 300-bed Abbotsford regional hospital and cancer centre. Not only will this serve the people of Abbotsford and the Fraser Valley, but it will lessen the pressure on the Surrey Memorial Hospital. This is a hospital the NDP failed to build in their decade in power and one they have tried to stop since the election of 2001. Why do they want those services cut? Nobody understands.

It is important to note that since Dr. Doug Cochrane, the chair of the B.C. patient safety task force, completed his review of the patient safety issues at Surrey Memorial Hospital in January, the 19 recommendations stemming from the report are in the process of being implemented. Some highlights of the progress made include: recruitment of additional health care professionals, including an obstetrician, a radiologist and additional nursing staff; plans for a short-term strategy to improve flow through the emergency department; clinic practice guidelines for intoxicated and head-injured patients; community nurses providing home care to post-natal women; giving additional education related to Caesarean wound assessment and incision care; and strategies to report post-operative maternity surgical infection identified in the community.

[1040]

Surrey Memorial Hospital is playing an important role in meeting the health care needs of Surrey. MRI scanners are being staffed and funded on an ongoing basis to operate at maximum capacity. Fraser health will perform 9,200 MRI scans in Surrey and at the Royal Columbian Hospital in 2004-05 — more than ever before. This makes an increase of 2,000 MRI scans from 2003-04. It is more than double the number performed in 2001-02.

Again, let's look at the big picture in health care. When we came into power, we found a health care system that was broke and simply not sustainable. Because we have made the system more efficient, more of those dollars than ever before will go directly to patient care. Building on improvements made since we came to office and the new investment in Surrey Memorial Hospital will help improve patient care in Surrey.

We are working hard to make sure we have the doctors and nurses we need. We have made changes to allow us to hire more than 600 additional nurses to practise in B.C. this year. Over the past four years we have added more than 2,100 seats in total to training spaces for nurses — a 50 percent increase and 25 times the amount added during the 1990s when the NDP was in power. Our universities are set to graduate almost twice as many doctors by 2009. The most recent statistics show that the number of surgical procedures increased by 8 percent. That's 68,000 more surgeries since we came to office.

I'd like to thank the working men and women and the volunteers at the Surrey Memorial Hospital. Day in and day out, they are delivering important services for people in need, and they are doing it in a professional manner. There are challenges, but by hard work from everyone and working together, we are going to get there.

The NDP also didn't recognize the power of a strong economy and what it can do to accomplish all the things that British Columbians want and need. The decisions we have made to make the economy as strong as it is today are what make the budget so powerful. There is simply not enough time here today to talk about all the positive aspects of Budget 2005.

As a member of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, I spent a large part of last year touring the province talking to and listening to British Columbians from all walks of life who told us what they wanted in this budget and how they wanted the government to invest the surpluses. We listened to them, and we passed on their recommendations to the Minister of Finance. This budget reflects the priorities of all those people we met, all those people who wrote and e-mailed us, all those people who made an effort to become part of this budget and part of forming the future of this wonderful province of ours.

There are many, many positives in this budget. I will try to touch on just some of the highlights that will benefit my constituents in Surrey-Tynehead and will, in fact, benefit the constituents of all 79 ridings in this great and wonderful province of ours.

This budget, like all others that this government has presented in the past four years, is a plan that ensures long-term prosperity, long-term growth and long-term stability. This budget sets the course that families can bank on and that creates the climate for long-term job security and long-term business success. That course, particularly for my constituents, contains \$290 million in transportation infrastructure through the gateway project that will benefit Surrey-Tynehead.

We will see a new bridge cross the Fraser River on the freeway in the Port Kells area of Surrey and Surrey-Tynehead. We have four-laning of 176th Street from the border to Highway 1, the Trans-Canada freeway. We have widening of all parts of the freeway in my riding from 152nd Street to 168th Street and then continuing to Langley. Highway 10 from Delta to 176th Street in Cloverdale improves the interchanges and overpasses, especially at 160th Street and Highway 1. All of those projects will benefit the businesses, commuters and the residents of my riding, as they will benefit the entire economy of our province.

[1045]

Even better news is coming. Our Transportation minister is also working on twinning the Port Mann Bridge, improving all interchanges and overpasses on the Highway 1 freeway in Surrey-Tynehead, completion of the South and North Fraser perimeter road and widening the Highway 1 freeway all the way from Langley to Vancouver, helping to solve the worst traffic gridlock situation in the province.

Twinning of the bridge will reduce wasted time in traffic and reduce pollution for my constituents stuck in the traffic gridlock going to work and coming back home to their families. It will improve gridlocked commercial and tourist traffic, faster and more efficiently — more investment in our transportation infrastructure. Therefore, the commuters will be able to move faster, as will the commercial vehicles, while at the same time decreasing the pollution in the air. It will save the economy of this province more than \$1.5 billion a year. That is forward-thinking and long-term planning.

Another example of long-term planning in decisions by this government is committing substantial funding to combat crime. Municipalities will now receive 100 percent of the fine revenue to assist the fight against crime. Surrey, in fact, has already taken advantage of the \$3.5 million in fine revenue by announcing a safety-oriented budget which will see 41 new police officers, 50 auxiliary officers and 28 RCMP staff members hired.

In addition, in communities across B.C., 215 more RCMP officers will be added this year as part of the crime-fighting strategy. That will see an additional \$122 million invested in policing, corrections and courts over the next three years. Add to that the new safe street legislation, and we have gone a long way in just a short few years in the battle against crime, something the people of Surrey really welcome and appreciate.

This budget, as a member of the press gallery said in his newspaper column recently, is a budget that will

stand up well. It is a budget based on a strong economy, something that was sadly lacking in this province until 2001. This budget, because we now have a strong, vibrant and dynamic economy, provides almost half a billion dollars in tax relief to low- and middle income people who need it the most.

In fact, in an unprecedented move, people in British Columbia who earn less than \$16,000 a year — those who are most in need — will now pay absolutely no provincial income tax, no B.C. income tax, at all. That is hard to argue with. Those people will now be able to put a little more food on the table or perhaps indulge in a luxury or two that they couldn't afford before, all because we have got the province's finances under control and have made the economy strong again.

We can now afford to share with people all those benefits that come from a strong economy, from those difficult but prudent decisions and good financial management. We can now share the success we achieved over the last four years, because of the state of the economy today. When we entered government, we were facing a structural deficit of almost \$4 billion.

Today we are able to do a remarkable thing: we are able to pay down the province's long-term debt by \$1.7 billion — the largest one-time down payment in British Columbia's history — because this government is running its finances and planning its budget responsibly. That is why this government can now begin to pay off its mortgage.

This year the \$1.7 billion paydown is a huge step toward that goal and is one more step toward the debt-free legacy we can pass on to our future generations. Servicing our provincial debt consumes the fourth-largest portion of our budget, trailing only after health care, education and social services. This huge paydown will help that bottom line and will allow us to spend more money on the three significant services that our tax dollars would.

[1050]

Speaking of those services, I mentioned earlier this year the government's investment of a record \$3.8 billion in health care over the next three years. This budget also contains a \$4,000 increase in the threshold for the Medical Services Plan premium assistance program. This will reduce or eliminate MSP premiums for almost 215,000 British Columbians — particularly for seniors, couples and families.

To keep the economy rolling and to ensure our plan for job creation continues to provide opportunity, there are changes to the small business corporate tax threshold. This will mean more money available to small business operators, who provide 90 percent of the jobs in this province, incidentally. This incentive will mean that small business people will have more money to invest to grow their businesses, to create more jobs and to continue to grow our economy.

Economic growth is the key to our future, the key to opportunity for our young people. Without that growth, without economic stability and a plan for long-term stability — and that is articulated in this budget — our province could slip back into the economic dark

days we faced in the 1990s when the NDP was in power.

This government has a plan to ensure our future and the future of our children and grandchildren. Our plan has been the cause for this reawakening of the mining industry, creating jobs in our resource communities. We have changed our forest practices and are creating stability and growth and opportunities in an industry that has been battered by U.S. protectionism and devastated by wildfires and a horrific pine beetle epidemic.

On top of all that, in the past few years we have faced major floods, fires, BSE, a terrorist attack on 9/11 in the United States, avian flu, and we managed to live through the effects that SARS had on our citizens and our tourism economy. Our plan contains ways to overcome these impacts to our economy by creating new markets, a plan that moves away from the reliance on the United States as the major consumer of our products and resources.

I was recently appointed vice-chair of the Asian Economic Development Committee. We, with the support of our Premier, will be pursuing the vast, virtually untapped markets of Asia — China, India, Taiwan, Japan, Malaysia, Korea, Philippines and the many other countries across the Pacific that need and want our products. Over the next few years we will be building bridges to the world — to Asia, to Europe, to South America — to ensure that our economy grows and that opportunities continue to grow in this wonderful province of ours.

The bridges are two-way. They will be bringing immigrants to us as we ship goods over to them. That is why I'm so very happy to see within this budget an allocation of \$14.5 million going into the B.C. Skills Connect program, which will assist those immigrants to find work in their field of expertise.

You know that we hear over and over that something has to be done to help foreign-trained professionals find suitable work in this province, jobs that will put their skills and talents to work for themselves and for all of us. This funding allocation is going to make that a reality, and their contribution will be beneficial to all of us. But this budget has not forgotten our own home-grown skill development. This budget contains a huge investment in education — for kindergarten-to-grade-12, for post-secondary skills and trade training programs, for more seats and more options for university students.

We now have a limit on tuition increases, held now to the cost of living, and more funding opportunities for students from low-income families. This will make advanced education more accessible, more affordable for thousands of young people. It will help them create a future for themselves and their families. It will allow them to take full advantage of this golden decade that this budget introduces.

[1055]

Yes, as our newspaper columnist said: "This is a budget that will stand up well." This is a budget for our future. This is a budget that will lead us along the way

to the 2010 Olympics. This is a budget that will help the elderly, our seniors and our youth; help people most vulnerable, such as the disabled, the homeless and women seeking shelter from abuse; help those in need of health care; and help our economy stay strong and grow so that we can pay for all the services our growing population requires.

[H. Long in the chair.]

B. Penner: I want to thank my colleague for a good summary of some of the highlights in the provincial budget. It's true the budget contains yet again more money for health care, yet again more money for education, and yet again sets out key goals for our province to achieve as we strive for a golden decade looking into the future.

Certainly, what's happening in British Columbia stands in stark contrast to the dismal decade of the 1990s, when the rest of the developed world went through an almost unprecedented economic boom, yet sadly, that boom passed British Columbia by. It's interesting that at that time the NDP made all kinds of excuses. They said it was due to factors outside of their own control. Yet those same factors were applying to the rest of the world. Like I said, the rest of the world saw an incredible boom. Just look to the south of us — Washington State, Oregon, California. They were booming. Alberta was booming. Ontario was booming. British Columbia was standing on the sidelines and watching it all go by.

Now we're seeing the reverse happen. British Columbia is leading the rest of Canada in economic growth, leading the rest of Canada in terms of job creation, with almost 200,000 jobs since December 2001. We hear the NDP saying: "Well, you've had nothing to do with it. It's due to low interest rates." Those low interest rates apply around the globe as well. The western world is enjoying those low interest rates, yet British Columbia seems to be taking advantage of it more than other places — certainly more than Washington State, more than Oregon, maybe even more than California. Certainly we're catching up to Alberta in terms of our percentage growth in GDP. British Columbia is doing incredibly well, but the NDP refuses to acknowledge that there is something that you can do about it here at home to make a difference.

That's just my way of starting off by saying that there are many interesting, exciting components to the budget and things happening that affect the communities which I represent. From a Chilliwack-Kent perspective, I think one of the most interesting, exciting things we've heard about in the last few weeks is the announcement about the World Trade University and their plan to establish a campus at the former military base in Chilliwack and educate up to 600 students at a time from around the world, teaching them various aspects of international trade to help facilitate ongoing growth, not just in Canada but around the world and in countries that need extra development badly, countries that are still Third World status.

I've heard it said before, and I think I agree, that trade is aid. It's funny how the left wing so often are the very people that engage in protectionist rhetoric and say that we should not import products from those Third World countries that most desperately need to trade with us in order to advance their own economic standing.

This initiative to establish a World Trade University in Chilliwack will not just benefit Chilliwack and Canada. I think it stands to benefit developing countries around the world as we educate people here to go back to those countries and help those countries access world markets so that they can create job opportunities, economic activity and investment in their own countries.

That's not the only education-related initiative that's benefiting people in Chilliwack-Kent. We all know that last summer the Premier came to Chilliwack and made an announcement about an additional 1,700 spaces at the University College of the Fraser Valley. At the same time, he indicated the government's support for the idea of establishing a new campus, again at the former military base in Chilliwack, to help that college grow and utilize its full potential — maximize its potential. That's something that has really captured the imagination of people in Chilliwack.

It was a shock to our system ten years ago — almost exactly ten years ago — when the former Finance minister, now the Prime Minister, Paul Martin, stood up in Ottawa and announced that the base in Chilliwack would be closing. It came as a real blow, psychologically, but we've recovered. We've set ourselves a new goal and a new vision: to transform that closed military base into a world leader in educational opportunities. Poised as we are on the west coast here, near the Pacific gateway to the markets in Asia, I think there stands a huge opportunity before us to use that university campus, the college campus, as a launch pad to bridge the gulf across the Pacific and access world markets throughout Asia.

[1100]

Last summer I had the happy experience to make an announcement that the provincial government was supporting a request by the local school board in Chilliwack to acquire property and fund the construction of a new middle school to help accommodate our growing student population. I believe the Chilliwack school district is one of only five school districts in the province that's actually seeing some growth in student enrolment.

Overall in the province, of course, enrolment has been dropping. I think it's down something like 29,000 students in the last few years. Despite that, education funding continues to go up. I believe that per-student education funding, if you look at it on a per-student basis, is up around \$800 over the last couple of years — a very substantial increase.

I'm hoping that in the weeks and months ahead, this new middle school will start to take shape. I expressed my interest at the time of the announcement last summer and challenged the school district to set

the parameters for the construction of that building to include a geothermal heat source as a way of reducing ongoing operating costs and showing leadership in terms of environmental stewardship.

Just across the street from where the school site has been proposed is a new residential development being built by Van Maren Construction, a homegrown Chilliwack-based business. Well, last spring I was delighted when one of the principals of Van Maren Construction contacted me to see if I'd be interested to know that this housing project would be the first geothermally heated housing project in all of Chilliwack. Of course I was interested and went out and took a look at that project.

It's true. The project is well underway, and they have a heat exchange system accessing geothermal heat under the ground, which is being used not just to heat those houses but also to moderate the temperatures in the summer to help them stay cool — substantial energy savings and a projected payback time of about 11 years. So there's a business case to be made for doing things smarter and more efficiently. I'm hopeful that the new middle school that the Chilliwack school district is pursuing will include the same kind of technology to help lower maintenance costs and ongoing operating costs into the future.

Just a few moments ago I had a chance to speak to the Solicitor General, and he reminded me of a couple of things that have recently been announced just prior to the budget.

Traffic fines. We have not just met but exceeded our campaign commitment to return 75 percent of all traffic fines collected in various communities back to those communities. In fact, we're now going to make that 100 percent of all traffic fine revenue going back to communities, so that they can reinvest in local policing to try and make our streets and communities safer.

In addition, there is the bait car program. Last week we had the information out that in Chilliwack, we've seen a decrease of about 13 percent in auto theft since the bait car program was implemented. That's progress. There's a ways to go yet. In my view, property crime is still at unacceptable levels, but we're starting to see the right kind of trend. We need to continue pursuing imaginative programs such as the bait car program if we want to get a handle on property crime.

Another initiative that the Solicitor General announced not that long ago was an extra \$30 million, I believe, for 217 new police officers around the province. Putting more officers on the street means more eyes and ears looking for people who would try to break the law, and it increases our chances of apprehending those who choose to disregard the laws that the majority of us respect.

It was just a couple of years ago that our government promised to work in conjunction with the city of Chilliwack and the federal government, through a joint funding program, to finally build a new overpass in Chilliwack. I can remember that one of the very first speeches I gave here as a newly elected member in 1996 was about the desire of Chilliwack residents to

overcome that barrier of Highway 1, which divides our community.

There was this old cloverleaf overpass — I think it was one of the first cloverleaf overpasses built in the province, somewhere in the late 1950s — which was the main thoroughfare connecting Sardis to the downtown part of Chilliwack. What a bottleneck it was. It was dangerous. The lineups were getting longer every day, and it was contributing to air pollution as cars sat and idled in what sometimes appeared to be a vain attempt to get across that freeway.

Well, fast-forward a couple of years, and what a difference a change of government makes. When the former NDP Transportation minister, Harry Lali, scoffed at the suggestion that this should be a priority, we pursued it in government. The former Transportation minister sitting across from me, the member for Nanaimo-Parksville — I want to thank her for her support for this initiative, because it has made a huge difference in our community.

[1105]

Today there are now four lanes of traffic making their way across Highway 1. The bottleneck has been undone, and traffic flows much more freely. I think that psychologically, it's made a difference in people's view of the community as being more integrated. Before, there was this growing balkanization, and we're now connecting the gap crossing the divide.

Other highway improvements. We had the straightening of a couple of the curves, or at least the widening of the section through the S-curves near Bridal Falls. That was an area of Highway 1 where, I think, in just a five- or six-year period there were something like 60 accidents, two or three fatalities and an accident rate substantially above the provincial average per kilometre.

Since that construction work was completed last fall, I've heard many compliments. People say they no longer dread driving that stretch of highway, particularly at night or when they're alongside a major transport truck. Previously it was very intimidating to be going through the S-curves up against a transport truck in the dark when it was raining, because the lanes were narrow. They were substandard in width. The concrete barriers right beside, on either side of the highway, again created a psychological impression that you really had less room than perhaps you had. It made many people panic, and when people panic, they make bad decisions.

That's a substantial improvement. I believe that the total project cost was something in the order of \$6.9 million, shared jointly between the federal and provincial governments. Again, it's something that we put on the table — actually, the former Minister of Transportation put on the table — as a priority, and we got it done.

Another transportation improvement which is creative and imaginative in showing strong leadership involves the construction of the first modern roundabout on a numbered highway in all of British Columbia. Other places have done it, but as we saw in the econ-

omy in the 1990s, British Columbia fell behind. We're catching up. We're catching up not just in the economy but also in terms of transportation. We now have the first functioning, modern roundabout on a numbered highway in British Columbia, and it's right in Chilliwack-Kent.

Now, there certainly were naysayers who said that drivers in British Columbia could never possibly understand how to go around a roundabout, that this was something new and different, and that therefore it shouldn't be done. Well, with that kind of attitude, no wonder we fell behind in the 1990s. We have to embrace new ideas. We have to challenge ourselves to change when, after you look at it statistically and scientifically, you know it will lead to improvements. That's certainly what has happened.

Since that roundabout went into effect, I think in late November of 2004, I'm not aware of any accidents taking place. Previously accidents were taking place on a regular basis. There was broken glass visible at that intersection every time I went through there. Now the roundabout is operating. Traffic is actually having to slow down, which was the whole idea. Large trucks, too, are slowing down as they make their way through the roundabout. But they are still able to make their way through the roundabout, contrary to the predictions of some.

Local opposition to the idea was led by the owner of a corner store called the Popkum Market. I went back to that corner store two weeks ago and talked to the young fellow working there, who says that their business is up, that he loves the roundabout, and that their customers like the roundabout because they can get in and out of the store safely and they know they can get back on Highway 9 without waiting an inordinate amount of time looking for an opportunity to scoot in between speeding transport trucks.

That's progress. It made sense financially. It made sense in terms of human safety. It makes sense from a transportation perspective.

Moving more to the economic front, in Chilliwack we've been watching with great interest the construction of what I think was billed as the single biggest industrial investment in Chilliwack's history: a more than \$20 million project and a new flour-processing mill. I'll just refer to some notes I have about this project. I was in the mill the week they first started producing flour, just before Christmas.

This is a state-of-the-art flour-processing mill that will handle 250 tonnes per day, turning wheat into custom, high-quality flours in bulk and in bags and sold to commercial bakers, food processors and distributors in the lower mainland of British Columbia, with exports to customers in Pacific Rim countries. Again, it shows that in Chilliwack we do have access to the Asian markets, and that's providing a benefit to local residents.

[1110]

When I was there at the construction site back in December, I think there was something like 50 different workers crawling around that site. They have built a

40,000-square-foot facility that is state of the art. As this plant gets into regular operation, I'm guessing there will be something like 23 to 25 full-time jobs, with opportunity for growth. This mill is operated by Rogers Foods Ltd., which is a subsidiary of Nisshin Flour Milling Inc., one of the core companies of the Nisshin Seifun Group, the largest flour-milling company in Japan.

So what we have is a Japanese investment in Chilliwack that is creating jobs by processing, adding value to commodities such as wheat and then exporting those products back across the Pacific to the Asian Rim countries. It's about the Pacific gateway. It's about taking opportunities that await us around the world, if we have the initiative and the vision to go out there and pursue them.

Another change that's taken place in Chilliwack since the last election is, I think, the largest single private sector employer east of the Port Mann Bridge, and that's Stream International. It's a call centre with a high-tech twist. They provide support services for companies like Hewlett-Packard and Microsoft. When they first announced that they were going to build that facility in Chilliwack, they promised that at some point they'd have up to 600 employees at this call centre.

I have to acknowledge that I was a little bit skeptical that we would in fact see 600 jobs in one place, because that's a huge number. Well, today they employ 1,600 employees at that call centre. It is the single biggest private sector employer east of the Port Mann Bridge in British Columbia. That's progress. We don't want to go back to the dismal decade of the 1990s.

In recent days I had the opportunity to announce advancements in emergency response times for the B.C. Ambulance Service. I had a chance to visit the local ambulance station a couple of days ago. As a result of a \$3 million strategic investment on the part of the Ministry of Health and negotiations with the union representing the ambulance workers, we've been able to restructure their call-out schedule and their hours of work so that we'll actually have enhanced 24-hour coverage at nighttime for paramedics. That means more paramedics right in the station waiting for the call rather than staying at home waiting for their pager to go off and then having to get themselves down to the ambulance station, into the ambulance and off to help someone.

I have to say how impressed I was at the professionalism of the paramedics that I talked to. In fact, two of the gentlemen there were people that helped me about a year ago in my hour of distress, when they came and transported me to Chilliwack Hospital when I ruptured a disc in my lower back. They were very competent, capable and professional in handling my situation about a year ago, and they were again very competent and capable when I got a chance to speak with them a few days ago. It was a real honour.

I think a couple of other changes are worth noting from a Chilliwack perspective. You don't have to look too far to see signs of the growing economy in terms of new housing construction, new housing starts. Many young families are establishing a first home in Chilliwack.

wack. Then once they establish their first home, perhaps at a townhouse complex, you see them moving into a single-family residence, and often they may be caught by the property transfer tax threshold. We have raised that threshold to \$325,000, which means that most new homes in Chilliwack will be below that threshold. That's providing a real benefit to families as they're trying to accommodate their growing families in bigger homes.

[1115]

A couple of other tax initiatives in the budget that was presented a few weeks ago caught my attention. Something I've supported for quite a while is increasing the PST exemption on hybrid vehicles. What's a hybrid? Well, a hybrid is a car or truck that operates on a combination of a standard gasoline motor with an electric motor. It requires a large battery pack and enhanced electronics, and many of the vehicles — certainly the full hybrids such as the Toyota Prius and Ford Escape — have regenerative braking. When you come to a stop, instead of that kinetic energy being wasted and dissipated in the form of heat and burning off the brake pads and causing further air pollution by releasing that particulate matter into the air, it actually captures that kinetic energy and recharges the battery, putting it back into the battery so you can draw on that energy when you go to accelerate after stopping.

That's why full-hybrid vehicles like the Toyota Prius and the Ford Escape SUV actually have better gas mileage in the city in stop-and-go traffic than they do on the highway. It's a complete reversal of our expectation and what we're accustomed to thinking. They actually get better gas mileage operating in the city.

These vehicles promise huge reductions in emissions, because as they do come to a stop, they don't just idle. Instantly the processor on the car shuts down that gas motor and starts it up immediately when you need it. Typically, you can accelerate up to perhaps 50 kilometres an hour solely on the battery, before the gas motor has to kick in. That's why you get substantial gasoline savings but just as significantly, or even more so, substantial reductions in air pollution.

We've increased the PST exemption to \$2,000 to give people a greater incentive to go out and purchase these cleaner vehicles. Ontario's incentive is \$1,000. Again, we're showing leadership in Canada by offering twice the incentive as Ontario for people to go out and make wise choices for themselves and their friends, families and communities.

Well, that's not where we left it, because yesterday I joined many members of the Legislature here, the Premier of British Columbia and the Minister of Management Services — the member for New Westminster — in making the announcement that the province will be acquiring 356 hybrid vehicles over the next year to add to the government fleet. [Applause.] I thank the Minister for Management Services for leading that round of applause.

That is showing leadership. It's doing the right thing. It's showing that government can lead by example not just by offering individuals the tax incentive to

make those choices but also by directly using those vehicles in the government fleet and reducing our emissions and operating costs into the future. It's my hope that we'll be able to encourage greater use of these hybrids, even beyond what we announced yesterday.

I know that by tradition the Ministry of Forests often likes to get larger vehicles such as Jeep Cherokees, but it's worth noting that the Ford Escape, which is an SUV, is available in four-wheel-drive configuration in the hybrid mode. These vehicles offer substantial amounts of power. In fact, the immediate torque available from the battery is greater than with a six-cylinder engine, because that electric power is instantaneous. I think there are great opportunities to revolutionize your thinking, do something good for the environment and promote technological advancement at the same time.

Since we're talking about air quality and improving our standard of living, I can't miss the opportunity to mention that the B.C. government remains committed to opposing the Sumas 2 project. Our government has taken a leadership role in opposing that threat to the Fraser Valley airshed. In fact, I believe we've spent something in the order of \$1.3 million or \$1.4 million now engaging the fight in Washington State and with the National Energy Board here in Canada.

It was almost a year ago today that the National Energy Board of Canada rejected the power line application from the backers of Sumas 2, but unfortunately that's not where the matter stopped. Sumas 2 is seeking an appeal to Canada's Federal Court of Appeal, and the British Columbia government will be there. A number of people are actively involved as individual interveners. I know the member from Matsqui, the Minister of Forests, and myself have gotten involved personally as interveners. But in addition, of course, the province of British Columbia is involved. I believe we have two lawyers dedicated to that file, making sure that the Fraser Valley's interests are well protected and that we put up the best argument possible.

It is my goal, my commitment and my belief that we will be successful in opposing SE2's appeal. I think there are very good grounds upon which the National Energy Board made their decision, particularly considering the Canadian public interest. I'm confident that the Federal Court of Appeal will uphold that decision.

Just when that appeal will be held remains to be seen. No date yet has been set for the actual hearing. There has been some preliminary exchange of documents. Something comes across my desk at least once a week in that regard, but it is something we continue to monitor and the province remains committed to fighting.

[1120]

That pretty well summarizes some of the key highlights from a Chilliwack-Kent perspective. Let me just close by noting again that we are seeing progress. We are moving forward. People are returning to our community. In the late 1990s, there were people I knew personally who felt they didn't have the economic fu-

ture in British Columbia to warrant staying in the beautiful Fraser Valley, and they actually left. They voted with their feet and got up and left the province.

Today, according to Statistics Canada, that trend is reversed. Instead of British Columbia having a net outflow of migration to other provinces, we have reversed it to where it should be, which is a net migration into British Columbia. That again is people voting with their feet, and I think those results will be demonstrated on May 17.

H. Bloy: I'm very pleased and honoured to stand up here today and respond to the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker. You have heard many comments from my colleagues, and my colleague from Chilliwack-Kent just spoke on all the great and positive things that have come out in this budget.

There are a few things that I would like to add to their comments. What a change it has been since we've taken office. I remember the nineties when my... They weren't my constituents at the time, but friends and business associates, and we'd be together. We'd be having coffee, and we'd be talking about the economy. I can tell you that I never heard a positive word in the nineties about the economy in British Columbia.

I had friends that were moving to Washington State for better opportunities. I knew of businesses that were going to Alberta for better tax rates and for getting things done in an extremely fast manner. This was disappointing, you know, to see your friends leave the province.

My family didn't leave the province. They were still pretty young and at home, and they liked what I kind of provided for them. But when I watched lots of friends leave the province, that was bad. Our economic growth was so poor. Communities and families were struggling to make ends meet. Then things started to change. Things started to change in May of 2001 when we elected a new government in British Columbia led by our Premier.

Over the first few years we had to make tough choices. We made those choices. We had to get business back on track. We had to provide more money for health care and education. Government is about choice. The choice is: do you want fast ferries, or do you want better health care? Do you want to waste money on bailouts like Skeena Cellulose, or do you want to spend money on health care and education? Do you want to drive businesses and families out of British Columbia, or do you want people and businesses to do business in British Columbia?

Because of this government, I believe that government should not be in business. Government only sets the regulations and guidelines for business to do what they do best, and that's do business. I believe we have proven that over the past three and a half years. We have set the guidelines, we have lowered taxes, and we have allowed the atmosphere in business to be positive. They have shown their faith in us by the amount of business that has grown in British Columbia — the

197,000 new jobs, the influx of people to British Columbia.

This budget is right for British Columbia. It meets the needs and priorities of all British Columbians. Wherever I travel in this province — whether it's in my riding, constituents in the lower mainland or in northern British Columbia — they talk about the budget and how positive it is. The budget invests heavily in health care and education, which are the top priorities of my constituents.

One of the goals of our budget that's closest to my heart was to make B.C. the best-educated population in all of Canada. As most of you know, every year I give a kindergarten child in my riding a book. I go into each kindergarten class — there are 20-odd kindergarten classes — and talk about the thrill of when my children were learning how to read. I give them a book and a letter about literacy to take home to their parents.

They have some great questions. "Can I keep this book?" I say yes. They say: "Can I keep it forever?" Yes. Another child will say: "Can I write my name in it?" I say yes. We have to educate our children. This is what we're doing. As the children grow, reading and literacy are what will make them successful — but not just the child. It makes the whole population of British Columbia successful, and this is what I'm doing to support the Premier's Read On B.C. program.

[1125]

Our government recently announced another \$150,000 for education. That is a per-pupil funding of \$7,079 per student. This is the highest amount of dollars ever paid per student in the history of British Columbia. Our new funding will provide more textbooks and more opportunities for music programs and for special education needs, and basic access to many programs that schools may not have at the present time.

The two Ministers of Education have visited my riding on numerous occasions over the past three and a half years. They have taken a real interest in the riding of Burquitlam in the province to provide the best education possible.

In my riding is Simon Fraser University, the number one university in all of British Columbia — but I'm somewhat biased in that. We were growing up there. We have provided over \$372 million in additional funding to advanced education. This new funding will now fund all the seats that we announced. There are 25,000 new seats. This is funding for 6,200 new seats, providing higher education to the students of British Columbia. These new seats came about through meetings with my fellow colleagues and talking amongst ourselves, saying: "Parents are coming to us saying that their child can't get into university because they only have 78 percent or 81 percent or 85 percent." Some courses were 91 percent to get in.

So review was done, and it came up that any child who achieved 75 percent or more should have the ability to go to university. When the ministry worked it out, that came to 25,000 new seats. I'm proud to be part of the government that brought forward guaranteeing these 25,000 new seats and funding these seats, so

every student in the province who achieves a 75 per cent average will have the ability to go to university.

Another bright spot at Simon Fraser University is the Young Liberals up there. It is the second-largest club on campus. It outshines everybody up there. There's only one. There are some great people that work up there — Woosang Lee, Brock Stephson, Grandy Chu and my colleague's daughter Christina Stewart, who are active members of the Simon Fraser Young Liberals. I'm so proud to be associated with them and to have them in the riding.

In health care, we've increased the threshold for premium assistance by \$4,000 for everyone in B.C. This will benefit countless families in Burquitlam and will affect those most in need. That's one thing our government said: "We will be there to help those most in need." The budget for health care is projected to grow nearly \$13.3 billion in 2007-08, which is \$3.8 billion more than in 2001.

Health care wasn't always about money. Health care was about getting control of the health care system back, not by having it run by special interest groups out of the Premier's office and not by having 57 NDP-appointed health authorities all over the province all re-creating the wheel every day to re-create jobs for their friends and cronies and to do things. We came in and said that it has to be run by professionals. We reduced 57 health authorities down to six local health authorities and one provincewide health authority. We've given them the ability to go in, and we're starting to get control of the health care system.

There were so many things that went on in the health care system that you might shake your head at, but it was true. If you were a full-time-part-time position — I can't remember the technical word for it — you could choose your two days off. If it was Monday and Tuesday, those are the only two days you would work, and you'd be paid overtime from the first minute double time. So we had to get control. We had to be able to move staff within a hospital, and now we can do that. We are getting control of the hospitals.

Through the nineties there was never a mention of the shortage of nurses and doctors by the former government, yet in 1996 it was identified that we needed to increase the number of nurses. From 1996 to 2001, the number of nurses graduating in British Columbia declined every year. Every year there were fewer nurses graduating. We have now added, since we have come into government, over 2,000 new nursing spaces, and we've doubled the number of doctors trained in Canada.

[1130]

Our shortage of nurses and doctors in British Columbia is not unique to the lower mainland or to British Columbia. It's unique to all of North America. There is a shortage of doctors. I can tell you I have been working very hard with the Ministry of Health to get more foreign-trained doctors here. There is a blockage, and there's a lot of buck-passing outside of government about how we get these doctors in training, but I'm working.... We have some really highly qualified peo-

ple that I know are capable of practising in Canada, and I want to see them be able to practise.

In Pharmacare we have provided \$465 million. More and more people are getting Pharmacare for free because of the thresholds we've changed to allow that to happen.

We're also making the right choices on the tax front. We are making it easier for ordinary British Columbians across this province. In fact, 730,000 British Columbians will now pay less in income tax this year thanks to our government. We've reduced income taxes again. Most individuals who earn less than \$16,000 a year will pay no income tax, and people earning \$26,000 or less will pay considerably less income tax.

For ordinary Canadians or ordinary British Columbians, at \$85,000 or less.... We pay more dollars, per tax, than any other province in Canada. You know, this will provide concrete benefits to many people starting out in the business world, starting at jobs to support themselves and their families. It's something we can afford to do because we have properly managed the economy.

On top of the new tax relief in this budget, we've increased the threshold for MSP assistance by \$4,000. The MSP premium will help 215,000 British Columbians — those who need it the most — to have MSP for free. The tax reduction premium relief will cost \$480 million over the next three years, but it's something we can afford to do in the booming economy of this government. That \$480 million is going to be left in the pockets of British Columbians for them to spend how they want to spend it. It's not for government to tell them. They're going to go out and spend it how they want to do it for them and their families.

My constituents are excited about the property transfer tax and the increase in the vehicle surcharge thresholds and also about the increase in the hybrid cars my colleague from Chilliwack-Kent mentioned earlier — about the presentation made in front of the Legislature yesterday. Our government is committed to buying 350 hybrid, fuel-efficient vehicles over the next three years. Their tax benefit goes from \$1,000 to \$2,000 per vehicle.

My constituents are excited about the film tax credits. Many movies have been filmed at Simon Fraser University and other parts of my riding, including *The 6th Day* and *Antitrust*. These create good-paying jobs for my constituents, and we welcome them.

Of course, the improvements in the homeowner grant.... The economy has improved. Housing markets in my riding and across the province have been hot for a number of years now, and they continue. In the nineties we saw a lot of for-sale signs, but in this decade we see sold signs on them. We still see for-sale signs, but they always have "sold" written across them. That proves our economy is growing.

I would like to talk a little about some benefits brought to my riding by our fiscal prudence. Thanks to our government and sound management practices, we're able to put money in the communities of B.C. where it is needed. Some of the programs. East Bur-

naby Family Place received a \$6,500 grant. Direct access grants totalling \$89,000 for the parent advisory councils in my schools. Traffic fines are now being returned to each of the cities of Burnaby and Coquitlam.

[1135]

Community policing is working in our area. The Solicitor General set up PRIME, which is helping to fight crime. In my area, crime is down, and the police forces work quite cooperatively on the boundary of Burnaby and Coquitlam — that's North Road, which I call the joining of my two ridings — on fighting crime. Our crime rate is going down.

I would like to thank the many constituents who have brought their concerns and their compliments to me over the last three and a half years and the businesses that said we're doing this right. We are allowing them to do business by the rules and regulations we're setting. They say: "Keep up the good work. Keep going." I would like to thank the hundreds of visitors by ministries and the ministers that have come into the riding of Burquitlam.

My colleague from Coquitlam-Maillardville thanked the scouting movement, and I want to echo all the words he had to say about scouting. As many of you know, I'm still involved in scouting, and my colleague was involved as well. There are many great people. There are hundreds and hundreds of volunteers. I would like to thank them for their commitment to our youth in British Columbia. There's something about scouting.... I don't think I can ever say enough. Did you know that over 50 percent of the elected officials across Canada, at the provincial and federal levels, were involved in guiding and scouting in their youth? It shows the true leadership potential.

There are so many volunteer groups to thank that it's hard to start. There are Crossroads Hospice, Burnaby Hospice and St. Michael's Centre. There are service clubs like the Lions, the Rotary, the Kinsmen, the Optimists, the Special Olympics, the Fraser restorative justice society and Share Family and Community Services.

There are festivals: the Festival du Bois taking place this weekend; the Korean Heritage Festival, which will take place this July; the Scottish festival; the Golden Spike Days. There are Oakdale Heritage Society, Eastbourne Community Association, Burquitlam Community Association and hundreds and hundreds of other volunteer groups and volunteer associations that make British Columbia the best place on earth to live.

Mr. Speaker, I have brought millions of dollars into the riding of Burquitlam on behalf of my constituents, for many concerns and businesses. I can tell you that my most rewarding one was from the Ministry of Children and Family Development, where I was able to get \$50,000 for an after-school program at Mountain View Elementary School. This is my most personally rewarding.

Last March the group that was running it phoned and said they'd lost their funding and couldn't do it anymore. I worked with the principal of the school and with the parent committee and a number of parents.

We worked on this committee and wrote grant applications. We went out and were able to get the \$50,000. There have been many more dollars come in. The after-school program is just starting at Mountain View Elementary School.

I would like to thank my staff over the last three and a half years. They are Richard Gettle, who has gone on to bigger and better things and who worked for me pretty well from the beginning; Leslie Techy; Kevin Lee; and many other volunteers that have been there.

I have to thank my family: my wife, Anita, for encouraging me — I enjoy the job, and she says: "You can see it in his face when he goes out every morning" — and my children, Jeremy, Katie and Candice. Most of all I would like to thank my dad, who'll be 92 years old this May. He encourages me every day to get out there and keep speaking. It has been an honour to represent the citizens of Burquitlam.

When I come into this House, even after three and a half years, I'm still in awe when I walk in here, look around and think of this close group working to make British Columbia a better place to live. I'm truly humbled and honoured to be able to do this. I look forward to serving in the golden decade ahead and standing side by side with our Premier for the next four years.

Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Finance closes debate.

Hon. C. Hansen: It has now been 16 days since Budget 2005 was tabled in this Legislature. I must say that the feedback I've had from British Columbians in all parts of this province, in all age groups and in all strata of life, has been very, very satisfying.

[1140]

I think this budget has truly spoken to the vast majority of British Columbians, and I think part of it is because there is something in this budget for everyone. Everybody benefits from Budget 2005. You know, there has been lots of discussion of the benefits for individuals with low and modest incomes, because truly, there are big, significant advantages in this budget for those individuals. In fact, everybody in this province benefits from one key aspect of Budget 2005, and that is the record debt paydown we are able to do because of the sound economic situation our province is in today.

We are going to come in, this fiscal year, at least \$3.3 billion less in debt than we had forecast just one year ago. Think about what a difference that makes for individuals in this province. That saving in debt cost alone is \$125 million in the year ahead. Think of what you can buy for \$125 million. Well, think of the \$70 a month increase we've been able to do for individuals with disabilities in this province — the largest increase ever in monthly cheques to those people with disabilities and the first increase in ten years.

In fact, if you think back during the NDP years in this province, they had a very small increase one year — a very small increase in 1992, I think it was — but then there was nothing. There was no increase at all in

income assistance for people with disabilities. You know why? Because they couldn't afford it. Because they had destroyed the economic foundation of this province.

That's going to cost \$56 million next year, and you can add on top of that the increased funding — the largest increase in funding ever — for transition houses and programs for women and girls in this province facing abuse. That program is going to cost \$13 million next year.

Then add on top of that the significant increase in policing funding that the Solicitor General announced recently. That's the largest increase ever in the budget for policing in British Columbia, and that's going to cost \$44 million in the coming year. If you add those three things together, you still have \$12 million left over out of the \$125 million. That funds the largest increase in social housing in the history of this province.

Those are things we can do because we've built the solid foundation in this province. We've turned the economy around. We've got government spending under control. We can actually reduce debt-servicing costs so we can free up that money — not just next year but the year after, the year after and the year after that. Those are programs that actually make a big difference in people's lives.

We have been able to increase funding for health care. We've increased it by \$2.3 billion so far, and we've got another \$1.5 billion increase in the plan. For education, we're up by \$1.2 billion so far, and there's another \$800 million of increase in education funding in Budget 2005. Services for children increased by \$241 million. You know what? We can do these things because, finally, British Columbia can afford to do these things and offer these programs.

The very first day that we were in office as government, we brought in the largest tax reduction in B.C. history. We decreased personal income tax by a minimum of 25 percent for all British Columbians. In this latest budget, we were actually able to go further, reducing personal income tax for people with incomes of up to \$26,000 a year and totally eliminating provincial income tax for individuals earning up to \$16,000 a year. That one initiative alone is going to mean that individuals in British Columbia are going to keep \$120 million in their pockets next year that would not have been there otherwise.

Do you know who benefits probably more significantly than most people realize from that change? That's our seniors. The median income for senior households in British Columbia is about \$26,000 a year. If you consider what their per-person income would be in those households, they would benefit from that income tax change, so it means more money is going to be in their pockets to spend as they see fit.

If you look at our total income tax impact in British Columbia, it now means that for those earning up to about \$85,000 a year.... They'll be paying less personal income tax in British Columbia than they would in any other province in this country.

[1145]

The changes we've made to MSP premiums, the raising of the threshold for premium assistance, means that 215,000 individuals in British Columbia will benefit by paying less for their MSP premiums. Do you know who benefits significantly from that? It's our seniors, because they fit right into that income category. It means that a senior couple earning up to \$37,000 a year will now pay less for their MSP premiums, or in fact, zero. The change means an additional \$40 million will be kept in the pockets of British Columbians.

Budget 2005 really builds a solid foundation for the future. We've turned the corner on the bad economy of the 1990s. We actually hear from people who would like to turn the clock back, but what I hear from British Columbians is that they want to move forward. We've built that foundation. We have a golden decade ahead, and Budget 2005 is the foundation upon which we can build for that golden decade.

I move, seconded by the Premier of British Columbia, that the Speaker do now leave the chair for the House to go into Committee of Supply.

[1150]

Motion approved on the following division:

YEAS — 40

Falcon	Wong	Hawkins
McMahon	Sahota	Bell
Roddick	Cobb	Lee
Thorpe	Hagen	Murray
Plant	Hansen	Bruce
Brice	de Jong	Neufeld
Coleman	Penner	Orr
Nuraney	R. Stewart	Hunter
Mayencourt	Trumper	Johnston
Krueger	J. Reid	Bhullar
Hayer	Visser	Halsey-Brandt
K. Stewart	Bloy	Suffredine
Whittred	Sultan	Kerr
	Manhas	

NAYS — 3

MacPhail	Brar	Nettleton
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Hon. G. Bruce moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned until 2 o'clock today.

The House adjourned at 11:55 a.m.