



6th Session, 37th Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT OF  
DEBATES OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
(HANSARD)

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(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

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

**6TH SESSION, 37TH PARLIAMENT**

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Afternoon Sitting

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MONDAY, MARCH 7, 2005

The House met at 2:05 p.m.

### Tributes

#### DEATH OF RCMP OFFICERS IN ALBERTA

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Across the country today and for the last number of days, people have been aware of the loss that we felt as four RCMP officers lost their lives in the line of duty. Since last Thursday, all of us have been reminded of the great risks that are taken each day by our law enforcement personnel across this country.

British Columbians, like our fellow Canadians, are shocked and saddened by the tragedy that rocked the community of Mayerthorpe, Alberta. It reminds us that the RCMP are such an important part of our shared national identity. When an officer falls, it touches the heart of every Canadian. But when four officers fall in the line of duty, it wrenches our hearts. We mourn with their families, with their fellow officers, with their communities and with the citizens of the community that is directly involved.

We honour the memories and the service of four exceptional Canadians. RCMP Const. Brock Myrol, RCMP Const. Peter Schiemann, RCMP Const. Anthony Gordon and RCMP Const. Leo Johnston were four exceptional young men who had only just begun their roles as guardians of the ideals of justice, peace and freedom upon which our nation stands and about which we are all so proud.

On behalf of all British Columbians, I extend our sincere condolences and our heartfelt prayers to the families and their colleagues. I know these words are inadequate, but I offer them in the hope that our prayers may somehow ease the pain, if only a little.

I would also like to extend my personal sympathy to the family of Leo Johnston, 32 years old, married just three and a half months. He'd not even seen his own wedding pictures yet. Now his wife, Kelly, struggles with his loss. His twin brother, Const. Lee Johnston, serves on my security detail here in British Columbia. To have this tragedy strike someone with whom I work so closely saddens me. It also saddens, I know, all the members of this Legislature and people from our entire community.

These incidents are always so sudden. They're always so unexpected. They almost take us out of time, and we wonder to ourselves: how did this come about?

There are no words that can express the sorrow or the sense of loss that I feel or that we all feel for Lee and his family and his three colleagues. I can only offer my deepest sympathy and my profound thanks to all of the families who have supported their officers — our officers — and particularly to the Johnston family who have allowed two of their sons and encouraged two of their sons to serve in the RCMP.

There clearly are many questions that must be answered as a result of this tragedy. There must be lessons that we learn. There must be issues that we face together as Canadians. It's in facing those issues together as Canadians that we honour their service, we honour their professionalism, we honour their citizenship and we honour their commitment to Canada.

But in our rush to seek answers, let us never forget the human faces of this national tragedy. Let us not forget the people of Mayerthorpe as they struggle to overcome the shock of violence in their peaceful community. Let us not forget the families and friends who will forever carry the wounds of loss and sorrow in service to a country. Let us not forget the RCMP officers across Canada who face the same risks every single day and who, by the grace of God, are spared the same fate. Let us not forget the four young men of such potential, pride and promise, who have been taken from us too soon.

I would ask that the Legislature rise and recognize the four officers with a moment of silence.

[1410]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, hon. members. Please be seated.

**J. Kwan:** The opposition joins with the Premier and the government to also express our deepest condolences to the family and friends and, indeed, the community who lost these four RCMP officers as they worked and served the community. With this tragedy that took place, we are reminded that men and women each and every day in the course of their work perform tasks that may put themselves in harm's way. This is one of those tragic situations.

As the Premier mentioned, I do hope that we learn from this experience. I do hope that we can address concerns that might arise out of it. I do hope that in the future, we can work to improve our communities in terms of their safety and in terms of the men and women who put their lives at risk. We're reminded, of course, that these four young men, these four officers who lost their lives.... They, too, have families. They, too, have friends. They're taken away from us far too early in their journey in this world.

I hope that as they're listening, as they're watching from wherever they are, they give us the wisdom today to learn from their tragedy and for us to create and work towards better communities for all.

#### Introductions by Members

**K. Krueger:** One of the great privileges of working in this place is the number of highly energetic, intelligent and well-motivated young people we get to work with. One of them, my legislative assistant, Jeremy Walden, is with us today, as is his friend Darren Simpson, who is a graduate of the University of Victoria's hospitality management program presently working in Whistler and who has joined Jeremy to watch us in

question period. Would the House please make these young men welcome.

**K. Manhas:** I have the pleasure today to introduce to the House Mr. Bob Kissner. Bob is the executive director of the Focus Foundation of B.C. They run day programs in the lower mainland as well as two provincially accredited schools through the Whytecliff Education Centre.

Bob, through the Focus Foundation.... This is an extremely interesting, extremely positive project in British Columbia. We really are leading North America in this. They focus on at-risk students. All of their students exhibit severe conduct and behavioral disorders. Over half of them haven't attended public school for the last two years and have exhausted many of the social service resources. Their success is shown through accreditation audits that the Ministry of Education conducts. Their course completion is the same as public schools. Their attendance rates exceed 86 percent, and they have a huge amount of support through the head of the Premier's Technology Council, PricewaterhouseCoopers and others.

I think it's a fantastic program that the Ministry of Children and Family Development supports, and he's here to talk to us and make sure that we continue supporting that. I'm sure that we will. Would the House please make him welcome.

**Hon. C. Hansen:** Joining us in the gallery today are two individuals who serve in the Ministry of Finance. Andrea Buzbuzian is a policy analyst, and Sarah Drummond is a co-op student. They both work in the financial corporate sector policy branch of the ministry. I would ask the House to make them very welcome.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain has another introduction.

[1415]

**K. Manhas:** I'd just like to introduce two groups of people: Laurie Nobbs and his family from Liberty Homes, a great company and supporter in Port Coquitlam and the Tri-Cities, as well as Mr. Isidro Flores and his family from Concord Concrete. I've spoken about them in the past in this House. They're great contributors to our community. They will be coming up to Victoria shortly, and I just wanted to make sure they got welcomed.

**H. Long:** Mr. Speaker, last Friday night, on behalf of yourself and the Legislative Assembly, I attended the certificate presentation ceremony at Government House to recognize the Teachers Institute on Parliamentary Democracy, which was a resounding success. I'd like to recognize all the staff that made it possible. In particular, I would like to acknowledge Karen Aitken from public education and outreach for her dedication and professionalism in making sure that this event was so successful. It is through efforts of people like

Karen that the events of this nature are assured to be a success.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Mr. Speaker, our Olympians have returned home. The B.C. Special Olympics athletes returned from the 2005 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Nagano. They came home with 23 of Canada's 84 medals.

I know many members of the Legislature know our Special Olympians. But I think it's important to note that Kim Beck from Victoria earned two gold medals in snowshoeing; Corrie Carlile of North Vancouver had two silver medals in snowshoeing; Fred Collins of North Vancouver participated in alpine skiing; Michelle Lord of Mission had two gold medals and a bronze medal in speed skating; Alexandra Magee of Surrey had two gold medals in figure skating, singles and pairs; Ken MacLean of Vancouver had a silver medal in cross-country skiing; Tracy Mlesko of Kelowna had gold, silver and bronze medals in cross-country skiing; Maria Schmitke of Kelowna had three silver medals in cross-country skiing; Alexander Singh of Surrey had a silver medal and two bronze medals in speed skating; David Swartzman of Victoria had a silver medal in cross-country skiing; Marc Thériault of Delta had a gold medal and silver medals in figure skating, singles and pairs; and Meghan Williams of Courtenay had two silver medals in alpine skiing.

These are athletes. They are dedicated, they are committed, they are winners, and they are British Columbians. I hope we'll give them a hand.

**K. Krueger:** I wasn't sure she was going to make it, but I have another wonderful person who works with me. She was one of our legislative interns last year and now works with me up in Kamloops. I'd like the House to welcome Joanna Ellis back to the Legislature.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. members, in the gallery this afternoon are two special guests. Dominique Boutin, manager of the legislative dining room, is here today. With her is executive chef Brian Vickstrom. Brian is a fairly new addition to the Legislative Assembly. He is a 30-year veteran as a chef and has cooked all over the world. He is an Olympic gold medal winner for the Culinary Team Canada. As members know, his food is excellent. I would ask members to extend a warm welcome to Dominique and Brian.

### Introduction and First Reading of Bills

#### CIVIL FORFEITURE ACT

Hon. R. Coleman presented a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: a bill intituled Civil Forfeiture Act.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** I move that the bill be introduced and read a first time now.

Motion approved.

[1420]

**Hon. R. Coleman:** I'm pleased to introduce the Civil Forfeiture Act. Once enacted, this legislation will be an important element in our strategy to combat organized crime and protect British Columbians from being victimized. It will be separate from the criminal law and will allow us to go after property that's purchased as a result of unlawful activity, using the civil law process.

Families and businesses suffer substantial losses as a result of unlawful activity such as consumer fraud, credit card fraud, identity theft, pyramid schemes, telemarketing scams, drugs, etc. The motive for all these activities is profit and the unlawful accumulation of property and assets. Jurisdictions around the world and within Canada are already using forms of civil forfeiture to go after unlawfully obtained assets, including the provinces of Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta.

Under the Civil Forfeiture Act, cash or property acquired from an unlawful activity will be subject to forfeiture by a civil court order. The civil nature of the proceedings will allow us to rely on the civil standard of proof, the balance of probabilities, to determine which property is to be forfeited. Money recovered will be paid into a special account which will be used to prevent unlawful activities, remedy the effects of unlawful activities, compensate eligible victims of an unlawful activity that resulted in forfeiture, and for costs related to the administration of the act.

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

Bill 5 introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

THE JOHN HUSSEY FOUNDATION  
(CORPORATE RESTORATION) ACT, 2005

H. Long presented a bill intituled The John Hussey Foundation (Corporate Restoration) Act, 2005.

**H. Long:** I move the bill intituled The John Hussey Foundation (Corporate Restoration) Act, 2005, of which notice has been given on the order paper, be introduced and read a first time now.

Motion approved.

**H. Long:** I move that the bill be referred to the Select Standing Committee on Parliamentary Reform, Ethical Conduct, Standing Orders and Private Bills.

Bill Pr405 introduced, read a first time and referred to the Select Standing Committee on Parliamentary Reform, Ethical Conduct, Standing Orders and Private Bills.

BRITISH COLUMBIA WHARF  
OPERATORS' ASSOCIATION  
(CORPORATE RESTORATION) ACT, 2005

L. Mayencourt presented a bill intituled British Columbia Wharf Operators' Association (Corporate Restoration) Act, 2005.

**L. Mayencourt:** I move that a bill intituled British Columbia Wharf Operators' Association (Corporate Restoration) Act, 2005, of which notice has been given on the order paper, be introduced and now read a first time.

Motion approved.

**L. Mayencourt:** I move that the bill be referred to the Select Standing Committee on Parliamentary Reform, Ethical Conduct, Standing Orders and Private Bills.

Bill Pr403 introduced, read a first time and referred to the Select Standing Committee on Parliamentary Reform, Ethical Conduct, Standing Orders and Private Bills.

Statements  
(Standing Order 25B)

FUCHSIA RIBBON CAMPAIGN FOR  
SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH

**S. Orr:** You will notice today that some members of this assembly are wearing fuchsia ribbons. This marks the start of the Stop the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth Awareness Week. The fuchsia colour symbolizes efforts in preventing the sexual exploitation of children and youth, because it is a combination of red, for red-light districts, and purple, the provincial colour for violation prevention.

The Capital Region Action Team on Sexually Exploited Youth, fondly known as CRATSEY, is a wonderful organization that has been working on this issue for many years and has been very successful. One of the driving forces is Councillor Helen Hughes from the city of Victoria, who started with Dr. Richard Stanwick on this project. They got the ball rolling. Helen is a highly respected member of our community for her commitment to our youth.

We cannot begin to imagine the horror that a child has to endure when being sexually exploited at the hands of a molester. This happens every single day. We know it goes on, and we try to stop it. But it still continues.

I work with an organization called the Mary Manning Centre, and they deal only with children and youth who have been sexually assaulted. On a good month they always have a waiting list of up to 40 children. I have seen that list go up to 100 — some as young as five years old, and last year they had a two-year-old. This must stop. No child should have to wait

for help. This week, let us think about what more we can do for the most vulnerable of our society — our children.

#### PASSPORT TOURISM PROGRAM IN COQUITLAM

**H. Bloy:** I would like to announce that I have been reappointed an ambassador for the city of Coquitlam. As an ambassador for the city of Coquitlam, I'm proud to show off their passport. This passport highlights hundreds of activities that take place there — like the West Coast Chocolate Festival; Rotary's Amazing Race; Festival du Bois, which was held this past weekend; the Como Lake Festival; the fourth annual Korean Heritage Day Festival, which will be held on June 18; and the B.C. Highland Games.

[1425]

People can take these passports and have them stamped and win prizes from some great companies in Coquitlam — like Coquitlam Centre, Ikea, Go West, Best Western Coquitlam Inn and the Executive Plaza Hotel. This book tells you so much about what is going on in the city of Coquitlam.

I have given a passport to all the members in the House here, so when they visit Coquitlam they'll be able to enjoy the many benefits. I would like to thank Mayor Jon Kingsbury and his city council and especially tourism director Barb Stegemann, who was a driving force behind the Coquitlam passport program.

I invite my colleagues and all the citizens of British Columbia to come and visit Coquitlam.

#### OPENING OF U.S. BORDER TO CANADIAN BEEF

**W. Cobb:** Ranchers in Cariboo South were eagerly awaiting the reopening of the U.S. border, which was supposed to take place earlier this month. The USDA had finally agreed with the fact — the fact we in the Cariboo knew all along — that Canadian beef was absolutely safe for consumers on either side of the border. But hopes of an open border and the return to something resembling normal business have been destroyed once again by the forces of U.S. protectionism.

The first round of bad news came when an American judge gave the U.S. cattle industry interests seeking to keep our beef from being sold there.... The second letdown came when the U.S. Senate voted to overturn the USDA decision, ignoring the advice of their own animal health experts. An enormous blow was struck on our local ranchers. They were already struggling to keep their feet above water through this last 22 months of being locked out of their biggest cattle market. I'll admit that many of our local producers had grown weary after nearly two years of rumours of the border reopening. But neither the U.S. nor Canadian officials saw this latest disappointment coming.

Cariboo is ranching country. There are families throughout the region that have been raising cattle for generations. The sad truth is that the U.S. cattle pro-

ducers who are pushing this issue don't care one bit about British Columbia families. Instead, they cloak their trade protectionism in a guise of concern about food safety.

The USDA based their decision to let our beef into the U.S. on pure science — period. Canada and the U.S. have similar safeguards to protect human health, food safety and animal health. The fact is that the USDA would never consider clearing our beef if there was any risk. The USDA have said they will continue to work to ensure that science-based decision-making prevails, and we will continue to stand behind our ranchers.

Provincial and federal aid programs have already provided some breathing space for the industry. But more aid could be necessary if this closure continues to drag on. It's unacceptable when common sense and science are trumped by selfish, unfounded protectionism. Our ranchers shouldn't have to suffer because of ignorance and the greed of a handful of American producers.

**Mr. Speaker:** That concludes members' statements.

#### Oral Questions

##### DISABILITY BENEFITS INCREASE

**J. Kwan:** The millions of dollars wasted in the disability review will go down as one of the most mean-spirited policies this government pursued, and that's saying something. British Columbians aren't fooled by a last-minute increase in disability benefits.

Can the Minister of Human Resources explain how she can justify denying individuals who qualify as persons with a disability, living in group homes, the increase in benefits?

**Hon. S. Brice:** It is with a great deal of pride that I know the government went and seriously looked at the resources that persons with disabilities had and gave the largest increase ever in the history of this province. This government is working to build the strongest support system in the country for persons who are vulnerable and have disabilities.

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

[1430]

**J. Kwan:** The government made a big deal about this increase in a pre-election bid to try to erase the memory of their dismal and mean-spirited record. Last week the minister told this House that every individual on PWD is getting the \$70 increase. Families contacted the opposition immediately to say that wasn't true.

I have correspondence from a family, and I quote from it: "People who live in group homes are not receiving the additional \$70 per month. I know this because my son is one of these people who have been

designated PWD. Because of a serious relapse, he has been living in a White Rock group home for the last two years."

What is the Minister of Human Resources doing to ensure that these individuals living in group homes are seeing an increase to their benefits, as they were promised in this House last week?

**Hon. S. Brice:** Following up on the discussion that we had in this House, I gave a fulsome rendition of exactly how these are going to apply. I will certainly be dealing with my colleague in order to ensure that they get the best.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I have just simply got to put on the record here that this government has the best record of dealing with persons with disabilities. In fact, I'm going to just quote here from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, certainly a think tank that is supported by the opposition.

This is what they wrote in the year 2000: "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 the 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." In 2000.

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

**J. Kwan:** Just last week the minister on several occasions said that individuals with disabilities would actually get the \$70 increase. On one occasion she said — and I quote from *Hansard*: "Any adult individual who qualifies as a person with a disability is eligible for a \$70 increase." On another occasion she said: "Yes. As I stated, anyone receiving disability assistance is receiving the \$70."

The correspondence that I put on record.... The minister knows about the problem. Parents and families have contacted her with their concerns.

Again to the minister: will she take immediate action to ensure that every British Columbian living with disabilities benefits from the Premier's last-minute conversion to compassion — that they would actually get it before he changes his mind?

**Hon. S. Brice:** My office has always got an open door. We're always pleased to review individual cases. I would invite the member of the opposition to provide me with a copy of that correspondence.

#### SOCIAL WORKER POSITION IN McBRIDE

**J. Brar:** Last week I asked the Minister of Human Resources about service delivery changes at the office in McBride and if the social worker at that office had been cut. I was assured by the minister that the position remained and that there was no change.

If that is the case, can the minister explain why her staff is telling disabled clients that they have cut that position at McBride?

**J. MacPhail:** No wonder you don't want to debate estimates, you guys. No wonder.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please.

**Hon. S. Brice:** This issue was canvassed fully in debate, and I stand behind the remarks that were made. The individual circumstance that was raised was simply a matter of finding the appropriate individual to fill the position.

On this side of the House we are absolutely committed to providing the best programs for persons with disabilities, and there is no match from the record from the opposition.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Surrey–Panorama Ridge has a supplementary question.

**J. Brar:** British Columbians with disabilities deserve straight answers. The minister told this House and British Columbia that the social worker position at McBride had not been cut.

[1435]

I'm tabling a letter sent by the assistant deputy minister of this ministry, which clearly indicates that the service has been cut at the McBride office. Phone calls to the McBride office recently, just last Friday, confirmed that the social worker has been replaced by support staff with nothing more than a phone line and a fax machine.

Was the minister misleading this House when she stated that the McBride office had not lost its social worker, and will she commit now to reverse that decision?

**Hon. S. Brice:** There are no plans to reduce the service in McBride. The staff are working to find the appropriate person to fill that position.

Not only have we provided the best and biggest increase to persons with disabilities in the history of this province, we have also doubled the earnings exemption. We've invested millions of dollars in allowing these individuals the very best opportunity to get back into the workforce. This government has done more for persons with disabilities than any government in the history of this province.

#### EMERGENCY SERVICES PLAN FOR CHILDREN ON VANCOUVER ISLAND

**J. MacPhail:** Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the plans are for this Legislature, but this may be the last time that the Premier has an opportunity to answer one of my questions. He hasn't answered one this session, so I'm hoping he'll take the opportunity to answer this one.

The opposition has obtained the Vancouver Island health authority's pediatric contingency plan — a plan for looking after our children. Will the Premier confirm that the Vancouver Island health authority has directed staff at the Victoria General Hospital to take sick children out of emergency rooms and place them in hallways to make room for new patients coming into the emergency room? Last opportunity to answer one of my questions.

**Hon. S. Bond:** The Vancouver Island health authority has the best interests of the patients of Vancouver Island as part of their strategy. In fact, you know, Mr. Speaker, day after day after day we have sat and listened to the members opposite talk about problems that were evident during the decade that they were here in Victoria and simply did absolutely nothing about them.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Leader of the Opposition has a supplementary question.

**J. MacPhail:** It's shameful, how this government refuses to take responsibility. Updated February 2005, this is a pediatric contingency plan: "Over-census patients will also be placed in the hall." This is a directive from the VIHA administration. "All units are expected to do this when the ER is no longer able to accommodate and care for ER patients arriving at their triage." Children are being put in hallways.

Well, that's what the plan says. The only plan that this government has to deal with overcrowded emergency rooms is to fill halls with patients, including children, including babies. But wait. Help is on the way. Today we learn that the Vancouver Island health authority is dispatching smile teams to hospitals to make staff feel better when they put patients in halls. Let me quote. I quote.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Order, please. Hon. member, please put your question now.

**J. MacPhail:** I will, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Now, please. Now, please.

**J. MacPhail:** Can the Minister of Health explain the meaning behind this statement? "Smile teams will be travelling the Island with treats, bringing smiles to wards, units and facilities throughout the authority. If you're smiled on, you'll know it."

Are you sure they meant "smiled on," Minister of Health?

**Hon. S. Bond:** I am absolutely amazed that the member opposite stands up and undermines the work

of the health care professionals in this system day after day after day.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Order, please.

**Hon. S. Bond:** Mr. Speaker, every single day in this province the incredible health care professionals who work in this system make sure that British Columbians have the kind of care that they deserve. We're going to continue to make sure that happens in British Columbia.

[1440]

#### TECHNICIANS IN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

**P. Nettleton:** In the wake of this government's 15 percent across-the-board pay cut to Hospital Employees Union members, the casualties continue to mount. I have received a letter from David Neuman, an HVAC/refrigeration technician at Prince George Regional Hospital. He is one of over a thousand highly skilled employees who are now looking at leaving their current positions in favour of opportunities in the private sector.

My question is to the Minister of Health Services. Is the minister aware of the continued exodus of technicians and other skilled, vital help from B.C. health care? If so, what is she doing about it, or is this merely part of the plan?

**Hon. G. Bruce:** This government is very aware of all that's going on in that respect, and they're working with the parties. Of course, when it comes to a situation where you're cognizant of labour market needs — both competitively in the private sector and with the public sector — it's incumbent upon government to make sure that the needs are met, so the services can be provided for the people of British Columbia. To that end, we are doing that for all areas of British Columbia, and we have made sure in this particular instance that we have the people in the appropriate places.

#### GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

**E. Brenzinger:** Today my question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. B.C. is far below the national average for provincial budget contributions as a percentage of agriculture GDP. In 2004 B.C. contributions to agriculture were \$203 million on an ag-GDP of \$3.4 billion. That's \$338 million less than the Canadian average.

For the minister: why, in 2004, did rocky Newfoundland contribute the equivalent of 15 percent of agricultural GDP to the ag-food sector while B.C. contributed only 6 percent?

**Hon. J. van Dongen:** The agricultural industry in British Columbia has shown good growth in the last 25

years, showing growth in gross farm receipts every year except in 1982. We have a very diverse, very strong agricultural industry. Our budget in the past year was \$45 million.

As a result of BSE and avian influenza, our government topped up that budget with an additional \$41 million, making a total of well over \$80 million and also triggering significant federal dollars into the province for our cattlemen and poultry men.

#### COLLECTIVE BARGAINING FOR TEACHERS

**R. Masi:** Recently, the teachers union released an issue alert to all teachers, claiming the province was planning to restrict teachers' bargaining rights. The alert alleges that the Wright report threatens to restrict teacher bargaining rights more than any time since teachers formed associations. To the Minister of Labour: are you planning to restrict teachers' bargaining rights?

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please.

**Hon. G. Bruce:** Don Wright, a former Deputy Minister of Education and of Forests, both for this government and for the former administration, has undertaken a review of teacher bargaining in British Columbia. He has put together a very comprehensive report. At this point, it's to all of the parties.

I have met with two of the four parties so far, wanting to speak with them and get from them their impressions of the report. It is a difficult situation in that regardless of the political party in power during the course of the last 12 years, we've been unable to get a negotiated settlement. It's important that as we work through this process, we get all parties to work through and to come up with a new process, so we will find a way that we can get negotiated settlements.

Until the time that I've been able to meet with all the parties and bring forward a conclusion.... It's incumbent upon me to meet first with the parties before I start offering opinions.

[End of question period.]

[1445]

#### Tabling Documents

**J. Brar:** I seek leave to table a document. It's a January 2005 letter from the Assistant Deputy Minister of Human Resources confirming service delivery changes at the McBride office.

I also rise to reserve the right to raise a matter of privilege.

**Mr. Speaker:** We need leave to table the document.

Leave granted.

#### Introduction and First Reading of Bills

##### SUPPLY ACT (No. 1), 2005

Hon. C. Hansen presented a message from His Honour the Administrator: a bill intituled Supply Act (No. 1), 2005.

**Hon. C. Hansen:** I move that the bill be introduced and read a first time now.

Motion approved.

**Hon. C. Hansen:** This supply bill is introduced to provide supply for the continuation of government programs until the government's estimates for 2005-06 have been debated and voted upon in this assembly. The bill will provide interim supply for government operating expenses for the initial six months of the '05-06 fiscal year. This will allow time to debate and pass the estimates. This interim supply is required because existing voted appropriations will expire on March 31, 2005.

This bill will also provide interim supply for other financing requirements. This bill seeks supply for two-thirds of the year's financing transaction requirements for capital asset expenditures and loans and investments, and 100 percent of the year's financing transaction requirements for revenues collected for and transferred to other entities. This will allow time to debate these requirements. This interim supply is also required because existing voted appropriations will expire on March 31, 2005.

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

Bill 20 introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

#### Motions without Notice

##### APPOINTMENT OF SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PARLIAMENTARY REFORM, ETHICAL CONDUCT, STANDING ORDERS AND PRIVATE BILLS

**Hon. G. Bruce:** By leave I move:

[that the Select Standing Committee on Parliamentary Reform, Ethical Conduct, Standing Orders and Private Bills be comprised of the following Members: Mr. Lekstrom (Convener), Mmes. Orr, and Trumper, Messrs. Belsey, Bhullar, Bloy, Brar, Bray, Hunter, Johnston, Long, Sultan and Wilson.]

Leave granted.

Motion approved.

**Standing Order 81 Motion**ADOPTION OF  
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS SCHEDULE FOR  
MARCH 7 TO MARCH 10, 2005

**Hon. G. Bruce:** I rise pursuant to standing order 81.1(2). Mr. Speaker, in relation to government....

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Order, please.

Can we please have order while we hear what the minister has to say.

**Hon. G. Bruce:** In relation to government business before the House or on the orders of the day, I move to adopt the schedule which is in the hands of the Clerk and has been distributed to all members.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 81.1 (2) that the following schedule be adopted for the conclusion of House business for the week of March 7 to March 10, 2005:

Monday, March 7	2:45-4:00 4:00-9:00	Bill 19 Response to Throne Speech	Committee and 3rd Reading
Tuesday, March 8	10:00-10:45 10:45-11:45 2:45-5:50	Bill 20 — Interim Supply Response to Throne Speech Bill 20 — Interim Supply	2nd Reading  2nd Reading (completed)
Wednesday, March 9	2:45-6:00 6:30-9:00	Bill 20 — Interim Supply Bill 20 — Interim Supply	Committee  Committee
Thursday, March 10	10:00-12:00 2:45-5:45	Bill 20 — Interim Supply Bill 20 — Interim Supply	Committee  Committee and 3rd Reading

Unless previously completed, at the times and dates mentioned, the Speaker and the Chair of Committee of the Whole will forthwith put all necessary questions for the disposal of all the various stages of the business indicated without amendment or debate. Any divisions called on the second or third reading of the Bills, or the Address in Reply, may be taken in accordance with Standing Order 16 and all other divisions will be subject to the provisions of Practice Recommendation No. 1. Proceedings under this motion shall not be subject to the provisions of the Standing or Sessional Orders relating to times and days of sittings of the House.]

**J. MacPhail:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker. We are now about to shut down the House with the biggest interim supply that people have seen in this province, and the government is now going to limit debate on it. They passed this rule when they had a majority of 77 against two. They claimed that they were going to have the most open and transparent government. Now we see they're going to run and hide. They refuse to debate their legislation, they refuse to let us debate the estimates, and now they're going to ram through, with this sessional order...

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Order, please.

**J. MacPhail:** ...that was of their making...

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please.

**J. MacPhail:** ...in a few hours. It is shameful.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please.

Hon. member, would you state your point of order, please.

**J. MacPhail:** I say that this is completely wrong-headed. It is against any transparency in any Legislature in the parliamentary system. This government is now using it to deny anybody the opportunity to debate the estimates of the budget.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Order, please. Order, please.

**J. MacPhail:** The Legislature in a fixed sitting should finish April 18, not this week.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you. Order, please.

Hon. member, it is not a valid point of order. The question is adoption of this motion.

[1450]

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Order, please. If you wish to debate, please take it outside the chamber.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. member, you are out of order. There is no debate at this moment. If you wish to discuss it, please take it outside.

Motion approved on the following division:

[1455]

YEAS — 43

Falcon	Coell	Les
Wong	Chong	McMahon
Bell	van Dongen	Wilson
Bray	Cobb	Lee
Plant	Hansen	Bruce
Brice	Abbott	Coleman
Penner	Clark	Anderson

Jarvis	Orr	Hogg
Nuraney	Nebbeling	R. Stewart
Long	Mayencourt	Trumper
Johnston	Krueger	Masi
Bhullar	Hayer	Lekstrom
MacKay	Halsey-Brandt	Bloy
Suffredine	Hawes	Kerr
	Manhas	

NAYS — 5

Kwan	MacPhail	Brar
Brenzinger		Nettleton

### Orders of the Day

**Hon. G. Bruce:** I call committee on the Ministerial Accountability Bases, 2004-2005, Amendment Act, 2005.

### Committee of the Whole House

#### MINISTERIAL ACCOUNTABILITY BASES, 2004-2005, AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

The House in committee on Bill 19; J. Weisbeck in the chair.

The committee met at 2:59 p.m.

Sections 1 to 3 inclusive approved.

Title approved.

**Hon. C. Hansen:** I move that the committee rise and report the bill complete without amendment.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 3 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

### Report and Third Reading of Bills

Bill 19, Ministerial Accountability Bases, 2004-2005, Amendment Act, 2005, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

**Hon. M. Coell:** I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

### Introductions by Members

**Hon. M. Coell:** I have some guests from the Gulf Islands here, from Gulf Islands Secondary School. Mr.

Sokol is teacher and instructor, and five adults are accompanying him. Would the House please make them all welcome.

**Hon. G. Bruce:** I call response to the throne speech.

### Throne Speech Debate (continued)

**C. Clark:** I am honoured to be able to offer my comments on the throne speech today in the chamber. Unfortunately, my voice has deserted me today, which will probably be my last opportunity to speak in this chamber that I've loved so much, but I hope I'll get to the end of it.

I'm honoured to speak in this chamber because I have such a profound respect for the work that this Legislature does. I have a deep, deep love of politics. I love question period. I love debate. I love the people I've met. I even love the protestors. I love politics. I love the conviction that every single member of this Legislature brings to the debate that we have in this chamber and outside the chamber every day. The work that we do here is so important, and it has been just such a tremendous honour to be at the heart of the work this Legislature does.

I was raised in a family that held public service in the highest esteem. My father was a teacher, but he revered politics. To him it was the highest calling for any citizen to be able to serve in public office, whether it be municipal, provincial or federal. He believed, as I do, that politicians have it in their power to make a better society if we make good decisions. Equally, we have it in our power to diminish what could be a great society if we make the wrong ones. He was a public school teacher, and he knew that building a great society is a task for every single citizen. He also knew that policy-makers have a huge role to play in building that great society.

If we have broad economic policies that work, we can attract investment. We can create jobs. We can give hope to families and help them put food on the table, pay their mortgages, hold their marriages together and give them time to nurture and love their children because they're not worried about their finances every day. Or we can choose to send those jobs to other provinces for other families and other people's children.

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

We can support citizens who need help when they're going through tough times, or we can ignore them. If we support them, we can create a caring society where the least advantaged benefit just as much from our economy as those who are advantaged. If we ignore them, we risk creating a society where those who are lucky, those who were born with advantages, get an opportunity to thrive; and where those people who are mentally ill or mentally challenged or physically challenged or who have just never had a lucky

break struggle every day in a society that is so wealthy, people could not have imagined it 50 years ago.

[1505]

We can make choices today that will ensure our children have the same opportunities to succeed that we have, or we can burden them with years of debt that they will really never have a chance to pay off. We can care for the elderly in our society and ensure they have dignity to the very end of their lives, something we all want for ourselves and for our parents. We can give our children all of the knowledge they will need to compete anywhere in the world with the best and the brightest, on an even footing.

We can protect the rights of minorities from the tyranny of the majority, something that we must always be vigilant about in any society, if we want our children to inherit the rich democratic institutions we're working so hard to create. We can create a society where individual differences are not just tolerated but they're embraced and valued and recognized for what they are: the fabric of one of the richest societies anywhere on earth — a society where because we welcome differences, we live in a place that is so unimaginably rich with such a bright future.

We can give every child, while they're still in the womb, the best chance in life by educating their parents about how to make sure they're taken care of. We can support those families, once those children are born, with every resource available to strengthen them and to make sure that every family becomes a seamless safety net that protects children. We are blessed if we have children, and we should remember that for those of us who have children, even if we have only one, those aren't our only children. Every child in every community needs to be all of our children. That's how we will build strong communities.

Those were the values that my father instilled in me. He believed in those things because he was a public school teacher. He saw every day the impacts of government decisions on individual lives. He knew the ingredients that went into a successful child, and he knew how difficult sometimes the challenges were for families and children to overcome alone. He believed, as I do, that resilient, loving, safe families are the fundamental base for a caring society. He knew that government could not replace families, but he knew that families often have to rely on government to get through some tough times. That was what defined him as a B.C. Liberal through all of those years.

He ran as a candidate in three elections when he knew absolutely for certain that he would be defeated. He ran because he believed it was important to represent an alternative to British Columbia and to stand up for those values that he prized so highly as a public school teacher. My father taught me a lot. He taught me a lot, because I watched him do politics. I watched the politicians who came to our house and who would share dinner and talk about the next election campaign. But I learned mostly from my father because he was such a thoroughly decent individual. I learned from

watching him care so deeply for his students and for his family and for his friends and those around him.

It wasn't easy to be a Liberal in those days, but just like if you're a hockey player, you can't score from the bench. You can only win if you run for office. Even if you don't win, you sometimes can make a difference.

It was those diehard Liberals across British Columbia like my father who clung so stubbornly to the belief that there needed to be an alternative in British Columbia. It was those Liberals who forced the Social Credit Party to widen their tent in the 1970s and revitalize that party with new ideas. It was those Liberals who offered an alternative when the Social Credit Party finally veered off course under Bill Vander Zalm.

I want to salute those party diehards who strived to present an alternative vision through all those years. I think of stalwarts like party president Floyd Sully and former MLA Clive Tanner — they ran this party on guts, on sweat, but mostly on hope — and party stalwarts like Mike McDonald, who drove to every riding in this province trying to recruit candidates.

[1510]

Our party is full of people like Mike McDonald — it was then and it is today — people who truly believe that change is possible, people of principle who understand that you need to have a sense of core values that you will stand up for and represent no matter how difficult times are, people who also understand that you need to be pragmatic. We need to work with a broad range of people and make sure that British Columbia's free enterprise party represents the vast majority of British Columbia, not just a few.

I think of my colleagues in the Legislature like the member for Vancouver-Quilchena, who was the one staff person to the Liberal caucus in the 1970s. I think of the class of '91, people like the member from Richmond, the members for Vancouver-Langara, Langley, North Vancouver-Seymour. I think of Fred Gingell, a man who had nothing to gain by running for office. He became a giant in these corridors, and he will always be remembered by those who knew him. He will be loved by his friends and enemies alike. He will be loved because he brought so much intelligence and good humour, and he brought a sense of this place, a sense of profound respect for what we do here. He will be difficult to replace.

Those were a group of political pioneers in British Columbia, and they presented an alternative, a middle-road alternative that B.C. was hungry for. It is a narrow path in this province to try and govern from the centre. If we venture too far to the left or too far to the right, we will go over a precipitous cliff to disaster. W.A.C. Bennett walked that path carefully for almost all of his career. Bill Bennett walked that path carefully while he was Premier. It's easy to veer off course, but those two men who worked so hard for the vision of a great British Columbia were two men who, while they didn't always walk perfectly along the centre, worked hard to include all British Columbians in the vision for a great future.

The NDP's approach at election time this time, just like in every other election we've ever seen, will be to say they will be the ones that can chart the course for the centre. Remember Glen Clark said he would be the one to walk the path that W.A.C. Bennett walked. The fact is that when the NDP get into power, they don't walk through the centre; they make a desperate dash to the left. When they do that, British Columbia almost inevitably falls over the cliff. When they go over the cliff, they do things like fudge the budget. They spend more money than we've ever had. They kill jobs in every region of this province and in every industry. British Columbians in this next election will not forget the devastation that the NDP wrought on British Columbia when they promised to chart a middle course.

When Carole James says she wants to stand up for big taxes, big government and big bureaucracy, she also says she wants to stand up for the little guy. Well, you can't do both. If you want to stand up for the little guy, if you want to be on the side of the people of British Columbia, you have to leave some money in their pockets. You have to craft a government that's going to be small enough and nimble enough to respond to their needs. You have to be responsive and listen to what the people want.

Carole James's vision of British Columbia is a vision where our province will be run from the back rooms again by a government of people who are not interested in supporting the little guy. They aren't interested in being on the side of the people on main street. They aren't interested in supporting people in every industry, in every region of this province. They aren't interested in creating jobs. They aren't interested in creating a real budget surplus that we can invest in British Columbia.

They are interested in governing for their special interests. They are interested in making sure that the people who are back in the seat of power in British Columbia are not the voters but the special interests.

When this election rolls around, although I will not be a candidate, I will be working with every ounce of energy I can muster to make sure that this Premier and this government, which has made some tough decisions....

**K. Krueger:** And the member for Kamloops-North Thompson.

**C. Clark:** And the member for Kamloops-North Thompson, who heartily deserves to be re-elected....

[1515]

I look around at my colleagues in the Legislature, and I see 75 people who have decided to run for public office even though it's not always the best way to make yourself popular at home — people who decided to put their names on the ballot even though they knew that being a politician doesn't always bring credit to your family. They did it because they believe in public service, and they did it because they were disgusted with what had happened in our province over the last decade. They did it because they know their communi-

ties and they care about making a better life for the men and the women that live there. That's why they ran for office.

I see people in this chamber who work day and night to represent the concerns of their constituents. I see people like the member for Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain who has done more to bring benefits to that community than any MLA in a decade. I see people in this chamber who work privately and publicly every single day to try and make sure their communities are better places, people who put together ideas and bring together decision-makers and listen to the concerns they hear on the street and make sure those concerns are heard in the halls of power.

That is why the B.C. Liberal members are here in this chamber, because we care about making a better British Columbia. We care about making this a place again of hope and opportunity where every child can have the opportunity to go to university, where every child can hope they can get a job when they graduate from high school and where every grandparent can know that their grandchildren may be able to live in the same community where they grew up. That is what drew us to public office, and that is the great project that we've embarked on for these last four years. It's a project that is not yet finished. It's a project that we still need to continue.

It would be so easy to turn back the clock, to go back to the days where our economy was shrinking, where people were leaving, where British Columbia was literally the laughingstock of this nation. It would be so easy to go back to the days when forest workers were standing on the unemployment line in record numbers, where mines were closing in every community instead of opening, and where the high-tech industry was shrivelling up and leaving for a better climate. It would be easy to go back to that, but we cannot allow it to happen.

This government has charted a middle course. This government has stood up for the little guy. This government has done what people said was impossible. This government and this Premier have brought in a \$2 billion surplus. For the first time that many British Columbians can remember our province is in a position to invest in people again, to invest in communities and to make sure that people who are the least advantaged and the most vulnerable have what they need to be able to sometimes live through tough times.

We have the resources to build the best education system anywhere in the world. By the way, we already have the best education system anywhere in the world. Kids in British Columbia do better on international comparisons than any kids, anywhere in the world. Our kids do better in reading and mathematics. The only kids in the world that can challenge our kids on science are kids in Finland and Korea. Not bad for our education system. More kids are graduating from high school than ever before in British Columbia. More kids are getting scholarships than ever before.

We are making sure that our public education system is as accountable and transparent as it can possibly

be. We're asking school boards to publicly account for what they want to do and how they intend to improve, and then we hold them to those accountabilities. We make sure that they live up to the commitments they've made.

We've included parents in our education system in a way that was never done before here or anywhere in Canada. We've put parents and students at the centre of the agenda instead of special interest groups, and that shows in achievement. Instead of saying we're going to look at just how much money we put in...

[1520]

Now, we have put a lot more money into public education, but we would be wrong if we said: "Gee, we've put more money into education; therefore, the education system must be better." We have put more money into education, but that's not the only reason the education system is better. The education system is better because we are focused on achievement. We are focused on the needs of students and parents, not the needs of the special interests. We, for the first time, have tried to forge a relationship and share power with the people we are trying to benefit and serve in our public education system. That has shown itself in the results that we get.

I have no doubt that when this government is re-elected and when we are given the great task to carry on this project we've embarked on, our public education system will continue to get better. I have no doubt that when this government is re-elected for another four years on May 17, we will continue to build on the 25,000 new spaces at universities that we've promised and will deliver. We need to make sure that every young person in our province who has the ability and the willingness should be able to go and pursue a world-class post-secondary education in whatever field it is they want to pursue.

We have the obligation to ensure that our citizens have all of the opportunities we can provide them. We are such a rich society. To do anything less would be irresponsible. To do anything less would be a lot like what the NDP did. Less would mean that we were actually shrinking access to education, which is what the NDP did. To do anything less would mean that we underfund our universities, that we shut down opportunities, that we make it five years or six years to do a four-year degree.

To do anything less means that we would again be sending more students out of British Columbia to pursue a post-secondary education, when they should be doing it here — when they should have access to great universities like Simon Fraser, UBC, UNBC, UVic and now the great new university that will be in Kamloops, the great new university that will be in Kelowna, the great new universities across this province that our government is investing in and that we will continue to grow to make sure our citizens have every opportunity that a rich, wealthy, diverse and caring democratic society can provide.

My father, when he was alive, revelled in politics. He watched question period every day. He pored over

the newspapers. He sent me clippings. When I was living in France, he used to mail me these huge packets of clippings — mostly Vaughn Palmer's columns, so I can't say I was always well informed.

Unfortunately, my father died after I was nominated but before I got elected, so the task of helping me through my political life fell to my family. In my case, that was my mother, my brothers and my husband. My brothers in particular, I want to say, did a great deal to make this possible for me. They devoted themselves to helping me succeed. My oldest brother put aside his better instincts in every election and went and put up signs on election day, knocked on doors and asked people if they'd voted yet.

My other brother has devoted thousands and thousands of hours and so much deep emotion to helping me succeed. I think the hardest day for him was when I told him that I wasn't planning to run again. I'm grateful for that. It was he who persuaded Gordon Campbell that I would be a good candidate, and it was he that phoned me and said: "If you get a call from Gordon Campbell, you might want to think about being a candidate."

So I ran, and I was elected to represent Port Moody-Burnaby Mountain, and I learned the ropes in opposition. I think if you look back at the *Hansard* record on those days, you'll see that I struggled to make a speech, and I wasn't very quick on my feet. But I learned through this chamber, as I've seen so many members do, how to be a better politician.

[1525]

It was during those years that the Premier, in particular, helped me and encouraged me in my growth as a politician. I always had the sense that he believed I was capable of things I had no idea were possible for me. He always gave me tasks and I always said, "I don't think I can do that," but he made me do them. He's someone who knows how to build a team around him, and he knows how to find the unique talents in every single individual and give them something to do that will allow them to grow in those talents.

He's been a great leader of our province. He's been a great leader of our party, but he's been a great friend to me. I want to thank him very, very much for that. In those years we worked hard to hold the NDP to account, and we learned a lot in opposition. We weren't always perfect, but we did have a pretty good time. Those years were years that I think were marked by a great deal of good humour and camaraderie for us, the class of '96.

It was when we got into government that it really tested the bonds of my family. It was my husband, Mark, who made it possible for me to do this job. When I was invited to join cabinet and we had our son Hamish, it was Mark who travelled back and forth to Victoria every week — interrupted his work and spent three days here so that we could have dinner together every single night. It was Mark who emptied the rotten food out of the fridge and went shopping every night to make sure we had dinner to eat. It was Mark who allowed me to stand in the limelight while he stood in

the back and didn't take any credit for the incredible support that he's been.

It was difficult to have a baby in the Legislature. I was shocked at the amount of controversy it created. I have brought my son here. I put him in office space that had already been allocated for me, and I paid for his caregiver. It was the public sector unions, who say they support more women getting into politics, that were protesting outside my constituency office, saying I was ripping off taxpayers.

I do want to say to the member for Vancouver-Hastings, who is normally a voluminous voice in any debate and who normally jumps at any opportunity to make the government look bad.... I want to say thanks to her too, because during that entire debate, when many of her friends and supporters and colleagues were attacking me for bringing my child to work, she refused to take part in that debate. She refused because.... Although I disagree with her on almost every single imaginable issue, I agree with her that we need to get more women into politics, and you can't get more women into politics if you don't find ways to be flexible about families.

The other person that I need to thank is the Whip, because it was the Whip who made it possible for me to go home every night and have that dinner with my family. It was the Whip who would look at me in caucus meetings and send me a note saying: "What are you still doing here? Don't you have a son at home?" I have made many friends in this Legislature who have been great supporters of my family and my need to be able to spend time with them. Unfortunately, it hasn't been enough time, and that's why I need to leave.

Before I leave the topic of the member for Vancouver-Hastings, I do also want to say that my initial sense of her was one of deep suspicion and that it evolved to a sense of grudging respect for her. Now that I'm leaving and she's leaving, I feel free to have a sense of good-humoured camaraderie with her.

Her party will not be able to replace her. When you look at the slate of candidates they have presented, it is obvious they have no one running for them that will be even half the debater and half the warrior that she's been on her party's behalf. When they go into this election, they will lack a plan, they will lack a vision, and they will lack the vitality of the member for Vancouver-Hastings.

When they go into this election, they say they will have — get this — a seven-point plan for British Columbia, a seven-point plan to put us back on the right track. Do you know what that plan's going to say? It's going to say:

"(1) Trust us.

"(2) Forget the past.

"(3) Glen Clark — who was that, anyway?

"(4) Listen. MacPhail's leaving, but we've got lots more like her...."

Who knows how far they'll get with that.

[1530]

That party is totally bereft of ideas. It's a party that has never, ever done what it has said it's going to do.

Now they are a party that, when they go into this election, will be saying to British Columbians: "Hey, folks, let's turn back the clock. Let's go back to 2001. Let's go back to the good old days when British Columbia was the laughingstock of our nation, when British Columbia was losing people every single day to other provinces. Let's go back to a province that was seeing a huge shrink in its economy, even at a time when North America was undergoing the largest economic expansion in its history. Let's go back to the days when strikes and job action were an everyday occurrence. Let's go back to the days when it was harder and harder to get into university, when forest workers were standing in unemployment lines, when mines were closing, when young people had to leave their families and leave the proud province of British Columbia to find work."

My great-grandfather came to this province from Scotland. He left his family, his language, his farm — everything he knew — to come to British Columbia, because this was the land of hope and opportunity. When the NDP took that away from us, thousands of British Columbians were hurt. It has been this Premier and this party that have restored that sense of hope and opportunity.

When Jim Sinclair says he wants to go back to 2001, he's not just saying he wants to go back to the days of job losses and mine closures; he's saying he wants to go back to the days when we weren't able to boost disability payments by a record amount. He says he wants to go back to the days when we weren't able to provide lower Pharmacare and MSP payments for seniors who needed them. He says he wants to go back to the days when we couldn't afford to invest many new billions of dollars into our health care system. He wants to go back to the days when we didn't have a sense of hope and opportunity in British Columbia.

Mr. Speaker, I see that my time is up, so I want to close by saying this. I want to say that I have so tremendously enjoyed the opportunity to be a representative of my constituency. I'm deeply touched by the support they've shown me in the two successive elections I've been in.

I want to say that I will miss this place. I will miss politics. I will miss the hundreds of friends that I have worked shoulder to shoulder with. I've loved every minute of it. Other than being a mother, it has been the greatest privilege of my life to serve here. I hope that the MLAs who occupy this seat after me love this place just even half as much as I have.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** It's always a challenge to follow the member for Port Moody-Westwood. I think the member summed up beautifully, crystallized exactly the kind of chaos and mess that was left to this government to have to clean up again. I say "again" because this is the same thing that we saw in the early seventies, the last time prior to 1991 that the NDP government was, unfortunately, given an opportunity to govern. In three short years they left a trail of devastation that was not forgotten by British Columbians, fortunately.

It was many a long year before they were ever allowed to return to government, and that was only because people forgot. They forgot because one of the things the NDP like to do, as the member for Port Moody–Westwood pointed out, is to portray themselves as moderates. This is a new thing they trot out every time a new election is coming around. They'll trot out this idea that somehow they've changed, that they learned from all the lessons. They remember the devastation they wreaked on the province, and they're going to be different. They promise they're going to be moderate. They won't allow big labour to call the tune. They'll try and be independent. We've heard all that talk before.

In fact, I remember so clearly the commercials they ran on TV in 1991 showing their leader at the time sitting with a little piggy bank saying: "We will not spend one penny more than we take in." I know many members of this House remember that ad.

What happened, Mr. Speaker? What followed was year after year after year of deficits — every single year that that government was in, except for one. In that decade of deficits they managed to single-handedly double the provincial debt from just around \$17 billion to almost \$35 billion.

[1535]

The one year they had a surplus was as a result of one-time — clearly one-time — skyrocketing natural gas prices and some energy export sales to the United States, which was a unique and one-time kind of event. What did that government do? They cranked up their program spending, knowing that those were one-time revenues that would revert back to a much lower amount. That's not how that government managed things. They, of course, cranked up program spending and set us on the course of totally unsustainable spending yet again.

When we were elected, our Premier had a vision and he had a plan for British Columbia, and the plan was called a new era of hope and prosperity for British Columbia. That new era of hope and prosperity contained 201 specific commitments that we laid out before British Columbians, that we were going to systematically fulfil and move forward to ensure that we could lay a foundation again in British Columbia — a foundation for restoring confidence, a foundation for economic opportunity and a foundation for growth and prosperity.

Doing that would not be easy. We knew it was going to involve making difficult choices, but leadership really is about making difficult choices. That's why we have a Premier that's never been afraid to make difficult choices. When faced with the prospect of doing what is politically expedient or politically easy and doing what is more difficult but knowing it will benefit future generations much more tangibly, this Premier always goes for the decision that is going to benefit our children and our grandchildren.

As we started to implement that plan, it involved, as I mentioned, 201 specific commitments, many of which, of course, I won't try to cover. What I will do is

remind those in the listening audience of the key elements. Some of those key elements included a significant reduction in personal taxes, and we fulfilled that on our first day here in this House with a 25 percent personal income tax cut. We did that because we are a government whose philosophy fundamentally is that we believe we need to provide tax relief to the hard-working men and women of this province so that they have an opportunity to decide how those dollars should be spent — their money. There's no such thing as government money.

The NDP always talk about spending more government money. You know, at the end of the day it's not government's money; it's the taxpayers' money. It's the people that are working eight and nine hours a day, that are struggling to raise their families, feed their children, attend their local parent advisory committee meetings, be involved in the community, coach soccer. Those are the people that are making the contribution, and the work they do and the taxes they pay are something that we have to treat with the utmost respect. That's why the 25 percent tax cut was followed through.

Another commitment we made was to reduce the regulatory burden by 33 percent, or one-third, within our first three years. I was tasked by the Premier with heading up that challenge, prior to becoming Minister of Transportation. We methodically went through every single part of government, every ministry of government, every Crown corporation, and we had them count the number of regulations right across government. In the previous government the one area they led in, and they led unashamedly, was in the growth of red tape. There was no other province that came close to how they could add on that red tape and regulation.

We went across government, and we actually, for the first time ever, counted how many regulations we had in this province. We found we had 382,000 regulations. We said we would reduce those by a third, and I am pleased to say that we exceeded that commitment. We reduced the regulatory burden by 38 percent in the province.

That was the catalyst — reducing unnecessary regulation; reducing taxes; reducing corporate taxes to ensure that we were competitive for small business with our major trading partners, whether it's in Alberta or Washington State — that really kick-started the economy of British Columbia. It told the investment community that we were serious in British Columbia about bringing forward an economy that would start to work again, that they could have confidence in investing in that economy.

[1540]

The benefits of a powerful economy can be seen in our throne speech. The benefits of a fast-growing, private sector-driven economy can be seen, because you now have the proceeds of a growing economy that are directed to government — the proceeds that allow us to reinvest in health care, reinvest in educa-

tion, reinvest in post-secondary education. That is exactly what we have been doing in this government.

One of the things that I thought was so powerful coming out of that throne speech was the commitment the Premier and the government had made to invest \$76 million through to 2007 to expand diagnostic screening for every child in British Columbia — in hearing, in sight and in dental testing. It is so important for young parents and young families, particularly those of modest income, to know that they could have that screening done and paid for by the province — to ensure that they can become aware at a very early stage of whether there are any challenges their young child might face so that those can be dealt with as efficiently as possible.

The area of schooling, in K-to-12 education, is something I'm very proud of in this throne speech. I'm proud because I represent the fastest-growing community in the province, and that is Surrey. I represent Surrey-Cloverdale, one of seven ridings in the community of Surrey, a district that was shortchanged for a decade and beyond.

We were a growing school district with a growing student population. What happened was that the funding formula never recognized that. In the decade of the nineties, the lost decade, we had portables scattered throughout the length and breadth of our entire community, because our kids were jammed into our schools, with none of the foresight being made to build new schools.

What we did was move to a per-pupil funding formula so that dollars would follow students. For the fastest-growing student population in the province and in the largest school district in the province — bigger than Vancouver — that was very significant. Our grants to school boards will increase \$150 million in the coming year. That will be a total increase of over \$300 million since we were elected in 2001, in spite of the fact that the student population has declined by almost 30,000 students.

The opposition and their BCTF union friends will say: "Oh, they closed all these schools." Naturally, they forget to talk about the schools that are open, but let's just put that aside for a moment. They talk about all the schools that were closed, but I have not yet heard Carole James say she's going to reopen those schools. Why haven't we heard that? Why haven't we heard her jump to the tune of the BCTF and say: "Yes, our labour friends, as usual, are right, and we're going to reopen all those schools"? The reason is because they know they can't, and they won't, because it actually wouldn't be good public policy.

As usual, we made the difficult decisions to close schools where they had dramatic declines in population and to open schools in communities like Surrey that were seeing dramatic growth in student population. In my riding alone I have opened up three new schools in the last couple of years — in my riding alone. We've opened up over a dozen new schools in Surrey, with more to come in the coming years.

We have undertaken one of the most dramatic capital spending programs in K-to-12 education that we

have seen in many, many years. Last fall we provided an extra \$10 million for school textbooks. This is above and beyond the additional funding we provided — another \$10 million for school districts to purchase textbooks. That represents about 285,000 new textbooks that will now be available for students in our schools.

By '07-08 capital funding for B.C. schools will have increased by almost \$2 billion since 2001. We will have built or approved 29 new schools in British Columbia and expanded, renovated, replaced or seismically upgraded 245 new schools. That is one heck of a stark contrast to the kind of nonsense that you see coming out on BCTF ads, which are full of misinformation — flagrant, flat-out misinformation. They're outright lies, in fact, when they talk about a post-secondary education costing \$1 million. Then they candidly admit: "Well, we know it's nowhere near that figure, but we're just saying that."

[1545]

Actually, when you think about it, a teachers union ought to have a lot more responsibility and credibility than that. If they are to dare to profess to speak for young kids, which they don't... If they dare to profess that, they ought to at least have some passing resemblance to understanding what the truth really is.

Post-secondary. I want to touch on that for a moment, because the post-secondary field is something I am genuinely passionate about, possibly second only to the Premier of this province. That's why I'm pleased that the Premier and our government confirmed in the throne speech that we are undertaking the largest expansion of post-secondary seats ever in the history of British Columbia — 25,000 new seats by 2010. Those are in addition to the 6,000 new spaces created over the previous three years. Mr. Speaker, \$800 million will be invested in new capital in our post-secondary system.

What does that mean in Surrey? In Surrey we have a new SFU campus — a \$70 million investment with over 3,000 new students able to be educated right in Surrey to the benefit of our community. They won't have to travel to Simon Fraser University in Burnaby and won't have to travel to UBC. They can do it right in Surrey.

There's a new trades and technology campus opening in my riding in Cloverdale. It's a \$39 million investment that will have 1,000 new student spaces to help meet the growing demand a growing economy creates in terms of the desire for new students and trade spaces.

Our government will be increasing funding for advanced education by \$132 million over the next three years. We are limiting future tuition fee increases to the rate of inflation effective this September.

I do want to say this; I want to acknowledge this up front. There have been those that have said that not having a cap on tuition fees hurts students, and I want to address this head-on. I find it interesting that when the previous government put a so-called freeze on tuition fees, the one thing they forgot was to make up the difference to the universities. They did not increase the funding to universities to make up that inability for

them to collect any increases from the students. That created a disastrous situation in the post-secondary industry — a situation where they didn't have enough seats, not enough money to undertake capital expansion, not enough money to hire new professors. The result was that four-year degree programs were now taking five years and six years. Students were finding it was taking much longer to get through their education. Our commitment there, I think, is important.

The increases that have taken place in post-secondary have, in some ways, been a challenge for students. I think it's important to look at where our undergraduate tuition fee structure stands today. Where we stand is that our undergraduate tuition fees today are number five out of ten provinces. Where were they ten years ago? They were number five out of ten provinces.

I believe that the increases post-secondary education has undertaken are sufficient. Now they can move forward with a cap based on an allowance for inflation. That will provide some certainty to our students going forward. The post-secondary institutions will know that in addition to that we will be funding additional dollars to the post-secondary institutions.

I want to touch on policing for a moment, because that's also important in my community of Surrey. For too many years in British Columbia, governments at the local level, provincial level and federal level have ignored the importance of dealing with crime. Fortunately, we have a Solicitor General who understands that it's more than just words; it's actually action that is necessary to deal with some of the challenges of crime.

In the policing end we said to municipalities right across this province that we would turn over 100 percent of traffic fine revenues to municipalities. One of our 201 commitments that we made in our new-era plan for British Columbia was to turn over 75 percent, but we actually ended up turning over 100 percent. In Surrey that meant millions of new dollars available to invest in policing.

In the community of Surrey, under the leadership of Mayor Doug McCallum, we have seen a commitment of over 100 new police officers being added over the next three years, in part because of that commitment to turn over 100 percent of traffic fines.

[1550]

The throne speech also talked about the \$122 million in new funding to add 215 new police officers over the next three years. That's 215 new police officers with units dedicated to stopping the growth and expansion of Internet pornography, particularly with respect to children. It's a dedicated unit that will fight child pornography on the Internet, something that has been long overdue in this province and something that now will be combatted with the dedicated police force. Those 215 police officers will make a huge difference in British Columbia as we move forward in battling crime and criminals.

I want to touch briefly on health. I believe that health care is the biggest challenge going forward not just in British Columbia but for the country as a whole,

and how we deal with that challenge is going to be very important.

Frankly, the opposition likes to run down the health system and tries to create a crisis where no crisis exists. It tries to take isolated situations and turn them into a harbinger of something larger. I can tell you that health care is an area that all provinces are going to be challenged with, as we deal with an aging population and as we deal with a demographic shift that sees the challenges of a population that is aging and that requires greater resources in our health system.

I am proud to say this: in 2001 we committed in the *New Era* document that we would not make any reductions in health care spending. I am pleased to say that we have increased health care funding. It has increased since 2001 by over \$2 billion, and over the next three years it will go up by another \$1.5 billion. This represents an increase since 2001 of \$3.5 billion of new money into the health system, yet you will still hear the opposition talk about health care cuts. It is unbelievable to me that anyone could talk about a cut when you're talking about an increase of over \$3.5 billion, but they will still do that.

We have doubled the number of doctors being trained in British Columbia. Do you know that not a single new medical training space was added in British Columbia since 1980? In the decade of the nineties there was not one new training space for doctors. The previous NDP government actually cut the number of training spaces for nurses. It is absolutely unbelievable. That's probably because in their entire \$8 billion budget they didn't have a single employee in the Health ministry responsible for health planning. It boggles the mind.

Today, as I say, I can tell you that we have doubled the number of doctors in training with brand-new medical schools at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George, at UVic in Victoria and at a new Life Sciences Centre at UBC. There will be 896 doctors in training at any given time in B.C. today. What a massive difference that is going to make as we go forward.

With nurses we have added another 2,134 new nurse training spaces in the province — a 50 percent increase in total nurses in training in British Columbia. It is 25 times greater than the nurse training spaces added throughout the entire 1990s. It's an unbelievable achievement in such a short period of time.

The final thing I will say, briefly, is on transportation. There is no community more than Surrey, except perhaps big parts of northern British Columbia, that understands how important transportation is to the well-being of the community and the growth of the economy. In transportation in Surrey we are seeing almost one-quarter of a billion dollars in new transportation investment.

Virtually everywhere you drive in Surrey, whether it's our contribution to the widening of Fraser Highway, the four-laning of 176th Street or Highway 15 all the way from Highway 1 right down to the Douglas border crossing, the four-laning of Highway 10 all the

way from 176th Street right into Delta or the four-laning of 8th Avenue between Douglas border crossing and Highway 99, things are on the move in transportation, and it's just the beginning.

[1555]

It is the beginning because we recognize that as part of the gateway program we need to do more. We need to deal with the challenge of the most congested corridor in the lower mainland, the Port Mann Bridge — a bridge that was built 40 years ago and that has been ignored by successive governments ever since, in spite of the fact that the population of the GVRD has tripled since 1963.

We are not going to ignore it. We are going to move forward with a business plan, with consultations with the communities, with the proper environmental assessment. Unlike the previous government, which rammed through the millennium project ignoring their own environmental protections, we'll do it the right way. I do want to say this: we will do it. It will happen, and it will happen because it's long overdue. It's one piece of a bigger answer to the puzzle of transportation. Congestion alone costs the lower mainland \$1.5 billion a year.

We recognize that the solution to transportation gridlock is a balanced one that invests not just in roads and bridges, though that is important, but also invests in public transportation. That's why, under the Premier's leadership, we have spearheaded a funding commitment of \$435 million to the RAV line. This will get 100,000 people a day out of their cars and into public transit, and it will help free up the lower mainland congestion by making that investment.

That's not all. There's an additional \$170 million that we've committed to help bring light rail to the northeast sector, which will again answer the need for improved and increased public transit. It is that kind of balanced transportation vision that really will start to answer the challenge of \$1.5 billion worth of congestion costs to the lower mainland economy.

[H. Long in the chair.]

In conclusion, let me say this. We had a plan for British Columbia. Our Premier had a plan for British Columbia. The *New Era* document that we laid out, a new era of hope and prosperity for British Columbia.... Of the 201 specific commitments I talked about at the beginning of my comments today, 97 percent have been achieved — 97 percent, Mr. Speaker.

That is a record of accomplishment that has inspired the private sector and that has given confidence to the bond rating agencies who upgrade our debt rating. It has given confidence to the small business community that has the highest level of confidence anywhere in Canada right here in British Columbia. It has given confidence to the public to know that the plan is working; that a private sector-growing economy works for British Columbia; that the power of a growing economy is the power to have new resources to invest in health care, in education, in transportation and in those folks that need an extra lift from the government.

That's exactly what we're doing, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank you for the opportunity to address our response to the throne.

**J. Brar:** I rise to respond to the speech from the throne. I want to tell you that I am in good spirits, but my throat is sore. I saw that another member speaking this afternoon also had a sore throat, so maybe there's something in the air in British Columbia. I will go through it, but I may be coughing through this speech, so you'll have to bear with me for that.

I would like to start by taking this opportunity to extend my deepest thanks to my constituents in Surrey-Panorama Ridge and to acknowledge their ongoing commitment to our community — a community that is truly diverse; a community that represents many cultures, languages and histories that contribute to the prosperity of our great province; a community that celebrates each other's values and faiths. I am proud to stand here today and be their representative, and I will ensure that this government does not fail them in tackling the current challenges we have in this province.

However, I feel that this, the fifth and last throne speech in the mandate of this government, did just that. It failed my community. This was a speech that left much to be desired, a speech that has done little to solve some of the pressing issues facing British Columbians.

[1600]

I am well aware that most throne speeches are long on rhetoric, and this speech was no exception. More concerning is that this speech was short on specifics and short on vision, Mr. Speaker. For a government to offer so little back to the people of this province after forcing them to endure four years of drastic cuts to the vital programs and services is shameful.

British Columbians have seen their taxes increase, user fees soar, programs that benefited them and their communities eliminated, the privatization of the health care system and their public assets sold off at bargain-basement prices. Now this government stands before them with only advice to act now on eating more fruits and vegetables — a great idea but not a great offer. Although this is a valuable sentiment, it offers little to the patient who can't get through the doors at the local hospitals or to the senior without appropriate care beds or to the doctors and nurses struggling to provide quality care in overflowing emergency wards.

It is clear to me that this government has thrown in the towel on health care and abandoned patients. In my constituency this is all too obvious. The number one issue facing Surrey residents is the state of public health care. Surrey Memorial Hospital is under extreme pressure. When this government cut services to Delta Hospital and Burnaby Hospital and closed St. Mary's, it only served to increase the demand on the emergency services at Surrey Memorial Hospital. This has led to overflowing emergency wards and the practice of hallway medicine at Surrey Memorial Hospital.

The Fraser health authority is facing a \$50 million capital budget shortfall this year alone, and that num-

ber will grow to \$160 million next year. Over 800 long-term care beds have been cut from this region. The needed expansion of Surrey Memorial Hospital has been put on hold for the last four years, despite demand from the former CEO, Bob Smith, that further stalling would mean disaster for the community.

Well, disaster has struck that community — my community. Still, all this government can do is to fire their scapegoat and force the health authority to redirect dollars earmarked for staff recruitment to the ER expansion project. While this government sits on an unallocated re-election slush fund of \$65 million, it forces the health authority to choose between an ER expansion or much-needed staff at Surrey Memorial Hospital. This is an unacceptable situation. Should we save the hand or the foot? It's a very difficult decision. There is money to save both but just not the political will in British Columbia.

This government promised to improve health care, including a promise to create 5,000 additional long-term care beds for seniors. Now, as a result of broken promises, health care is in worse shape under the leadership of this Premier than ever before in this province.

[1605]

The ramifications of this broken promise are seen and felt not just in Surrey but also in Penticton, Kamloops, Victoria and right across the province and particularly in smaller communities.

We can tell from the throne speech that he has no intentions of resolving the crisis his government has created. We now know that the shiny promises contained in the throne speech truly ring hollow, especially on the issue of health care. Now that we have seen the budget for 2005, the promises of this government have no backing. There is no money allocated for long-term care beds and no commitment to capital projects that have been on hold for four years because this government has refused to fund them.

Looking at the throne speech in retrospect, the fancy packaging of the golden decade has become tarnished. The gold paint is already chipping away. British Columbians will not be fooled by fancy slogans and buzzwords. They want substance. They want truth. They want to see a government that makes a real investment in this province, in communities and in families, not a government that merely pays lip service to the important principles of our society when, and only when, it particularly benefits them — just two months before facing the voters of British Columbia.

For the last four years, this government allowed tuition fees to skyrocket. Across the province tuition fees have doubled, with no regard for students who have been forced to rethink their educational goals because of the new price tag they have to pay. The B.C. Liberals' agenda for post-secondary education has been to make it as hard as possible to get a degree or a certificate.

Skyrocketing tuition fees, cancellation of student employment programs and the elimination of provincial student grant programs — that is the legacy this government has left to students, the future of this prov-

ince. It is a legacy that ensures that only those who can pay are educated, and the rest can get a job for \$6 an hour in this province. It's a legacy that flows funding to institutions so that students pay more to sit in overcrowded classes, using outdated lab equipment and crossing their fingers in hopes of getting the classes they need to graduate.

Now — surprise, surprise — after years of public outcry from students and parents, two months before the election this government announces a cap on tuition fees — a big surprise. This last-ditch effort to repaint the image of this government and its record on post-secondary education is useless. In fact, it just goes to show that this government really doesn't get it.

We used to be a leader in this country when it came to post-secondary education. It was the NDP that set the now national trend to freeze tuition fees and make education affordable for average families. It was the NDP that introduced the most progressive student grant programs in the country to ensure that our students didn't graduate with unmanageable student debt. It was the NDP that built our world-class model of education that includes colleges, university colleges and universities all working together. It has taken this government only four years to erode that system, to dismantle the system that was built over many years.

[1610]

Where we were once leaders, we are now simply followers, and it is our students, our youth, that are paying the price. It is this government that dares make one of its goals for the golden decade to make B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. That is a tall order, especially after cutting funds for schools, libraries and librarians. Maybe the Premier does not see the connection, but I do. So do British Columbians across the province.

This government has forced school closures and cuts to vital programs and services for our schools, programs and services that benefited our kids and their families — programs like physical education, music and art, and services like special needs assistance and support in the classroom. This government gave themselves a big pat on the back when they announced a reinvestment of \$150 million for our schools and then looked confused when the flurry of heartfelt thanks was not forthcoming. Well, putting back a portion of what you took does not deserve thanks, only gasps of relief from underfunded school districts that can now make ends meet without more cuts and closures.

Cuts and closures have been the name of the game for the last four years. Now that British Columbians have all suffered and struggled with increased taxes and user fees, the loss of vital programs and services, the erosion of health care and the sell-off of public assets, the B.C. Liberals have saved up enough of a re-election fund to give a little bit back. A change of heart. Suddenly the heart starts beating for ordinary British Columbians. Surprise. An admittance of a mistake this government has made? I would like to believe that, but just like in the 2001 election, this government will say one thing and do another — lots of promises, no action.

This throne speech is no different. More empty promises will only serve to foster the growing credibility gap this government has with British Columbians, a credibility gap that has grown with each broken promise. It is just not credible to disband the Seniors Advisory Council and ignore the input of seniors across this province for years only to reinstate the very same structure two months before an election.

It is not credible to cut services for women and children at risk only to tell those same women and children that now that the election is near, their safety is very important to this government. Nor is it credible to cut child care programs and subsidies only to speak of the importance of child care for working families just prior to election day. Not only is it not credible, but it is insulting — insulting to all those British Columbians who have had to work hard with less stability and smaller paycheques because of this government's agenda.

The message coming out of this government is clear: contracts are worthless, workers are disposable, children and youth are not worth investing in, our environment is not worth protecting and publicly owned assets are better off lining the pockets of private interests. I could go on.

[1615]

If the opposition had been given the opportunity to debate the line-by-line estimates of the budget, I'm sure this list would be even longer. But I suppose that's why this government has chosen to avoid the estimates process. It is too risky. It is too risky just before an election, two months away. Heaven forbid that the budget should be passed and this government bound by the promises contained in it.

This government has a record now. The record is clear. Just as my colleagues and I have held this government to account inside this House, the public will hold the government to account on May 17, 2005.

**E. Brenzinger:** I rise to speak to the House in response to the throne speech. As the House Leader of Democratic Reform B.C., I rise to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I also recognize the consideration extended to me by the Government House Leader, who has acknowledged and facilitated my right and that of my party to be heard under the provisions of the standing orders.

Tomorrow is International Women's Day. That will be a year to the day since I decided to leave the Liberal caucus to sit as an independent. Today I speak for a new political party and for the disenfranchised of this province — the broad middle of the electorate, who have faith neither in the promises of this government nor in the failed vision of the NDP.

I speak, too, for the voters in Surrey-Whalley who once believed, as I did, the Liberals' bright promise of a new era and who must now surely question the new promise of a golden decade. I fear that we shall all grow silver waiting for this government to deliver.

I address you from experience. I know I speak for the values of Surrey-Whalley when I say that the gov-

ernment has a huge credibility problem. The people no longer trust you. When I was elected in 2001, the people knew they were electing a political moderate, a liberal in the true sense of the term.

I expected the government to tackle issues like providing increased assistance to children with special needs, but it did not. I expected you would move to increase the number of care beds for the elderly, but you did not. I expected that you would seek to treat people with drug addictions in their own communities rather than herding them into the downtown east side or Surrey-Whalley, but you did not.

Instead, you froze health care spending across the province. You closed the hospitals, lost thousands of highly trained and experienced health care workers and opened the way to further privatization of health care. You tore up the contracts of health care workers. Honouring contracts is fundamental to our way of life. If we cannot trust the government to honour its contractual commitments, how can we trust your promise of a golden decade?

You abused the power of this Legislature. You eliminated the job security which helped British Columbians retain experienced workers and recruit new ones.

The throne speech notes that you have attracted more doctors to our province from other parts of Canada in 2003 than any other province. Raiding other provinces is hardly a record of which to be proud, especially when you have largely ignored, to date, the talents of trained professionals who are immigrants to this province. The sad fact is that many who come here with foreign credentials soon find the lustre gone from the golden promise of relocating to British Columbia. One-third of them will live below the poverty line five years after immigration, and many will never work in the professions they trained for.

To your credit, you have nearly doubled the number of doctors and nurses in training, but health care is about more than doctors and nurses. I represent Dr. B.C., and our prescription for health care also includes eye care, dentistry, physiotherapy, hearing, podiatry, naturopathy and chiropractic.

This government eliminated eye exam coverage. You eliminated physiotherapy, massage therapy, non-surgical podiatry, naturopathy and chiropractic from MSP. You eliminated the B.C. hearing aid program. The throne speech would have us believe that Pharmacare is getting better every day. You increased the deductible paid by everyone for prescription drugs, and you reduced premium assistance for drugs for all seniors.

[1620]

You have a credibility problem. It involves more than health care, special needs, children at risk and seniors. It involves every one of your stated five great goals.

You tell us you want to create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada. Yes, B.C. job creation has increased, but what kinds of jobs are we speaking of? You don't raise the ceiling by lowering the floor.

Far too many of our working poor face an awful dilemma. Never mind eating more vegetables, their big question is: do they pay the rent or feed the kids?

Which Third World country would you have us emulate in your thrust to enter the global marketplace? Why do we have homeless in the streets? Why are we exporting high-paying jobs with every new raw log export? Why are we placing the skilled people of our working waterfront at risk? Why are we exporting jobs by having ferries built overseas? Why has this government stood idly by as our forest industry spiralled into decline, mills were closed and the mountain pine beetle reached epidemic proportions?

The answer is incompetence and a government that hides from the important questions. Your backbenchers and the numerous moderate Liberal MLAs who are not running again know the truth about this government, though not all are willing to admit it. This is a government which suppresses internal debate and responds with a herd instinct to the first whiff of criticism from the back benches. This is a government of spin doctors who would have the people believe bright new dreams, when the tarnish of the old ones tells the real truth.

The truth is we have a windfall in the budget this year from our discouraging status as a have-not province within Confederation. It isn't something to celebrate. It augurs of itself no golden decade. You tell us that you plan to lead the world in sustainable environmental management. Great goal — then why haven't you done it? Can the people believe a government that has consistently lowered the environmental bar and has reduced the standards of environmental assessment? I think not. Can the people believe in the environmental review office that has been made subordinate to government policy and which emphasizes development values over environmental protection? No.

Can the people believe a government that proposes sustainability when its record shows a substantial increase in unsatisfactorily reforested lands? Why? Incompetence and lack of foresight — that's what the people concluded. Can the people believe a government which has gutted the ability of provincial staff to monitor and prosecute impacts on the environment? No. The government's answer in the throne speech is a new student conservation corps. It will take more than a corps of junior forest rangers to cure the sustainability gap in our forest sector.

Then there is education. Children in Surrey have been going to school in portables. In other areas of the province some 130 schools have been closed. Access to library services has been reduced. Teachers have been laid off. Class sizes have increased. Young rural children face many hours on the bus just to get to school. Some faced reduced school weeks while their working parents have to scramble to find day care for the days when schools are no longer available.

Neither this government nor the preceding one has fully understood the idea of equitably funded and equitably delivered education. We need to recognize the special importance of rural schools to the people

of our interior. They are more than a place to be educated. They express the right of rural cultures to preserve their way of life, and they are an essential part of a viable rural economy. What this province desperately needs is a program of rural education enhancement funding — funding that is fully justified by the provincial wealth gathered in rural communities. We also need standardized hours of instruction for students across the province. We need local governments that have the resources to respond to local needs. We also need to address child poverty. One child in six lives in poverty in B.C. This is not acceptable. These children need a healthy start in life, and the best way to achieve that may be effective school lunch programs. The throne speech promises to eliminate junk food in all schools within four years. If this government was serious about nutrition, it could do this today. It seems the golden decade of eating more vegetables is at least another four years away.

[1625]

The throne speech also promises increased school safety. Some promise. Some distant goal — 15 years, they tell us, it will take until seismic upgrades will be complete.

We cannot trust this government. Our teachers know that. You have sought to restrict teachers' fundamental democratic rights. You have created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation in our school districts. Like others in the public sector, teachers have endured abrogated contracts, poor-faith bargaining and a government willing to overrule the reasonable decisions of the judiciary.

Is it any wonder, then, that we see disturbing advertisements from BCTF as a counterattack to your warm and fuzzy publicly funded advertising promoting your idea of the best place to live? The best place in the world to live and work is one where democracy means something — where in a manner consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, employees of the Crown and public institutions are free to discuss public policy without fear of intimidation or loss of employment.

I believe that a government that values the best interests of children and families should have nothing to fear from the fair and open comment of teaching professionals and that teachers should share with other citizens equal rights to freedom of assembly, association and speech. This government has turned B.C. into a Third World state of labour rights and has found itself cited under UN conventions on freedom of assembly. It has jeopardized the cause of women and children more aggressively than any other government in B.C. history. Now it asks us to dream of the new possibilities. We have seen your new era. It has not been the dream you had us imagine. It has been a nightmare, and this is especially true for first nations.

The throne speech talks of an inclusive society, of the diversity and wealth of first nations cultures. What it ignores is the abysmal record of this government on aboriginal concerns. As the Supreme Court reminded us in its decision on the Haida challenge to Weyer-

haeuser forest tenure, this government has "a diminished vision of the dignity of the Crown."

Rather than acknowledging your responsibility to consult with and accommodate the concerns of first nations, you have sought at every turn to frustrate and discourage their legitimate aspirations. Dr. B.C.'s first nations partners....

Interjections.

**E. Brenzinger:** Oh, the government is getting a little antsy here.

Dr. B.C.'s first nations partners suggested that every year B.C. delays completing effective treaty negotiations may cost us \$1 billion in lost economic activity. Rather than realizing the potential that exists, you have chosen instead to engage in costly court battles and a divisive referendum — rather than government-to-government negotiations as envisioned by the original treaty tables.

A throne speech that promises to promote aboriginal languages isn't enough. We need to open our eyes, hearts and minds to the true status of first nations within British Columbia. It is time to recognize that the historical denial of democratic and legal rights to first nations people has created a social environment that has served neither the best interests of aboriginals nor non-aboriginal citizens.

The actions of successive federal and provincial governments have created a costly and controversial Third World existence for many first nations within this land of plenty. Cultures that were once self-sufficient when B.C. entered Confederation have, by successive government policies, been reduced to an unsatisfactory dependence. It is time that first nations share equally in the benefits of economic progress. It is time that we had a government that would recognize the first nations' inherent right to self-government, honour treaties and conduct good-faith political negotiations that build healthy communities and allow for mutually beneficial economic growth.

It is time, too, that we listened to the recommendations of the Lortie commission and the Law Commission of Canada and establish first nations constituencies so that aboriginal voices are heard in this Legislature. The members of this Legislature and the federal House of Commons should hang their heads in shame at the record on aboriginal affairs. Only 40 percent of first nations pupils finish high school. We need a coordinated approach between the federal government and the provincial and local schools to turn the situation around. We can pay our part now, or we can pay for it later in increased welfare, justice and correctional costs.

[1630]

The government would have us believe that we now have safer streets. They imagine the member for Vancouver-Burrard's private member's bill on aggressive panhandling has done that. Here is the government's true record on public safety, crime and justice. Crime rate statistics clearly indicate the B.C. government's failure to address crime and to protect citizens

and private property. Abbotsford, Vancouver and Victoria are now among the leading metropolitan areas in Canada for Criminal Code offences. The crime rate in these communities, expressed as the number of overall offences per 1,000 population, was double or more than double that experienced in either Toronto or Quebec City in 2003, according to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. Abbotsford had 134 crimes per 1,000 of population; Vancouver, 116; and Victoria, 106. This compares with 53 for Toronto and 51 for Quebec City.

Crimes such as breaking and entering, fraud, theft and possession of stolen property have substantially increased, giving B.C. the ignominious title of having the top property crime rate of the ten Canadian provinces. From 2000 to 2003 the number of property crimes in B.C. increased by 11 percent. In Quebec, by contrast, property crime actually decreased by 2 percent in 2003, and Ontario experienced only a 0.2 percent increase.

Crimes such as counterfeiting, prostitution, gambling, disturbing the peace, vandalism and criminal harassment showed even greater increases. During the last four years the number of crimes in this category increased by 18 percent. In all the cities and in all the provinces and states of North America, Vancouver is now second only to Miami for property crime. On average, there is one bank robbery every day in the city — three times the rate of Toronto — and the cost of Vancouver auto theft and vandalism adds \$60 million to the premiums of every ICBC policyholder. The average claim for residential and business break and enters is approximately \$4,400, according to the Insurance Bureau of Canada. Clearly, B.C. has a problem, and it's time to get tough on crime.

Democratic Reform B.C. believes court statistics suggest that the provincial government cutbacks to the court system may actually help to create an environment in which crime flourishes, since much reported crime goes unpunished or unresolved by the justice system. We require a renewed investment in the court system. As crime rates have burgeoned, the Ministry of Attorney General has taken a contrary approach, prosecuting fewer crimes, closing courthouses and reducing staff. The number of hours for criminal sittings at all levels of courts declined from 113,515 hours in fiscal 2000-01 to 101,454 in fiscal 2003-04, a 10.6 percent reduction. Meanwhile, evidence suggests that the courts are backlogging. According to the 2003-04 annual service plan report, the numbers of criminal cases concluded fell from 125,545 in 2002-03 to 109,295 in 2003-04, a 12.9 percent decrease.

Under strategies created by the current ministry, targets have been established for Crown counsel that suggest the percentage of those facing criminal allegations who should go forward to court proceedings. Targets were initially set to divert 13.5 percent of cases from proceeding to trial. These have subsequently been increased to 17 percent. While it is perfectly normal for Crown counsel to conduct a rigorous pre-charge screening of police investigative reports, we shouldn't have a quota system driven by efficiency standards

more applicable to industrial processes than justice. But that's what this government favours.

The current strategies, as applied to justice, seek to minimize expenditures by reducing services. From the perspective of Democratic Reform B.C., this is penny-wise but buck foolish. The short-term government savings are insignificant when compared to the broader cost of an ineffective justice system and the resulting physical, emotional and economic impacts expressed by medical bills, missed work, lost property and increased insurance and security costs. A nickel-and-dime approach to justice betrays the public trust.

[1635]

The throne speech promised to make B.C. the best-educated and most literate jurisdiction on the continent — again, a laudable goal. The 25,000 new student spaces by 2010 and \$195 million more for higher-education operating budgets by 2007 are impressive, but let's consider what the new era for higher education has really meant. In '93 the average student owed just over \$8,000. Today it's almost \$25,000.

It's fine that we will have more seats coming available and more doctors and nurses in training, but how will we fill those seats if students can't afford to be in schools? Holding fees to the rate of inflation may be part of the answer, but every year many bright young graduates leave the province to seek employment elsewhere. What benefit will it be to us if our newly graduated nurses and other professionals leave the country or the province to seek employment elsewhere? What we need is an enhanced program of loan forgiveness which keeps graduates in B.C. in exchange for living and working in the province. We should be willing to forgive the student loans over a five-year period for all students.

We also need an effective program of student employment development that will help students avoid debt in the first place and help them develop the skills that will ensure them well-paying jobs. Tuition fees — whether they are held to the rate of inflation, as this government proposes, or frozen, as the NDP misguidedly suggests — are only a small portion of education costs for students who live away from their families.

Affordable housing is also essential. Through a combination of tax incentives to private property owners and renewed commitment to public sector housing, we should be making it easier for students and others in our society to find affordable housing. The throne speech is remarkably silent on the subject of social housing, yet it is clearly one of our most pressing needs.

This government would move towards eliminating property transfer taxes. We have a different vision. We would apply up to half of the current property transfer taxes to social housing in a dedicated fund that would be administered by local people at the regional level. It's a business plan that would respond closely to market forces. In building boom times, the fund would grow, just as social housing needs were increasing.

Every day that I sit in this House, I become more convinced that we need new, refreshing and innovative

approaches to the government. Neither the tired criticisms of the NDP nor the record of the Liberal government offer much real promise.

I'm heartened, nevertheless, by Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor's tribute to the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. Democratic reform is the future of this province, and I was privileged to sit on the legislative committee for the citizens' assembly. The 160 members of the assembly have brought forth their recommendation for BC-STV — single transferable vote. This government has chosen to remain officially neutral on those recommendations, as has the NDP. Only Dr. B.C. has come out in direct support, encouraging citizens to vote yes for democratic reform.

Could it be that the government fears grass-roots democracy? Numerous citizens have told me that they have not received the recommendations that were supposed to be mailed out to everyone. I understand that the Attorney General's office has curtailed further printing.

As for the NDP, well-known commentators affiliated with their cause — Bill Tieleman, Paul Ramsey and Tom Barrett — have ridiculed the assembly's efforts and sought to confuse the public about their recommendation. It doesn't take much imagination to guess what kind of legislation we may get if the people vote yes. If the NDP forms the government, it will be like our neutered recall-and-initiative legislation. Eighty percent of us voted for recall. What we got doesn't work.

The assembly's recommendations represent the thoughtful result of 160 ordinary British Columbians; 80 percent of them voted for this recommendation. And 80 percent of British Columbians may very well support their vision of enhanced voter choice, greater proportionality and a truly representative relationship between the MLAs and the people. But if the people vote yes, there will still be much work to be done to deliver formal legislation and to address matters that were not within the mandate of the assembly.

What vision does this government have on the question of electoral district magnitude? How will you balance the needs of the north and the urban centres? How will you ensure that electors and those who seek election have equal opportunities within the new system? Faced with a governing party that refuses to fully inform them of the recommendation or of their own intentions, I fear the people once again will see their thirst for democracy thwarted by the special interests of the few.

The people of B.C. deserve better. They deserve Democratic Reform representation — MLAs they can trust to deliver on the promise of electoral reform.

[1640]

**K. Krueger:** It's a real privilege to rise in this House and speak to this throne speech, a throne speech of which I'm tremendously proud. The heavy lifting, the tough stuff, for the first three years of being government was really hard for the MLAs, for the government and, in many cases, for the people of British Co-

lumbia, who had to do the heavy lifting with us. It's so good to be at this stage of the mandate, where in the last year we've seen the benefits really start to roll to every corner of this great province, to every British Columbian privileged to live in the best place on earth.

We look back over those years and see how very far we've come. We had a whole lot of setbacks along the way, things that nobody could have planned for, whether it was 9/11 or SARS or — we did know about the hassle with softwood lumber with the American industry before we were elected, but the way that it has been protracted — the dramatic rise in the Canadian dollar and the effects it has had on our economy, or West Nile, forest fires and floods. It seems like we have been subject to every pestilence but the locusts, and many times British Columbians have asked when we're going to see those.

Through it all we've had a Premier, a vision and a government that knew where it was going and had mapped out a good plan to get there. The plan hasn't required a whole lot of changing along the way. The plan that was a great plan is a great plan, and it is working.

We had what we called the *New Era* document in the year 2001, when we ran for office, and we said that we were going to usher in a new era of hope, prosperity and opportunity for all British Columbians. That's what has happened, and it is largely to the credit of the Premier of this province — with the amazing vision that he has, his tremendous work ethic, his managerial skills, his ability to press on toward the goal, his ability to choose the right people for the right positions and to support people, as we have worked together to achieve these goals and to bring British Columbia into the new era.

I was pleased that very early in this throne speech the government referred to the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. I was proud to be the Deputy Chair of the MLA liaison committee with that citizens' assembly, and I was so impressed with the people who came together. Yes, they were chosen at random, but did they ever take their job seriously. They worked very hard, and they acquired a tremendous education over the course of the year that they worked on that huge project.

They came in with a recommendation that many people find somewhat startling. We will see what the public decides to do about it. The previous speaker criticized the government for being neutral on the position. The government always said it would be neutral on the recommendation. This was to be a process of the people, driven by the people without the interference of the government.

Here we had a Premier who was elected Premier with by far the largest mandate that any Premier of British Columbia has ever had in history. In fact, he had more MLAs elected to his caucus than there have ever been MLAs in this building in any previous government in B.C.'s history — 77 MLAs. Did he rest on those laurels? Did he stand on that power base and say, as the NDP actually said — one of their cabinet minis-

ters put it into words in office — that government could do anything it wanted?

This Premier is not cut from that cloth. He had the greatest amount of power ever conferred on a Premier by the electorate of British Columbia. He put it all on the altar of public opinion and said: "This is what I said I'd do, and this is what I'm going to do. We're going to have the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. When it makes a recommendation, if it's a recommendation other than the status quo, we are going to put that recommendation to a provincewide referendum, no questions asked." We won't try to interfere with it; we won't try to stop it; we won't try to convince the public any which way. We'll just put it out to the public, and the people of B.C. can decide.

If the people of B.C. decide that they want the single transferable vote, B.C.-style, instead of what we've had up until now, that's what they'll get. It will be in place for the 2009 election, which is another innovation of this Premier and this government. We willingly discarded that ancient political advantage, which Premiers have had and abused over the many decades, where they can call an election on short notice, where they can ramp up spending from the taxpayers' purse in an attempt to build their voter support and see if it works. If it doesn't, they can draw back and wait, having blown a lot of that money. Then when they think the time's perhaps a little bit better, they can do it all again, and they can go up to five years.

[1645]

I wonder how many people have noticed that the NDP did go up to five years, both times, when they had the chance. They didn't have the jam or the heart to call an election anywhere along the way. They did try the old "spend the money and see if we can rise in the polls" approach. When they didn't rise in the polls, because they were heading down, they just dragged it out. They went to the end of their mandate each time — five full years.

Well, if we followed their pattern, we wouldn't even be talking about an election now — not for another year. Yet for the last year, with everything this government has done, all of which is entirely in keeping with the plan and the vision we laid out from the beginning, the NDP and our critics have presumed to say: "Those look like election goodies to us. That looks like vote-buying." That's the way they think. That's the way they always conducted business in this province. Not this Premier; not this government. I'm very proud to have served with this Premier and this government.

When the throne speech talks about a golden decade for British Columbia, it's not joking. Those aren't just words. This Premier had a vision; he still has a vision.

I was watching Carole James sitting just behind me here when the throne speech was delivered by the Lieutenant-Governor, and her face looked frozen to me. She looked as though she was frightened. I thought: "No wonder. You must feel you are looking at Mount Everest." Carole James is a talker; I know that for sure. Some people say she is a nice person, but I've

seen some not very nice stuff already. Certainly she's a talker, but is she a builder? Is she a person who could actually lead a committee, let alone provide leadership to the whole province?

We've got a Premier of four million British Columbians who has made us proud day after day. He travels around the world on government business, leading trade delegations and making friends for British Columbia. He travels across this country and takes part in first ministers' meetings, and he emerges as the leader time after time in brokering deals that make sense for British Columbians and for all of Canada. He's never grinding to take advantage of anybody else. He's always working to bring together the people at the table, in the room, in the jurisdiction and in the country and to do what's best for all of us.

I was so proud of him when 9/11 happened, and he was the first leader I saw in the media saying: "Americans, we stand with you. We want to build a perimeter of security around North America. We feel for what you are going through." He was the first person of note to stand up and say, after the tsunami disaster, that this province was going to give, I believe, \$8 million. It shamed a lot of other governments into jumping into the gap and helping as well. That's the kind of leadership we've seen from him.

What did we see from the Premiers before him? We saw Premiers making enemies of all our neighbours. Their silly class warfare approach, their silly "attack your neighbour and maybe it will look good to your electorate" approach created enemies. Alaska was angry with us; Washington was angry with us; Alberta; the rest of Canada; Canada itself, the U.S.A. Those Premiers, Glen Clark in particular, made enemies all around us. This Premier is a builder — a builder of relationships, a builder of plans, a builder of programs that work and a builder of British Columbia.

This throne speech is the crowning glory of these four years in office as it maps out the direction we're going to go. The budget that followed it a week later is an absolute credit to the Minister of Finance, the Premier and this entire government. Look what we're able to accomplish once we have our financial house in order because we followed our plan outlined in the new-era platform.

Now, the NDP and some of the media keep hectoring us that they want to go through an estimates debate of the budget. We're willing to go to the people. We don't care to sit and listen to a couple of MLAs rabbiting on for weeks when we could be out there talking to the people of British Columbia. We're running on that budget. That's our fiscal plan for the future.

We're tremendously proud of it — a budget that paid off more debt in a single day, one payment, than has ever happened before in British Columbia's history. Mind you, it is only 1/10 of the debt that the NDP ran up in their pathetic ten years in office. That payment will save us \$125 million per year in interest payments, which we can spend on health care, education, public safety, safe schools and the things we know are important to British Columbians.

Just think. That means the debt the NDP ran up all by themselves in ten years is presently costing us \$1.25 billion a year in carrying charges. What we couldn't do with that, Mr. Speaker. You would think that those members would be ashamed to open their mouths in this Legislature and voice any type of criticism at all after this sorry, pathetic, awful record they had while in office.

[1650]

I like the way the throne speech says: "This government's path is clear. Although its options have multiplied as British Columbia's fortunes have improved, its chosen route and destination remain the same." We know how we're getting there. The principles that we laid out at the beginning, we're sticking by, and we know what we are getting to.

I'm proud of the goals that this throne speech maps out. We do have multiple options. When people say the economy is firing on all cylinders now, they're not joking. It is doing great. Even when one cylinder is being pushed down, another one is rising.

That's the way it's supposed to work. But things are happening so fast and so well for British Columbia that the kind of problems we're having to talk about now are where we're going to get all the people from. We've got jobs looking for people instead of the other way around, the way it was through that whole dismal, pathetic decade of the nineties when the NDP were in control.

Listen to the achievements that are listed in the throne speech. It's all true. More jobs — almost 200,000 new jobs since the end of 2001. More investment. We know that there are billions of dollars in investment holding their breath right now, waiting to see if perhaps, against all logic, there could be a change of government in British Columbia on May 17, 2005.

People are eager and anxious to put their money into British Columbia and create jobs here, but they would disappear so fast it would make people's heads spin if, God forbid, there were ever another NDP government here. There would be a giant draining sound. It wouldn't just be money. It wouldn't just be the future. It wouldn't just be investment. It would be people, like it was all through the 1990s, when we saw people exiting this province and our population dwindling. Of course, many, probably most, were young people about to start families or having recently started families — young people with a bright future and career ahead of them. They're going to be paying taxes for 40, 50, 60 years, but they went elsewhere to start their lives because they knew there were no opportunities here.

I got a phone call one time in my constituency office during that awful five years when I had to sit in opposition and watch that government continue to destroy the economy. The fellow said: "I own a restaurant in Cache Creek and another one in Salmon Arm, and I'm just calling you because I don't want to talk to NDP people. I want to tell someone that I hung a sign on my door today that said: "Comrade Clark, I quit."

He'd had just one too many visits by a government representative putting his hands in his pockets, and he

wasn't going to have any more of it. Now we have more jobs, more investment, new hope, new prosperity, lower taxes — the lowest taxes in Canada up to your first \$60,000 in income.

When the previous Finance minister, Gary Collins, invited all of British Columbia to give input on how we should allocate the surplus, I wrote him a letter and said: "I'd really like to see you raise the threshold below which British Columbians don't have to pay any income tax at all. It doesn't make any sense at all to me that we're collecting taxes from people who make under \$15,000 a year, because we pay civil servants to take it from them. Then a lot of these people are seniors and feel intimidated by the system, and they pay accountants to do the income tax for them. Then we pay civil servants to give it back to them, and all of that costs money. It's their money, and it's wrong that we should be taxing people with such low incomes."

Again, I was tremendously proud of our Finance minister when he tabled the budget he did recently, where people in that income tax bracket do not pay any provincial income tax at all from now on. I have been proud every step of the way as we've made the changes we needed to make to recognize that there are people of every age in this province who are income-challenged. It isn't just seniors.

In fact, there are a lot of seniors who are very wealthy and who would be embarrassed to take tax money that was paid by somebody with less than \$15,000 per year. They don't need any free ride. They're not asking for it. They're not looking for it. They actually want a health care system that works and an education system that's turning out students who will be contributors to our economy and to this great province throughout the future.

I have been tremendously proud as we've made our changes. They haven't been easy changes to make, whether it was a change to the MSP premium — we had to have the money in order to pay our doctors the best salaries in Canada in order that we could have doctors — or the many other changes that we made when we had to eliminate some supplemental benefits under MSP. Every time we did that, we protected the low-income earners. Pharmacare, chiropractic, right across the board — we've always protected the low-income earners. In fact, as a result of the budget that followed this throne speech by a week, there will be 750,000 British Columbians that are either paying less income tax or no income tax at all. That's something to be proud of, my friends.

Better health and education, a cleaner environment, safer streets and schools, new confidence, new optimism, a new world of possibilities — all of that is true, and all of it has become true only since May 16, 2001. That was my birthday, by the way. What a birthday present: to be elected, and to be elected as part of this government that has done all these things.

[1655]

When I hear Carole James say that she wants to roll the clock back or hear Jim Sinclair say that he nostalgically wants to go back to 2001, I think: give your heads

a shake. Only a socialist would think that those are good goals to have.

Under the NDP we saw a dramatic population decline. To me, that was completely unnatural. I grew up knowing that British Columbia is a land of opportunity and a place where I could become anything I wanted to be.

I grew up poor. My dad was a homesteader. He had 1,600 acres of bush 18 miles north of Fort St. John, out in bush country. You got to it on a Peace River gumbo road where you had to countersteer your car all the way in on a rainy day, because it was either sliding to the left or sliding to the right. I knew how to drive when I was 12 years old from watching my dad do that. It was a tough place to live, but it was, nevertheless, an opportunity.

We cleared 1,200 acres of that land over the course of my childhood. We had a producing farm, but we had very little to start with. We were not at all wealthy. But I always knew that I could become anything I wanted and that I could go to university if I wanted, that I could win a scholarship to do that. That's what I did. People didn't feel that way in the 1990s, and I tell you that people never feel that way under socialist governments, because they just don't work. It's the mentality, the ideology, of envy — always wanting to take from other people what they've earned for themselves.

In fact, my mother's family was driven out of Russia because of that very attitude in the Bolsheviks and the communists. They were Mennonite people. They'd gone to Russia because Catherine the Great welcomed them and said they wouldn't have to go to war. They knew the kaiser was heading for war in Germany, so the Mennonites went to Russia. They're hard-working people with few vices, and they got rich by just working hard. Along came the Bolsheviks and hated them for it and took it all away.

My mother's family.... Her father was so hard-working — he had owned a flour mill and big farm — that he got rich again working hard. They took it all away again and said this time that they were going to kill him, and they almost did. They took the children in a wagon, and they got out of Russia. They came to Canada because it's the land of opportunity. It still is. I'm so glad they did. I've been so privileged and blessed to grow up in this great province.

I was mortified when I saw what was happening to British Columbia in the 1990s. One of the members who was elected for Kamloops in 1991 is a fellow named Art Charbonneau, who was promptly elevated to cabinet and deserved to be there — a really bright guy. But he was one of these bright guys who somehow is captured by the socialist ideology regardless of how ridiculous it is and how obviously it doesn't work. He was friendly to me. He didn't know that I wasn't a socialist, because I kept my cards close to my chest. I was a public servant.

He used to have me out for breakfast, and the second year, he said to me: "We can't understand it. We increased the amount we pay people on welfare, and at

the beginning of our second year there were 20 percent more people claiming welfare than the year before. So then we did it again, and now at the beginning of our third year there's 20 percent more than that total." They just couldn't believe that their approaches didn't work, that their overtaxation and their overregulation actually shrivelled the economy and deprived British Columbians of opportunities and drove everything in the opposite direction of where they wanted it to go.

We were looking at Mount Everest when we became government. Mr. Speaker, you know that. We all know that. We were part of it. We were looking at this absolute mess that had been created for us, and Gary Collins, when he was Finance minister, told us every day that a new swamp was discovered. Every day something else came up that nobody had anticipated. There was just more and more to try and dig ourselves out of. But we did it, because we had principles that we lived by. We had a plan created by this government and driven by this Premier, and it has worked. We've worked our way out of that hole we were in, and now we are on solid ground, and the sky is the limit.

Do you remember, Mr. Speaker, when there was what was known as a B.C. discount in our forest industry? People who owned forest companies had to expect to sell them for less than they were worth because nobody wanted to come and do business in British Columbia.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

That just isn't the case anymore in spite of the challenges — the incredible rise in the Canadian dollar, the fact that we've had this awful pine beetle infestation, the fact that the Americans have essentially closed their border to us in some ways and charged us over \$4 billion in unfair tariffs and duties, which they're trying to steal from us in spite of the fact that the World Trade Organization and NAFTA have refuted their arguments at every turn.

All of these challenges.... Our forest industry has roared to life and is just booming. That's a result of a government that listens to the people — the people in industries, the people who work in industries, the people who own companies — and is willing to accept their recommendations and make productive change. We've seen that in the oil and gas industry, which has just taken off since this government has been in office. We see that in the mining industry, where the Minister of State for Mining has done yeoman service working around this province listening to investors, and we've seen mining exploration five times the level it was when we came into office. The mining industry tells us that we're approaching the point at which the jurisdiction can expect to have one new mine, at least, opening in the jurisdiction every year. We're spending enough money on exploration that that is likely to be done.

[1700]

I can tell you that the people of the North Thompson Valley felt devastated by the wildfires of 2003.

We'd already lost one major mill up in the Vavenby area because of the market conditions and the fact that primary lumber manufacturers in this province have to consolidate two very effective plants in order to compete in a world where Third World countries are producing the same 2-by-4s at the same prices we're able to get for them. We'd lost one mill, 180 jobs and then along came the wildfires and burnt down another one in Louis Creek just south of Barriere, and the licensee made the decision — which was probably an obvious decision, given those market constraints and the conditions the industry operates under — not to rebuild that mill. People were in shock.

What did the Premier do? He came out with the Prime Minister. He came out again with the Finance minister, who is now the Prime Minister. I flew out with him. We toured the sites, and everybody made a commitment to help. The Premier sent the Solicitor General to my office. The Solicitor General is a man who's problem-solved some of the stickiest problems this province has had. Gambling, for instance, brought down two NDP Premiers because they couldn't get it right. They just kept messing with it. He's a man who knows how to look at a problem, crunch it all together, come up with a solution that works, and we credit him for it. We're proud of the Solicitor General.

He came to my office and said: "The boss wants to know how we can help. Specifically, what can we do?" I know my constituents. I've been listening to them. I knew what they needed. I said: "Well, I need money for the North Thompson Community Skills Centre. It's a really good operation. It trains people. We're going to have to have a lot of people retrained. I would like to have money so that they don't have to concentrate their energies any longer on fundraising. They can concentrate it on developing people for new careers."

He wrote me a cheque for \$1 million for that and said: "What else?" I said: "Well, there are people up and down the constituency — not just in the area that burnt but all up and down the valley — who've been really hurt by this disaster in ways that nobody can compensate them for under existing schemes. They don't have insurance for it. You can't get insurance for a lot of these losses. In any event, some of them didn't even have insurance — they're in really tough."

Even operators way up in Clearwater and Blue River, although they weren't touched by the fire, had their hydro cut off. The tourists around the world saw on TV that B.C. was allegedly burning. They didn't come that year, during the high point of the tourism season. I had a lot of frightened small business operators up and down that valley, particularly in hospitality and tourism venues.

I said to the Solicitor General: "I would like a hardship fund. I would like something that people could apply to where we can give them help." He wrote me a cheque for \$2 million for a hardship fund. We entrusted that to the North Thompson Relief Fund Association — wonderful people. It formed spontaneously under the leadership of a Nissan dealer named George Evans, a great guy in Kamloops, a guy who's going to

get the B.C. Community Achievement Awards next month. What a deserving recipient he is.

The fund was administered by these people, by a committee of volunteers, handpicked people who'd be fair, who'd have a consistent way of applying it. People could get up to \$10,000 of hardship relief under that fund, and to a lot of them it meant the whole world. It meant whether they could keep their business or not. It meant whether they'd be able to afford to feed their family or not that winter.

I asked for another million dollars to put into a fund with the Thompson-Nicola regional district so that we would have assurance of a long-term supply to pay an economic development officer to work up and down that valley and make things tick again. I got that million dollars. It's in trust with the TNRD. They are investing it so wisely and well that the economic development officer is being paid largely out of the interest money that it accrues, so there's money there for assistance in economic development initiatives we might want to undertake. I got another million dollars for those, and I put that also in a separate account with the North Thompson Relief Fund Association. It's still being administered very carefully by the good stewards that operate that fund.

[1705]

We have undertaken a whole range of economic initiatives up and down the North Thompson Valley, and they're working. There's a whole spirit of optimism in the valley. The Minister of Forests came through for me in a tremendous way. I went to him and said that the people in the valley want community forests.

I'd gone to him when the Weyerhaeuser mill shut down in Vavenby and said: "This is what the people say. They think you should take back tenure from the big licensees — 97 percent of the tenure is spoken for and no new entrant to the market can get a supply of fibre. They think you should take some back, and I agree with them. They'd like to see it apportioned partly to first nations, partly to the small business program so that value-added manufacturers and others can bid on that fibre, partly to community forests and partly to increasing the woodlot program."

The minister came back to me a couple weeks later in caucus and said: "I think we can do all that." As you know, he has done all that not only for the North Thompson Valley but for the whole province. What a difference it has made in the North Thompson Valley.

We have invited community groups in both the lower North Thompson Valley, the Barriere-Louis Creek area up to Little Fort and down to McClure, and in the upper North Thompson Valley — what is known as Wells Gray country by the local people — to apply for community forest licences. I fully expect they'll get them, and they'll have them extended. They'll have them for 99 years. The Minister of Forests made an allocation of 300,000 cubic metres of the beetle-kill timber to the Lower North Thompson Community Forest Society.

I went to the Ministry of Transportation and said that one of the problems we have in trying to attract

investors to the North Thompson Valley is that although we're trying to get fibre and I think we will, we don't really have a place for them to set up on. Last Wednesday the Ministry of Transportation signed a deal, and last Friday I had the privilege of announcing it at a media conference.

The Ministry of Transportation bought the burned-out Tolko mill site. It is going to extract the gravel from that site and recoup, we expect, all of its money from that and leave the site for the people of the lower North Thompson Valley to attract investors as an industrial site, which I hope one day will be turned over to the ownership of the community of Barriere-Louis Creek, once it's incorporated.

We have land for investors to locate on, we have fibre to attract them, and we have a number of investors who are actively considering coming to Barriere, setting up value-added plants, perhaps a small primary processing facility, and beginning to replace those jobs that were lost in those horrific wildfires. I am tremendously proud of a government that has made that possible.

The throne speech says that government is again living within its means with balanced budgets and, including the forecast allowance, a record surplus. Our stronger economy is generating new revenues for sustainable improvements to social services. We've seen those across the board, including — and we're very proud of this and have every right to be — the largest increase ever seen in this province in allowances to people on disabilities.

I went to the Christmas party at the Canadian Mental Health Association, and these people were coming up and hugging me. They were so thankful. That amount of money in their jeans makes a whole lot of difference in their lives.

We're able to do that, where the NDP never could despite always holding themselves forth as the champions of the downtrodden and the unfortunate. They just couldn't find any money for them. They were too busy throwing it away on Skeena Cellulose, fast ferries and all the other ways by which they amazingly got us to double the debt we'd had after 125 years of government, in their ten miserable years in office.

They couldn't do it, but we can. We can enhance those benefits in social programs, those benefits to the needy in British Columbia, because of a competent strategy, a good plan, an ability to stick to the plan and be well managed, and a whole team of people who do their jobs — whether it's the Solicitor General, the Minister of Finance, the Premier — who take their responsibilities very seriously and do them very well.

As a result, we have a rising tide in this economy, rising tremendously. The Prime Minister himself has referred to it repeatedly and said that one of the reasons Canada's doing well is that British Columbia is doing so well. Those acknowledgments come in from across the board.

We were pleased to see the supplement in the *Globe and Mail* last week, where they devoted eight pages to a performance appraisal of British Columbia that was

absolutely stellar. We probably couldn't afford that kind of advertising, but we got it for free because that's the way things are. That rising tide does lift all boats. It's lifting all boats. It's helping all British Columbians, and I know that they appreciate it.

My newly nominated adversary for the NDP, when we announced that we'd made this deal with Tolko and bought their site, criticized it. When his leader heard that we had created a brand-new university or made a decision to in Kamloops, she criticized that and said we should put the money into access instead.

[1710]

We all know what that means to an NDP person. Access means freezing tuition. That's what they did in the nineties, and it drove the universities to despair. It shrunk their enrolment. It shrunk their ability to get students through a four-year program in four years. It was taking them five years. It was a disaster. She was saying, in essence, that she didn't want us to create that new university nor the one in Kelowna, because she wanted to see us freeze tuitions again and go down that same sorry road that she'd taken the province down.

Then one of the union bosses piped up and said: "We don't like the plan either, because our people don't want to have move to Kamloops from Burnaby." But we're doing it. We've had the courage of our convictions all along. We've turned this province around.

We're on our path into a golden decade. We're proud of it. We're happy about it. We know British Columbians are delighted, and I have been tremendously glad to be a part of this government. I'm proud of this throne speech.

**K. Manhas:** I'm proud to stand up and support this fifth, and my last, throne speech of this term. I'm certainly a feeling of a lot of mixed emotions. I want to tell you all from the bottom of my heart that it has been truly an incredible experience representing the people of Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain over these past four years. It's been a rich and rewarding experience and one that I'm truly grateful for.

You know, Mr. Speaker, my grandfather taught me and my family to stick close to our values. He also taught me to know no limits. He taught me not to be scared of anything or anyone. When I ran for office in 2001, I said: "I want to ensure that every British Columbian has the same opportunity to succeed in their life no matter their race, colour, origin or age, no matter their social or economic situation and no matter where they live in the province. That means access to good quality health care and education and a government that encourages success and innovation." I've stood for those values that I believe are right, and I'm proud to have worked with a Premier that has led government to do just that.

I've decided that I need to make a change and pursue other challenges and opportunities at this time in my life, but I've truly loved public life and everything about it. Everything about my experience in the past four years has been truly incredible. I'm going to miss it. There's nothing I regret.

It certainly was an interesting story that led to my decision to seek election at 23 and my election to this House at 24 years old in 2001. I think it all began in 1997 when I returned to B.C. after graduating from McGill University in Montreal. On the first day back I met then Leader of the Opposition Gordon Campbell and the MLA for where my parents lived, Christy Clark. I didn't even know who Christy Clark was that day — I know we're not supposed to say names — the member for Port Moody-Westwood, then the member for Port Moody-Burnaby Mountain. We started talking. From there I became quite involved in the B.C. Liberal Party. I was already a member of the B.C. Liberal Party, and I continued to get more and more involved.

I'm certainly very, very proud of what has happened in that sequence of events that has led so many people to actually stand up and take some action, to do something about what was happening in the province. I, myself, at that time looked at British Columbia not as a place where I could seek opportunity — a place where I grew up, where my family was, that had provided a lot of opportunity — but a place where I did not see any opportunity for myself.

I think that was part of what drove me, as I was about to leave British Columbia in 1999, to actually realize what it was that I would be doing by leaving the province. If I didn't stand up with the Premier and the members of the B.C. Liberal Party to actually turn around the province that had delivered all that it had for my family — my grandfather who came when he was a teenager — and had delivered so much opportunity for them until the 1990s, then I couldn't expect anyone else to turn that around.

[1715]

It truly was something that changed my life. I want to tell you that it's interesting that in deciding to do this, one of the things that I faced was a great fear of public speaking. I couldn't stand up and speak publicly. I was deathly scared of it, but I actually believed more strongly in what I had to do and followed my gut and my heart and my intuition to do this. I was surprised, as I've told some of my colleagues, that the last time I spoke in this House I spoke without notes that I read and got cut off by you, Mr. Speaker, for going through the time.

I hope you'll indulge me as I take just a moment to recognize a few of the many people who have worked with me to make this job such a pleasure. I want to thank all of my colleagues for their support and sacrifice. I am incredibly proud of our caucus and our government, and I think, in large part, that British Columbians are as well. I've seen first hand how hard my colleagues work and how dedicated they are, and I've been consistently impressed with the high calibre of individuals that came together to form our government. I want to thank the people of Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain for giving me the honour of representing them in this great riding, and I want to thank you for electing me as the youngest MLA in B.C.'s history. That was a real honour.

I want to thank all of those people who have particularly supported me throughout this endeavour: of course, my mom and dad, Karm and Devi Manhas, whose support has been unshakable; my brother, Deepak Manhas; my sisters, Kiran, Sheila and Sharan; my entire family and all of my friends who are always there for me; my riding association that kept working and plugging away all those years and were always there supporting me and the party; Roloff Veld, our riding president and my great friend, for his unwavering support and leadership; Rhonda Murray, our past president, still a pillar of support to me; Ravi Panwar, who wouldn't take no for an answer when he pushed me to run; Vicky Byrne and Jean Farnsworth, who were with me from the very beginning and did a fantastic job working with me for many of these great past years in the constituency office; Corey Vanthaaff and Ruth Jones, who do a wonderful job working with me now; Rob Shirra and Irene Barr, who were my campaign co-chairs; Peta and Edwin Shiau and their family, particularly Carolynne, who ran my campaign at 19, the youngest campaign manager in British Columbia; Mary Lim, Huat Seng Poon and all the Young Liberals; all the great supporters and community members who are always there and who helped me move ahead the great initiatives.

Certainly my colleagues in the Tri-Cities were always there working with me, and all of my colleagues in the House here in Victoria, especially the Premier. I grew to really understand how much the Premier cares about what he does, what his passion is for youth, his level of intelligence. I'm so proud of being able to learn and work with people like the Premier who are so passionate to lead this province, to make it a better place, and put their lives aside to make it a better place. I think that there is a real credit.

British Columbians are going to look back on history at the amount of work, the amount of things that individuals in this government and the government in the future put aside to turn this province around. It is a remarkable place. It's remarkable because of its people and people like the members of this government and all the members of the Legislature who are willing to put their lives aside and stand up because they care and love this province. I know that that is going to continue. I know that my experience in the last three, four years has been enriched, working with all the incredible, wonderful people. That vibrancy and caring is what makes my community in Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain in British Columbia one of the best places in the world to live.

I've worked hard and to the best of my abilities to fight for my community and to represent the people of my community over the past four years, and I will continue to do so in private life. In May I will leave knowing that I represented my community well in Victoria and achieved what I set out to do.

[1720]

When I stood for election, I actually had a document that I set out on in my naïve, early days. I called it my manifesto document. I took a look back on it in the

past months, and I'm so proud to finally go back to that document and see that I was able to move and see every single thing that I set out to do.

I'm honoured and privileged to have had the opportunity to be involved with so many great initiatives — things like the positive youth development initiative, which I've worked with so many people to help initiate around the province. It is making a move, changing the way that people in British Columbia, the ministry and communities deal with youth in the community. The Ministry of Children and Family Development has helped to start off the pilot projects, including one in my community, and is looking very closely at turning around the way we think about our youth. Instead of dealing with problems once they occur and having specific protection services for kids who are at risk and already in trouble, we're now turning around and seeing how we can connect to those youth and actually make a difference before any of those issues exist, and connect to every single young person in British Columbia.

Youth Matters! was one of those — the initiative I started in the Tri-Cities. I know I have seen the incredible impact it has made through things like Project Garage; the neighbourhood initiatives; Youth Matters! Place, which is now being planned. It is a tremendous community initiative, and I've been proud to be involved with it. I've been proud to be able to do my small part in seeing that happen.

Rapid transit. Our government committed \$130 million for that to come to Coquitlam. That's going to change the way people look at Coquitlam and how Coquitlam develops. That's going to be very, very important. We didn't choose the actual technology, but we finally actually committed the money.

The Minister of Transportation spoke earlier about new initiatives that we have been fighting for as MLAs in the Tri-Cities and that I know every single one of us has spoken up about: expansion to the Pitt River Bridge; expansions to access the Trans-Canada Highway; a better Cape Horn interchange; Mary Hill bypass improvements; and even all the road improvements we fought for at the local level — a new bridge at David Avenue, a new Murray-Clarke connector and many, many more. I know that one of the things our caucus has been able to do in the Tri-Cities is to go out and try to see what it is that's needed to build our community to become a better place, and to actually go out to advocate it. We've done exactly that.

We've got \$1.6 million for an arts village in downtown Port Coquitlam. That's going to be like a mini-Granville Island and will actually attract people to become a tourist destination for Port Coquitlam — create jobs, create opportunities, create a milieu that will change the way Port Coquitlam will be seen and the place it has in British Columbia.

Volunteer Fest. My colleagues and I started Volunteer Fest. Burke Mountain, A Hard Night Out. The Salvation Army, which we don't know.... The housing projects that we've been working on, Inlet Centre, Youth Matters! Place. The expansion at SFU and the

Douglas College expansion. Support to the Tri-City Family Place, youth justice funding, the full utilization of the PoCo courthouse, Partners in Learning. More police officers have been put on the street. There are a number of new schools, including a new school in Port Moody and a new school in Burke Mountain to relieve the pressure up at Terry Fox; they're over capacity at Terry Fox. An expansion to Eagle Ridge Hospital, which now has six full operating rooms in operation.

I know that I and my colleagues, as a result of being able to be a part of this government, have actually gone out and said: what is it that we need? What will actually build our community and see our community become a better place? That's what happens when our community elects government members. We actually go out and are able to do something about it. I've seen how issues have built up over many, many years and have been ignored.

Once they came to the attention of me or my colleague from Burquitlam or my colleague from Port Moody-Westwood or my colleague from Coquitlam-Maillardville, we stood up and came together through our Tri-Cities caucus, through our caucus at large, and actually took action. We just said: "Okay, I'll take the lead on this; you take the lead on this. How do we get this done?" We've actually seen a great number of things happen in our community. I think that the people of the Tri-Cities are proud of those changes.

[1725]

The growing needs of the Tri-Cities will continue to be addressed. I think that is why it's so important to ensure that B.C. Liberals continue to be elected so that we have members in the government who fight and will work hard for our community.

You know, Mr. Speaker, even in lean times we've worked hard and delivered what our community needed most. I've heard a number of times from people, whether they're on the council or members in the community, who have come out and said, "You know what? Port Coquitlam has done very well. Port Moody has done well. Coquitlam has done well" — and these are in lean times.

I know that if the community moves forward and elects members of the opposition, there is going to be nothing more but rhetoric. We need to make sure that the Tri-Cities is well looked after — that it's taken care of and has a voice in government.

As the House may know, the NDP nominated its candidate for Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain yesterday — a ghost, a blast from the past, a ghost from the past. Mike Farnworth was renominated, my opponent in the last election, who I thought the public sent a strong message to when he lost by a significant margin. Yet after such a significant rebuke, he still came back to want to run for the party's nomination. He doesn't live in the riding. He hasn't been back there for four years, yet he has come back and said he doesn't know if the members for the Tri-Cities have done anything in the last four years. I think the facts show that I and my colleagues have done a lot and brought a lot to the Tri-Cities.

It's that type of messaging — the empty words and misleading statements — that characterize the NDP's style. They characterize what people have come to know as what the NDP do in politics. None of their statements actually needs to have a basis in reality. Their messaging needs to have a sound bite that they hope, if they repeat enough times, people will believe. It's that type of false messaging that reinforces what was wrong with the NDP, what was wrong when they took our province down and flushed hope and opportunity and prosperity in British Columbia down the drain in the last ten years.

I think that there is no way the people of Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain or British Columbia will ever want to see that happen again. It's amazing to me that there are so many of these members — like Harry Lali, Adrian Dix, Sue Hammell — who are joining Mike Farnworth, who created the problems that we had to come forward and fix, who are running again, in this next election. It shows what the true face of the NDP is.

You know, it was Corky Evans, another former NDP MLA who's running in this election, who said: "We announced things that we never even planned on doing." Mike Farnworth was part of that. We know that was their style. That was their politics. That was their action. As a direct contrast, our members in the Tri-Cities — our members and all of our colleagues — have actually put their heads down and said: "We're not going to go out and put out empty rhetoric like Mike Farnworth and the previous colleagues did, where they kept on announcing the same things. We're actually going to do things. We're actually going to make things happen."

I've seen the amount that each of my colleagues has worked, and I've seen what they've actually delivered. Yes, we haven't spent nearly as much money as the NDP did, but we have done far, far more, and the results actually show. I do not believe that the people of Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain or the people of British Columbia will be fooled once again by accepting that rhetoric.

I think we have to take a look at how some of these comments actually could be made. We have to look at how Mr. Farnworth could even comment on what's happened in our community in the last four years after he hasn't even been here after losing badly. I remember taking office and wanting to see good things happen for the community and actually calling him, like my colleague the member for Burnaby-Edmonds sat down with the outgoing NDP MLA and talked about how to make a transition for the constituents in their riding.

[1730]

Mike Farnworth wouldn't even return my call. They closed down their office. They shut it down to members of the community. They wouldn't transfer any of the files. You couldn't get in touch with them. They shredded all their files and would not return any calls. The place was blacked out.

He left our community and didn't resurface again until he decided he wanted the trust of the good people of our community again. After I made my announce-

ment that I wouldn't seek election, he pounced. He confirmed his interest; he mobilized his old cronies to win the nomination. I don't see how the.... Why should the people of Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain trust him or any of the NDP again? We know what they were up to.

We don't need empty rhetoric. We don't need a janitor standing up for Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain. We need a principled champion. We need a doer. We need someone who has a record, inside and outside of political life, of supporting the community. We need new ideas. We need integrity. We need representatives that deliver. Empty words do not build a community; actions do. That's what our members in the B.C. Liberal Party have actually done. If anybody goes out to talk to the members in the community anywhere in the Tri-Cities and anywhere in the province, they will see how much my colleagues and I have worked. I think that is what is going to speak volumes to the people who live in every community in British Columbia.

Over my term as MLA, I've worked with individuals and politicians of every stripe to deliver for my community. I've been able to take action and mobilize our government to deliver for the community. The facts and actions speak for themselves: the new arts village at Granville Island Concept, Youth Matters!, actions to get homeless off the street, rapid transit, a planned new Pitt River Bridge — amongst a list of the many things that I mentioned before. They didn't drop out of the sky. We worked hard to see them happen. They involved hard work by my colleagues and me and the effort of many people in the community who worked with us to see their realization.

I believe that great things have happened, and great things are yet to come. There is tremendous opportunity in this province. We've begun planning for what we need in the region, and we have a plan for what's needed in the province. We know that values are important to British Columbians. We know elections are about values, that political parties are about values and that governing is about values.

We are in the midst of tremendous and long-overdue institutional change in British Columbia. That change has helped our province move to the forefront of North American economies. It's interesting to hear the opposition members stand up and say that it wasn't this government who turned the province around, that the B.C. Liberal government can't take credit for the turnaround in the economy. I want to remind the members of the opposition — and anybody who claims that — that we went through a period of the largest economic expansion in North America's history in the 1990s. There were only two places that didn't take part in that, and British Columbia was one of them. It was a result of the retarding of growth by the NDP. Every other area, everybody beside us, all our neighbours took part in this.

If you look at the difference in what British Columbia is achieving today versus our neighbours, the rest of Canada, British Columbia is outperforming and out-achieving on every single measure. That is a result of

the hard work of our Premier and this government. That change was possible because there was vision. On September 11, 1993, Gordon Campbell was elected the leader of a small opposition B.C. Liberal Party. On May 16 he helped form the first B.C. Liberal government in over 50 years. As we grew as a government and as we solidified, we really got a great understanding of what we want to see happen, who we are as a party, who we are as a province and where we want to get to as a province.

[1735]

We know we believe in the power and the potential of the individual. We have worked hard to make sure that individuals have the ability to achieve in this province. We believe in freedom, responsibility, social justice, equality of opportunity and tolerance. Those are central values of liberalism and remain the bedrock principles on which a modern society should be built, and those are the things that we have done.

Yes, we have had to manage a fiscal mess that the last government had left us, but we believe government is an instrument of the people. We believe that a strong, open, free market economy creates wealth. It encourages innovation and enables us to provide critical public services like public health care and public education, and to take care of those less fortunate. We believe that when government tries to direct the economy, it fails and people suffer. We believe monopolies are a threat to both our political and our economic liberty, so we only support government ownership of those undertakings that are beyond the scope of private enterprise or where a greater public purpose does not serve its role.

We believe in security from the hazards of sickness, unemployment, disability and old age, and that every citizen is responsible to others in society. We believe that liberty and individual responsibility are the foundations of civilized society, and that rights and duties go together. We believe in the right of private enterprise, private success and private ownership — in the right to embark on an individual enterprise and to reap the full reward of one's hard work.

Most of all, we believe in B.C. We believe in the power and inherent ability of British Columbians and in the power and potential of this magnificent province. We are B.C. Liberals. We stand for something. We stand for what we believe in. We have put forward a plan. We continue to stand together. We have a vision, and that vision is to see that each and every British Columbian has the opportunity to achieve their full potential. That is the difference between us and them. We have a vision, we have a plan, and we've done something about it.

Government cannot be everything, and we can't look to government to solve all our problems. Rather, government must focus on the things that really matter. With these values first and foremost in our minds and in our decision-making, we have accomplished some tremendous things.

Many will remember that when we first formed our government just over two years ago, our provincial

finances and provincial economy were both in perilous shape. Since we formed the government, the economic challenges presented by the September 11 tragedy, softwood lumber negotiations with the U.S., SARS, mad cow, wildfires, drought and a great number of things didn't help. I don't think we should complain or feel sorry for ourselves, but it's important to recognize that governments are elected to deal with tough circumstances. We understand that.

In clear opposition and clear contrast to this government, the last government faced challenges oftentimes not even as severe as the ones we've had to face but did not know how to deal with them — simple challenges like my predecessor, Mike Farnworth, having a standoff with doctors that led to a crisis in the province. Governments are elected to deal with tough circumstances, to meet goals for their province and to deliver for the best interests of the people in their province. What's significant is that this continued to happen, and we are still on track. We still balanced our budget in our third year. We've met our commitments, and we ran a surplus greater than anyone could have even imagined.

I bring up some of these things because I think it's important to remember here and to think about what kind of shape the province would be in had there still been an NDP government in Victoria during this time. As I said, the NDP held power in the period of the greatest economic expansion in North America's history and still managed to drive this province into economic stagnation and have-not status. Mr. Speaker, we would have been in terrible shape.

You know what? Things have been tough, but it is getting brighter and brighter. Things are happening, and I'm thankful for each and every day that it's Premier Gordon Campbell and the B.C. Liberal government dealing with the organization and planning of this government rather than Carole James and the NDP. I'm proud to be a B.C. Liberal now more than ever.

[1740]

I want to thank all of you for this great honour. Now it's time for me to take part in some of the great opportunities that are presented in British Columbia as a result of the hard work of our government. I will continue to work with the Premier and this government to make sure that this Premier continues the work that he set out on, that this province continues on the path it needs to go on and that opportunities continue to exist for young people in this province.

As a young person, I'm very proud of what we've achieved. As a young person, I'm very excited about the future, and I look forward to seeing all of you in that great future ahead.

Interjection.

**K. Manhas:** I'll take you for lunch anytime.

I look forward to seeing you all, even as I make my transition back to private life and — who knows? — maybe in the future, if it's right, back to public life. It

has been a great honour, a great privilege, and I want to thank you.

**G. Hogg:** It's a delight to follow the passionate member and the comments and issues he brings forward. We certainly have enjoyed working with him and look forward to him having a prosperous time in the private sector and perhaps returning to this Legislature at some time in the future.

The Speech from the Throne historically provides a vision for the future, a clear understanding — and the clearer the better. The more focused and stronger the goals, the more likely they are to be achieved. The qualities and tasks that goals have as a part of them become time-limited and measurable.

Clarification helps us to ensure that we can overcome great challenges. John F. Kennedy's famous challenge to put a man on the moon at the end of the decade is often used and referred to as one of the ways of goals being set, worked towards and focused on. The clearer the goal and the tighter the time frame, the more likely it is to achieve.

I remember reading about the opening of Disneyworld. They had talked about Walt Disney having this clear and crystal vision of what Disneyworld might look like. On the official opening, unfortunately, Walt Disney had died. His brother Roy presided at the opening of Disneyworld. Somebody came up to him after and said: "You know, it's too bad Walt couldn't be here to see this." Roy responded: "You know, he did see this, and that's why you can see it today."

That clarity of vision that was put forward was the reason why we were able to look and see, and now many generations and thousands of people have enjoyed Disneyworld because of the clarity of vision that Walt Disney had.

The Speech from the Throne provides such a vision, a view of the future which — with discipline, focus, good planning and resources — can become a reality. Part of the process is the engagement of the people of this province, and that comes from citizens. Certainly, the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform is a historic milestone in looking at the approach, the engagement and the involvement of the people of this province. They're getting the opportunity to make an informed decision on the best way to elect their MLAs and to choose the electoral system that best represents their needs and their interests.

B.C.'s voter turnout has sunk into the low 50s in the last provincial election. This trend has occurred throughout all the OECD countries. The trend started in the 1950s in the United States; we saw a reduction of the voter turnout there. The OECD countries tend to have followed ten to 15 years behind the trends in the United States. They've gone from about an 80 percent average turnout in the fifties to what we're seeing today. And as I said, turnout is in the low 50s in British Columbia. It is rare in the body politic to find trends which are so widely recognizable and generalizable — able to be looked at and generalized across so many countries.

[1745]

This trend has occurred in the face of rapidly rising levels of education, and education is, virtually everywhere, a strong predictor of political participation. The higher the levels of education, the more likely we are to see people engaged and a part of the political process. Yet as we've seen that growth in educative levels, we've seen a reduction in political participation. Part of this may be attributed to the way elections have shifted from the mass-based participation to what has become much more of a vicarious viewing of the campaign on television, whereas years ago people were out there, engaged and a part of elections. As we see mass media and the growing of the electronic media, people become almost vicarious watchers of the process and make their decisions based on the 6 o'clock news rather than being out there, engaged and a part of what the electoral process is about.

Robert Putnam, a professor of public policy at Harvard University, has reviewed mass participation. He's looked at the impacts that mass participation has had in elections, in participation — our membership in political parties, in unions and in churches. He says that these represent the principal social organizations for the three primary spheres of community life — politics, work and faith. For many citizens of established democracies, churches, unions and political parties once represented a primary source of identity, of social support and of political leverage. They referred to and were a part of community involvement and, indeed, friendship.

The decline of engagement in these institutions stands out in advanced democracies. This trend, Putnam postulates, may be a transformation from a social-capital-intensive to a much more politics-oriented-by-the-media and media interested in professional forums of politics. As Tip O'Neil often said.... His little mis-sive, "All politics is local," may be losing some relevance in the times and days that we're facing now because of the changes and the electronic impact.

The citizens' assembly is a bold, creative step towards trying to better engage our citizens in their future and in the political process. The future laid out in the throne speech is built upon a strong foundation — a foundation of more jobs, of more investment, of lower taxes, of balanced budgets and of increased revenues. This prosperity allows us as British Columbians to look to the future with more optimism than has been possible in over a decade. The goals and the vision are now being seen and looked at from this foundation, from the sound economic foundation, and it gives us new confidence, new optimism and certainly many new possibilities.

These opportunities and possibilities are the welcomed result of hard work, of trials and tribulations, and of obstacles. As Churchill said, it is out of the adversity of these challenges that we indeed grow strength. We as a province and the people of this province have indeed grown strong through this process and the challenges that we've taken on.

We are now leading the nation in job creation. Unemployment is at its lowest level since 1981. As Can-

ada's gateway to the Asia-Pacific, we have an opportunity to forge new relationships.

I've had the privilege of visiting China. My son taught school in China. I've had an opportunity to see firsthand the enthusiasm, to see their growth, to see that they are reaching out. China and all of the South Asian community is indeed ready. Ports, airports, roads and rail links open B.C. to new trade, to new investment, to new visitors and to new cultures. We have to position ourselves to be ready to take advantage of that opportunity to be good global citizens, to be good global neighbours and to ensure that our participation is there as they put out a reaching hand and to see that we can lift each other up together and reach higher as a result of cooperation.

We are moving beyond economic recovery now. We are moving on to connect with people. We've talked so much about goals being referred to as our economy, the budget — getting the economy moving or the budget balanced. Indeed, those were not our goals. Those were indeed processes to achieve a goal. Our goal was actually to connect with people, to give more opportunity and more options to people. We're seeing now the opportunity to give them those more options, more opportunities. The goal has always been about people. The process has been the economy, the budget and jobs to be able to move us there, so that process is being moved on.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**G. Hogg:** Please be seated. Be seated. No standing ovations in the House, please. Please be seated. All of you, please be seated. Thank you. [Laughter.]

Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, you may also be seated now. Thank you.

[1750]

Again, it's that connection. It's that connection with people that we've been working on. It's that connection with people that we've been after all of this time, and we're able to make that. Indeed, it's the economy that's been a connector to being able to make that so that people have an opportunity to achieve their goals, their dreams and their aspirations. We're doing that in a truly global economy, and that opportunity is truly global.

With the five great goals that we've laid out for the next decade, those goals to make B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent.... Indeed, connecting that with the fact that we've looked at and are part of a growing participation in the democratic process, and our assembly will help us build on that....

Secondly, to lead the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness. Certainly many members here.... I see the Solicitor General is a fine example of physical fitness and the ability to look at and manage and work towards that. These goals are not beyond even his comprehension or his ability. He, too, can realize these goals and be able to work forward, as can the minister of Community, Aboriginal

and Women's Services, who I know has had a lot of challenges in terms of achieving that, just as we as a province have had challenges overcoming some of the economic obstacles we've had to deal with. These are not just challenges that we have personally, but they're also global, and we as a province are taking on those challenges as we build to healthier living and greater physical fitness.

To build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities or with special needs, children at risk and seniors. We have made great strides in terms of being able to provide those services. We've moved and shifted in terms of the social provision of services away from a global model that says you have to fit yourself into these models, into these services. We've been able to centralize them and focus them more around individuals and families so that, in fact, they have greater opportunity and choice in our government. That's been a wonderful stride forward for the developmentally disabled, for the special needs, as we've looked at individualized funding models, as we've looked at models that will allow us to focus more directly on them.

We've looked at children in care. Knowing that by having systems for children in care where we take them out of the household and we place them into different homes, we don't have.... When we were doing that, 70 percent of the children the last government was apprehending were coming from single-parents families — usually women on income assistance. We've been able to look at and build support systems around them, because we know that virtually everyone wants to be a good parent. We know that virtually everyone needs to be supported in helping them to do that.

Often the apprehensions we were making were as a result of people who basically needed a little bit of support for a period of time. They perhaps needed some assistance in some day care or meal preparation or child care. Those types of things have allowed us to ensure that at less cost we've been able to provide a better, more efficient and more effective system, one which is supported by families across this province.

Our fifth is to lead the world in sustainable environmental management with the best air and water quality and the best fisheries management. When I chaired the strategic planning committee of the greater Vancouver regional district, we did something called *Creating Our Future*. We went out and engaged the people across the GVRD and what they wanted. What were their goals? What did they want their future to look like? The top two issues on that were clean air and clean water. People across this province want to ensure that they have clean air and clean water as the foundation for their quality of life. Certainly, laying that out explicitly as a goal is a wonderful and appropriate thing for this province to be doing.

To create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada. We're certainly well on our way to doing that in the creation of jobs that we've seen over the past three years. The turnaround has indeed been remarkable. Combining that with a focus on issues and ser-

vices for seniors, the throne speech has announced that we're creating a Premier's council on seniors and aging to look at a myriad of seniors issues, to look at the issue of retirement ages. Clearly, as our demographics are changing, these are important issues. We've taken the leadership in looking at, focusing on and starting to deal with those issues. The Premier is going to be appointing that committee in the future — a committee which will provide us with knowledgeable, informed seniors from across this province to look at, guide, support, and provide advice to government as we move forward.

These are great goals. They're challenging goals, but no less challenging than those that were facing us when we formed government in 2001.

Interjection.

**G. Hogg:** The sound of one hand clapping.

**Mr. Speaker:** Wait until the applause dies down. [Laughter.]

[1755]

**G. Hogg:** Be seated again, please.

We are moving forward to test our limits, to test our potential. We won the right to host the Olympic and the Paralympic Games. It's the vision of that type of excellence which continues to draw us on, which continues to support us as we create that vision and the goals behind it and now have the vision that comes through the throne speech and back that up with the necessary resources through our budget.

It has been a wonderful opportunity to stand before the people of this province and talk about that vision and particularly to hear the thunderous ovation from my colleagues. I don't think I've seen their.... [Applause.]

No, no. Please be seated again. You shouldn't be standing up in the House. Thank you so very much, Mr. Speaker.

Noting the time, I move that we do now adjourn debate.

G. Hogg moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

**Mr. Speaker:** After that, some nourishment is called for, hon. members. We will recess until 6:45.

The House recessed from 5:56 p.m. to 6:47 p.m.

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

**D. MacKay:** I am pleased to stand up this evening and respond to the Speech from the Throne that was delivered on Tuesday, February 8, 2005, by Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor.

As has been said several times, the throne speech is a blueprint of what the government proposes to do

during the next legislative session and into the future. There's so much good news in that throne speech. We've heard the members speak about the highlights of the throne speech. I'm also going to spend a few minutes touching on some of the highlights of the throne speech, as I saw items of interest that affected me and the constituents I represent.

Probably the most startling thing in the throne speech was the fact that the citizens' assembly will be put on the ballot on May 17, 2005. The people of this province will be asked what it is they want to do when it comes to electing the MLAs who represent them in this Legislative Assembly. That has certainly piqued a lot of interest, given the fact that other provinces are also coming on stream and looking at what British Columbia is doing in involving the citizens of our province. The fact that we have a citizens' assembly coming to a vote by the people of this province has prompted other provinces to look at what we're doing, so I would suggest that we are leading Canada in electoral reform.

There are other things in the throne speech that caught my attention. The fact that we are now creating jobs.... We actually have jobs looking for people. We have, in fact, created over 200,000 new jobs in this province since we were elected, and 97 percent of those are full-time jobs. They're full-time, good-paying jobs supporting families throughout this province.

The other interesting thing about the number of jobs we've created is that it's had an effect on the unemployment rate. Today in British Columbia the provincial unemployment rate sits at about 6.2 percent. Those are numbers we have not seen in this province since 1981. For 24 years we saw the unemployment rate rise in this province, and today, this year, we are actually sitting at the lowest level since 1981. That speaks volumes about what we've been able to do as a government to reduce red tape and bring the investor back into our province. That is a great-news story.

I am seeing some of that spinoff in the northwest part of our province, where the unemployment rate has actually dropped about 2½ percent. We're sitting at about 9.2 percent. We're about three points above the provincial average, but those numbers have dropped significantly as well. Those jobs have dropped because of the reinvestment in the forest industry as well as the new interest expressed again by the mining sector.

[1850]

That is good news, because they are creating employment opportunities for people in the northwest. They're creating employment opportunities in the small community of Dease Lake, and they're also creating employment opportunities for people in the Atlin area, in Smithers and throughout the rest of the riding that I represent.

We're actually seeing people move back to our province. For the longest time in the nineties, under the previous administration, people had actually left this province because there were no employment opportunities for them here. They had to go seek employment opportunities next door in Alberta. For the first time in ten years, people are actually moving back to our prov-

ince because of the employment opportunities present for them here. That is such an endorsement of what we've done as a government — to create these employment opportunities and bring people back to the province.

We shouldn't forget that at one time the province led the country in employment opportunities. We had the highest GDP, and the ten years under that previous administration saw us go from the number one job creator, the number one employment opportunity province, to number ten, and that is a sad state. I hope people remember it on May 17, when they go to the polls and vote on two issues: the electoral citizens' assembly, and whether they want to go forward under the continued leadership of our Premier and the B.C. Liberal government or go backwards and suffer what they did under the previous administration.

When we look at the labour force and all those jobs that have been created, we should not forget for a moment that 68 public sector agreements have been reached in the three and a half years since we've become government. We've had the fewest strikes and lockouts in 30 years. That would suggest to me that the people of this province, whether they be in the public sector or the private sector, have understood that they have to do more.

We've all shared in that downsizing. We've all shared with the zero-zero-and-zero. I think it's probably been forgotten, but most of us in this House, with the exception of the opposition, took a 5 percent pay reduction to bring our financial house back in order shortly after we were elected.

Not only are the public sector people having to bite the bullet; they're doing it without going to lockouts or strikes. That suggests to me they understand that some of the hard times were necessary to get us where we are today. It's like living within our means. We are finally, as a province, living within our means. No more debt; no more passing on debt to the next generation.

It's much like myself. If I decided I wanted to go to Hawaii or Australia, I probably couldn't afford it, but I could use my kid's credit card or my grandchildren's credit card to take that trip and then expect my grandchildren to pay for it later on when they get into the workforce. That's not fair to the next generation. It's not fair to my grandchildren, who are in primary school — grades 2, 4 and 7. It's not fair to ask them to pay for a holiday trip for papa while he goes down to Australia and to ask them to pay for it when they get into the workforce.

We finally have our spending under control, and we are living within our means. For the first time, as was evidenced by our budget speech which followed a week later, we actually have a surplus in our province. We've paid off \$1.79 billion from our debt.

We're actually going into a golden decade. The Premier talks about a golden decade that awaits the people of this province under our government. We're going to be the most literate. In order to understand the literacy, I travelled last weekend on Saturday down to Burns Lake, and I was pleased to present the librarian

with a cheque for \$336,000 to add on to and double the size of that small library in Burns Lake. That's the power of a strong economy. That's what you can do when you've got a strong economy and a balanced budget with a surplus.

We talk about healthy living and physical fitness. I don't think there are too many of us in this room who realize that I'm only 28 years old. That's because I like to work out in the morning, and I'll take a lie detector to prove that. I think you've all seen that commercial on television, which prompted me to say that. It's such a neat commercial.

**J. Nuraney:** Maybe he's only 21.

**D. MacKay:** I doubt that; I doubt that.

We're also going to, in this golden decade.... We have a support system in place for those who most need it, those with physical and mental disabilities, the elderly people.

[1855]

**R. Stewart:** The 28-year-olds.

**D. MacKay:** The 28-year-olds. That's right.

We will also, in this golden decade, look at sustainable environmental management, with clean water and clean air.

Number five, the thing that I like most of all, is the fact that we are going to create more jobs than any other jurisdiction in Canada. We've done that already. We're well ahead of the national average, and we're going to continue to do that with private sector investment in the forest industry and in the mining industry. The mining industry in my part of the province is going to create thousands of jobs in the years to come.

Those are some of the things that we can do with a strong economy. But there's more we can do with a strong economy and with that surplus. We've committed to spending \$76 million through 2007 for diagnostic screening services for every child in this province — in hearing, sight and dental. That's a great step forward — to make sure that those young kids have all the tools they need as they're growing up, and that with any problems identified in their early ages we have the medical technology to help most of those young children overcome some of those problems.

We're also going to add funds to prevent FASD. I spoke in the House this morning about the fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and what we have to do. We have to educate people about the pitfalls of consumption of alcohol during pregnancy. That's all it's about. It's just education, and we have committed more funds to do that education.

There's so much more we can do with a strong economy. Education. We keep hearing about the number of schools that we've closed in this province, but the NDP always forgets to tell everybody that we've got 30,000 fewer students in our education system today. If you look at the ratio of teachers to students in

our school system today, it's what it was in 1995. There's no difference; it's just that we've lost 30,000 students. The NDP still rags on us that we've closed schools. We have closed schools, but they should remember that we have also built new schools and spent a pile of money upgrading schools that are in the system today and still in use.

With a strong economy, we've been able to give the school boards \$68 million in wage costs, and we've also provided \$138 million in one-time grants to help public education. With a strong economy, we will continue to provide funding to our education system. Through 2007-08 we will see a \$1.8 billion increase in funding to our education system since 2001. In six years we'll have actually increased the funding every year, and the total will be \$1.8 billion in 2007-08. As I spoke about the things you can do with a strong economy, we have actually — I've got the numbers here now — built or approved 29 new schools and upgraded 245 schools throughout the province. Over the next three years we will also see \$800 million invested in capital improvements in our public education system.

Safer communities are something else that caught my attention, having previously been involved in law enforcement. I was pleased to see that AMBER alert was finally up and operating in our province. AMBER alert, of course, is a program designed to find young children and involve the people of this province in finding young children who are apprehended. That was a good-news story, and I was pleased to have been part of the process of making that thing come to reality.

This morning in the House I spoke very briefly about the sentencing for crystal meth. I didn't get a great deal of time to talk about that, and I'd like to spend just a few minutes. Those of us who are in this chamber are going to have to work with our Solicitor General to make sure the federal government understands that crystal meth is not smoking grass. Crystal meth kills young people. We lost 33 people in our province in 2003; 33 young people died as a result of crystal meth.

[1900]

More and more people are using that drug, which is cooked in homemade labs on kitchen stoves and sold in back alleys to our young people. It's actually destroying the minds of our young people. We have to work with our Solicitor General to see if we can't get those sentences changed around, because at the present time, possession or trafficking of crystal meth carries a maximum of ten years in prison.

My commitment to the people that I represent — and I'm sure other people around here as well — is that I'm going to work with the Solicitor General to see if we can't get those maximum sentences of ten years converted to being the minimum sentence for those people that decide they want to traffic crystal meth and destroy our young people, because we have to do that. The social aspect of crystal meth.... We've got to educate people on the damage that it's doing to the health of our young people. We have a lot of work ahead of us

there, but I think it's something we can do, and I know with his support we'll make that happen.

Crystal meth is a health care issue. We've actually increased the funding to health care by \$2.4 billion since 2000, and over the next three years we're going to add an additional \$1.5 billion to our health care system. In 2005 health care will have consumed 44 percent of our entire provincial budget — 44 percent of our entire provincial budget goes into health care.

We're also training more doctors. For the first time since 1980 we've actually increased the number of doctors that we are training in this province to look after the health needs of the people of this province. There are more nurses being trained. We have nurse practitioners coming on stream, and we're doing a lot to encourage people to get into the health profession. We are actually providing forgivable student loans to those who enter the health profession and serve in underserved areas of our province.

Pharmacare. The cost to Pharmacare had been increasing on an average of about 12 to 14 percent a year. Under the new throne speech and under the new budget we are now seeing 82 percent of all citizens actually paying less or not paying any MSP premiums. Sorry, I got off track there. I will start again. We are actually seeing 82 percent of all citizens paying the same or less than they did in 2001 for Pharmacare, in spite of a spiralling cost increase to Pharmacare.

Looking ahead to the future, to the golden decade that awaits us, the people of this province are going to have a choice to make on May 17. They can continue to move ahead for a better province with more employment opportunities, better health care, better education and a government that's actually got planning people in place to make sure, as we move forward, that we are looking at the demographics of our population and planning for the people — planning for the people that are getting older. I will probably be 29 after the next election, and I want to make sure that when I'm 30, there is someone looking after me in my golden years.

**Hon. P. Bell:** When's that? Five years from now?

**D. MacKay:** Five years from now, or pretty close to it.

The throne speech was a good-news story. It was a good-news story for everybody through every part of our province, and it touched every age. It touched the youngest people from birth right through to the final days when they lay us to rest. It's a good-news story for everybody. I'm certainly proud to be part of a government that has turned this province around and that has seen some of the benefits of some of the tough choices we've had to make, so I certainly support the throne speech.

**J. Nuraney:** I, too, rise in support of the throne speech. As many of my colleagues have said in this House, the throne speech is a blueprint. It is articulating a vision. It is a plan that is set forward by this government for the months that will come in front of us.

A throne speech traditionally lays out this plan. It is a vision. I must also say that when we were elected in 2001, we had a plan. We had a vision. It is not very often that you see governments implementing those plans, and as you can see, our report card says that we have now been able to implement 97 percent of the things that we had set out to achieve, and we have accomplished those promises.

[1905]

This is a huge achievement. It is an achievement under a leadership, and it takes a leader to not only have the intellect and the administrative ability to manage the affairs of government but to have a vision. I have seen this very distinctly in our leader, the Premier of this province. He not only has the ability to implement a plan, he has the ability to visualize, to see ahead as to what he would like to see this province be.

When we became a part of this government, we shared that vision. I'm very happy and very proud to say that as a member of this government I have been able not only to share the vision but to play a part in accomplishing and achieving the plan that our Premier had set out for us.

Our Premier not only visualized and set out a plan; he changed the way we govern. He set us all up in caucus committees so that each one of us, each member of this House, each member of the caucus, had a part to play where we felt we were a part of the decision-making process. We felt that we were a part of this journey where we had these huge challenges in front of us that we had to surmount.

There is no denying the fact that there were challenges when we took office. There were enormous challenges. We had seen a decade of decay. We saw that investments had taken flight from our province. We know that we are now in a global economy where the mobility of capital is so very easy. People move from province to province, from country to country, and the investment disappears very quickly when there is no credibility with the government.

We saw that in the 1990s, the credibility was at its total ebb and the lowest ever recorded in the history of British Columbia. The investors were not interested in coming. We saw the flight of capital. We saw that happening in the mining sector, where people were investing.... People who had their mines here took away their capital and resources and went south.

We saw that happening in all different sectors of the high-tech industry. I know for a fact that I have in my riding the huge Electronic Arts, which is a world leader not only as a high-tech company but in various other creativities that this company is famous for. They were going to take their operations to Seattle because the climate here was not favourable for them. As we assumed office, as we began to change, as we began to put new measures in place, we created this sense of confidence again. When all the different achievements that this government has been able to accomplish.... I think if you were to point out one single achievement of this government which really is to be applauded, it

is that sense of being able to bring back the confidence in the investment market.

We are now seeing a net increase in the immigration into the province. I remember that in the 1990s the young, newly qualified graduates from universities were not able to find jobs in British Columbia. They had to leave the province. This was not just the flight of a resource, it also meant breaking up families. I remember that my daughter was not with us for several years, because she found a job in Ottawa. Thank God that she's back home after we managed to create that sense of confidence and create 200,000 new jobs in this province in the last three and a half years.

All this did not just happen miraculously; it took a lot of work. It took a lot of courage. It took a lot of decision-making that was hard, that was tough. Those decisions and those policies were implemented because there was a calibre in our caucus. If you look at the calibre of the ministers we have had, you would see that this speaks well for the government.

[1910]

Many times I have said in my speeches in public that every so often I look around the room and see the caucus members, and I ask this question: who is a member here who was looking for a job in 2001? I cannot see one.

Each one of us has given up something to be in this House. Each one of us felt in 2001 that the province was crying out and saying: "Save us." Each one of us took up the challenge and came into public service simply because of the need; this was the time that we had to change and turn things around. This, to me, speaks volumes of the calibre that we have in our caucus, the calibre that we have in our ministers — for example, the Solicitor General, who is sitting in this House today.

I have had the pleasure of chairing the police complaints commission in the past. Every policeman and every person that I talk to in the RCMP speaks very highly of our Solicitor General. They felt that after a long time there was a sense of confidence. There was a sense of confidence in the Solicitor General. They knew that he would do the right thing. That sense of confidence created the new plan that the Solicitor General had to put in place, a scheme of integration among police forces and police work so that we are able to get better results.

It is the calibre like that of the Solicitor General, the Attorney General, the Minister of Health who was there at the time, the Minister of Finance who was there at the time, that calibre of people who created that sense of confidence.... We were able to implement the plan that lay ahead.

We are moving forward. Like my colleague for Surrey-White Rock mentioned earlier, balancing the budget, showing fiscal responsibility, adding more money to the health care system, adding more money to education, bringing forth the social agenda in making sure that people with disabilities receive the highest allowance they've ever received in the history of British Columbia — all those achievements are struc-

tural achievements, in my opinion. These are the foundations we have laid so that we can now move forward in what the Premier calls the golden decade. These are the measures that were necessary.

We now have a future that we have to plan. This is a future like the throne speech talks about. It is what we need to do: the best place on earth to raise a family, the best in child care and early childhood development, the best in education, the best in higher learning, the best in literacy. These words, "the best," are there for a reason: because that is our goal and that is our vision — to make British Columbia the best place on earth. This is where we know to go.

We have now seen that we have been able to get the Olympics in 2010. That process, that journey towards 2010, is going to create a sense of optimism. It is going to create a sense of confidence. It is going to give our children and the next generation the sense of hope, the sense of creativity, the sense that they will be able to play a role in making British Columbia the best place on earth.

With these words, it also needs to be said that people say we have short memories. People have short memories. Let it not be forgotten what the NDP did to this province in the 1990s. It was only five years ago that each one of us was crying out loud to say that we do not need this kind of government in British Columbia.

As we are heading towards a new election, the next election in the coming weeks, let it not be forgotten what the NDP's agenda is. The NDP is, simply put, a government party of socialist principles. If anybody has read what is called the Regina Manifesto, you will see that the NDP talks about nationalizing banks and financial institutions. The NDP talks about a singular objective of promoting just the union interest. This kind of agenda must not be allowed in British Columbia ever again.

[1915]

Let it be known that we as a government have perhaps not been perfect. There are things that we have done that may not be right. We accept that. There are things that we said we would do, and we have perhaps not been able to achieve those goals. But we are a government that is serious. We are a government that listens.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, from personal experiences, that when I visited the schools in the past months, the teachers told me they had to spend their own money to buy books for children, which I thought was a situation that is not acceptable. There were parents who came and complained to me that the libraries were closed in the schools, because there were no librarians, and the funding for all those things was not there.

I took these matters forward, and as you know, in the announcement, several of my colleagues echoed the same sentiments that I did. The result was that the government listened and put in place the extra funding so that these things will now be there. The textbooks for schools — there is special targeted funding for that

— will now be bought. The librarians in the schools will now be in place. These are measures that came forward because we were listening.

It is very important that whilst we govern, we also look at the needs. That combination of being able to listen, of making a plan, of making sure that we are moving in the direction the province should be moving in and, at the same time, having our ear to the ground to make sure that our measures are doing what we intended them to do....

We are in a time of fast-moving changes around the world. I have always said that in a situation where the pace of change is going so rapidly, it is important that we have effective leadership that understands the challenges that lie ahead and has the courage of its convictions, leadership that is visionary and has a real, good intention at heart to make sure that British Columbia indeed achieves the place that we are all talking about as the best place on earth.

Having said that, I once again say that I support the throne speech. I am a very proud member of this government. I'm looking forward to the public's point of view to give us one more mandate to make sure we complete the task that we have begun.

**R. Stewart:** It is indeed my pleasure to rise right now, particularly immediately following the hon. member for Burnaby-Willingdon. That member has distinguished himself in so many ways during his time in the House. He has shown himself to be a tireless and passionate advocate for so many people in his constituency and across this province and, indeed, around the world. I take my hat off to the member for Burnaby-Willingdon for the tremendous dedication he has shown his constituents and also the tremendous dedication he has shown this province and this world in his public life, in the decision he made to step forward in 2001 and serve if the public asked him to.

I ask the people of Burnaby-Willingdon to please ask him to do it again, because we need him back in the House. He is a tireless worker, and I think he's the best thing that I have seen from Burnaby-Willingdon in so many years.

I rise today, of course, to speak in favour of the throne speech, to acknowledge the simplicity of the throne speech and yet to acknowledge the incredible implications of the complex public policy document that it represents. It sets out for the next decade, a time when we don't know how the politics of the world will play out.

If anyone had asked me six years ago the kinds of things I would expect our government to have to face as far as outward forces go, I would never have come up with such a protracted dispute in the forest sector with the United States. I would never have contemplated anything as evil and as heinous as 9/11. I would not have anticipated the worst forest fire season on record.

[1920]

I wouldn't have anticipated that so much of our forests would be completely devastated by the moun-

tain pine beetle; that two of our important industries of agriculture — the ranching of cattle and the raising of chickens — would be so completely devastated by illnesses; that so many aspects of our society would face enormous challenges, from floods to droughts. Yet we would weather through it all. That is what this government has done under the leadership of Gordon Campbell. It has weathered every storm that has been thrown at it.

I simply recognize that the throne speech we see today is, I believe, the throne speech that we set out to produce when each one of us decided to give up what was in our lives at the time, to give up our careers as they were and to throw ourselves into this position in service to the people of our communities and of this province. The throne speech that we have today is exactly what I think the people of B.C. could have hoped for, and perhaps even more than they could have hoped for, in 2000, when they had recognized that their beloved province had fallen so drastically from number one in the country to number ten.

I don't want to focus too much on each one of the economic realities that we faced. I dealt with that quite a bit in my response to the budget. I do want to acknowledge some of the tremendous people that have helped us get there and helped our society along the way.

One of those sectors is our educators, our teachers. Professional teachers, for me, are the most important part of our society. I know a great many professional teachers to whom I take off my hat for their dedication to their classroom, for their dedication to their students, for their dedication to their profession. I know that some of them are quite frustrated today by the way in which their profession, I will call it, has evolved. They are the ones who are perhaps saddest, because they did enter a profession when they studied to become a teacher and an educator, and I believe that it ought to be a profession. Sadly, we're seeing some directions that don't make many of us comfortable.

I do want to acknowledge those educators. While I cannot acknowledge them all individually, I want to acknowledge one such educator who distinguished himself in schools not far from where I grew up, with whom I had the chance to meet a year or more ago and who has since passed away. The following information I credit to his grandson Colin Doyle, a staff person and colleague here in the Legislature. His grandfather Ken Mutter spent nearly 40 years as an educator in British Columbia, having begun his career as a teacher in Jordan River on Vancouver Island in 1942, prior to serving as a flying officer and navigator during the war.

After the war, Ken taught in Kelowna, becoming a vice-principal in 1949. Mr. Mutter then came to Coquitlam and served in 1957 as vice-principal of Winslow junior secondary school. From there he moved to Como Lake High School in 1958, until he became principal at Montgomery in 1962. His subjects were math and science. He was principal of Montgomery from '62 to '64, and in that capacity he would have known my

older brother Paul as a very young student. In 1964, Ken Mutter moved to become director of instruction for school district 43, a position he held for ten years. He was also active in a number of professional organizations. Ken has served as president of both the Kelowna and the Coquitlam teachers associations and has been active in a number of BCTF committees.

In 1970, Douglas College was established. Mr. Mutter was the secretary for Coquitlam and New Westminster in discussions to have the college in those communities. This led to the development of Douglas and Kwantlen colleges. He helped coordinate the feasibility of a college to cover Burnaby, New West, Coquitlam and Maple Ridge. Along with this work, he pursued his education, completing his master of education from UBC in 1970. In 1974 he was promoted to assistant superintendent and then retired as acting superintendent in 1984.

[1925]

His life, like the lives of a great many teaching professionals, was dedicated to his students and to our schools. I know that there are tens of thousands of other dedicated, professional teachers across this province, including my wife. I'm always proud to hear from past and present students and parents about how my wife, Anna Rosa, taught them or touched their family in some way through her dedication. I know there are many other teachers like that. I know I join my colleagues in the House here in acknowledging the professional teachers that make our schools what they are today.

In my budget response I mentioned the fiftieth anniversary of Scouts, the francophone Scout group, and the contribution made to that by Jean and Suzanne Lambert. Those two have also been deeply involved in parts of my community that I want to talk about now. But I'll mention some others, like Henriette Sevigny, who is involved with Centre Bel Age and Ladies Auxiliary at the Foyer Maillard, la Société Maillardville-Uni, la Société Biculturelle and of course her own parish. There's Laura Frigon, who's involved in pretty much the same organizations. At the recent Festival du Bois this weekend I couldn't keep up with her — this woman who must be at least 60.

There's Mariange Beauregard, who with her friends distinguished herself by the knitting of frog hats. The frog toques that she created, along with other frog paraphernalia, including a frog tie that I have worn in this House, frog socks that I'm not wearing now and various other.... In fact, I think I could outfit myself entirely in knitted frog outerwear produced by Mariange Beauregard and her team. They do this for charity, but they do it also for the spirit that Maillardville has in acknowledging our tremendous francophone heritage, which I know many members right here in this House also acknowledge from their own families and backgrounds. I promise that anyone who wants to can buy a frog toque from me. I'll have it delivered next week.

Interjection.

**R. Stewart:** You laugh. It is absolutely a wonderful frog toque, and it's a tremendous bargain as well. Her husband, André Beauregard, certainly helps in that capacity. He was also a former Scout leader of mine and is tremendously involved in his community.

There is Gilberte Napp. She belongs to Lady of Lourdes Centre Bel Age from.... Again, they raise funds for the church with catering. Their team creates the tourtière and sugar pies that every year in the past I have been able to bring into our caucus to let them share the francophone heritage of my community with meat pies and sugar pies created by these wonderful — I won't call them pioneers, because they're far too young for that — people who are dedicated to the traditions of my community. There are others, like Irene Canuel, Margaret Proulx, Marguerite Finnigan, Rachel Tourgeon, Claudia Lemay, Emelia Lafrenière, Lina Chabot, Lorraine Therrien, Annette Poirier, Muriel Bruneau, Suzanne Girard, Florence Bouchard and, of course, Laura Frigon.

These folks are the heart of our community in Maillardville. They're among the hearts, because there are many more. I hesitated even mentioning those, because I know I have forgotten some and missed some. For the ones I have forgotten, I thank them for their anonymity, but I want to acknowledge all of them for the spirit that they create in our community.

There is another fellow that I wanted to acknowledge. Father Stan Frytek, who's the pastor at Notre Dame de Lourdes, is going to be celebrating his ninetieth birthday on March 31 and on June 17 will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of his entering the priesthood. Certainly there will be a big celebration in our parish at that time, as we recognize a tremendous commitment of another person who has spent a great deal of his life working with the francophone community of Maillardville.

[1930]

On Sunday I was able to attend another function recognizing some outstanding people in our community. It was the Women of Distinction Awards luncheon for the Soroptimists of the Tri-Cities. At this event they recognized several women who have done outstanding work to better the lives of women and girls in our community and elsewhere.

[H. Long in the chair.]

I want to acknowledge these individual winners of the women of distinction awards: Suzie Yoon, Kim Nelson and Irene Dale. The winner of the Violet Richardson award was Vanessa Barbossa, a student at Centennial high school. She's involved in relief work in Mexico, a tremendously enthusiastic student. I had the opportunity to meet both her and her parents at the awards ceremony, and I congratulate her.

There were also the Women's Opportunity awards, which went to Shelly Warren, who got second place, and Kathy Tremblay, who got first place; and the Making a Difference for Women awards. Second place went to Laurie Henri, and first place went to Jacqueline Gor-

ing. I'll talk a moment about Jacqueline Goring, because her office is just above my constituency office in Coquitlam. She runs an organization called Pregnancy Concerns, an organization that serves women who are facing a crisis pregnancy or women who have faced a crisis pregnancy.

It also serves a number of social agencies in the community and tries to give help to women at a time when perhaps they need it the most. Her dedication and commitment to those women is something that I want to acknowledge. It was in fact me that nominated her for the award, and I'm very pleased that the Soroptimists saw fit to acknowledge the tremendous contributions that Jackie gives to our community by giving her that first-place award in Making a Difference for Women.

Throughout our community of late, of course, we've seen tremendous efforts to raise funds for tsunami relief. I know that I could speak forever about the amount of work that these people in my community have raised for tsunami relief. These are people who, through no short effort whatsoever, have put a lot of work into the cause that they believe strongly in. I'm talking about the Kinsmen, of course, and the Rotary and Lions clubs and other service clubs. But I'm also speaking about groups that just came together and decided to do something.

I know that certainly at Mundy Park Christian Fellowship there was a program to raise money through their church, both nationally and locally. I also attended a tsunami fundraiser called Wave of Relief at Our Lady of Fatima church hall on January 22. I want to acknowledge Father Patrick Teporten, the pastor there, and his team of organizers led by George Scott and the large team of performers we saw that night. We enjoyed wonderful food and great fellowship.

We also saw Scout troops and classrooms all pitching in to help with this enormous disaster. For example, Hillcrest Middle School, where my wife teaches, put in a strong effort and raised \$500 to help this worthy cause. I want to congratulate all the students and their teachers for the work they put in to that end.

This past Saturday night the Cornerstone Seventh-Day Adventist church in Coquitlam held a relief concert featuring a stellar group of performers. I regret that I wasn't able to see the performances, as my wife and I had two other events to attend. I was very impressed with the line-up of incredible performers and talent that the audience was about to see.

Just after that, we went up to the Special Olympics dinner, which honoured Marge McNary. This annual dinner acknowledges the tremendous dedication that Marge and her husband, Bob McNary, and their daughter Lois have put into Special Olympics for many years. The Marge McNary dinner — now a memorial dinner — has gone on for several years to continue that tradition and to raise funds for our Special Olympians, particularly the Special Olympians who the Premier was able to acknowledge today for the tremendous performance that they were able to achieve in Nagano, Japan, this past weekend.

[1935]

This past weekend in Maillardville was really a culmination of our cultural history. Le Festival du Bois goes on every year, and I was able to partake this year more than I actually had hoped. I was there for almost the entire event and was able to participate in a great many aspects of it. I want to thank all those people who came up and said hello and who were able to drag me into the Jammers, for example. The Jammers is a wonderful music group put out by some of the pioneers of our community, and they let me play music with them. Of course, it was absolutely fabulous, as you can imagine. I was on the spoons and did a fabulous job working with the Jammers at the Festival du Bois.

I want to acknowledge all of the volunteers that put so much effort into putting on the Festival du Bois every year. Le Société Maillardville-Uni and all of the volunteers really should be commended for a tremendous show once again this year — probably the best I have ever been to.

A couple of weeks ago we were able to make a significant contribution as a government to a group that I believe very strongly in, the Children of the Street Society. The Children of the Street Society works with young people who find themselves in situations that are not healthy. Diane Sowden, who is the director of the program, tries to keep young girls off the street and tries to keep young girls from incredible situations that we can't even imagine. As a government we were able to contribute \$50,000 to the ongoing work of the Children of the Street Society, and it was my pleasure to be able to present that cheque to them.

This year has been a tough year, and I do want to touch on one side of it that affected me. One of our colleagues got sick. I'm a longstanding blood donor, and I recognized at one point that some of the e-mails she was sending around to her colleagues referred to the need for blood donation. I want to stand here today and appeal once again to my constituents and to the people of the province to please give blood.

Blood is an amazing gift that you can give no matter what age you are. If you are over 17 and less than 71, I think, you can give blood. There are some medical contraindications, but if you pass the test, you can give a gift of life that costs you nothing and will make you feel warm inside. If you do as I do, which is sometimes give at the plasma apheresis program, you get a free movie out of it, and juice and coffee.

**An Hon. Member:** That's why you're doing it.

**R. Stewart:** That is why I'm doing it — for the free movie. I have four children, and I don't get to choose the movie I get to watch at home. This Wednesday I'm scheduled to give my 100th pint of blood in my community of Maillardville. I'm kind of proud of that, because it is something my father taught me when I was young. He instilled in me the need to give blood because it was one of those things we could do. When he could no longer do it because of his health, I continued,

and probably four times a year for the 25 years since then I have given blood. Here I am on my 100th donation, and I think for that I get a pin. I'm looking forward to it.

I want people to consider giving blood, but I also want them to consider registering for the unrelated bone marrow transplant program, which allows our society to identify as close as possible matches that can medically save lives in our community. I urge everybody in my community, in my riding and across this province to consider giving blood, giving the gift of life.

As chair of the Select Standing Committee on Education, I want to close my discussions today with education funding. We have heard an awful lot of things about education funding that quite frankly make me angry, because education funding has never been higher in British Columbia.

Despite there being 30,000 fewer students in our system than in 2000-01, education funding has never been higher. We've invested \$711 million in capital projects. That's 19 new schools. That's 24 replacement schools. It's 124 additions to schools, and it's 24 significant renovations of existing schools. But we hear from some groups that suggest that we have closed some schools.

[1940]

I want to talk about one of those schools. One of those schools is in my riding. It's the only school in my riding that was closed. It's called Montgomery Elementary School. I spoke about it earlier. It's a school that was closed by school district 43. They made the decision to close it, and I followed the making of that decision carefully because I thought these are the kinds of decisions that ought to be carefully watched.

Montgomery Elementary was built for 530 students. When it closed, it had 120 students including two of mine. My two youngest children were still there. We were sad to see it go. There were no students left in it, but we were nonetheless sad to see it closed. I'm sure the community was sad to see the school board make that decision, and I'm sure the school board felt lousy about having to make the decision.

Nonetheless, it was the right decision to make, because they were able to put between \$300,000 and \$500,000 a year.... That's all the money they got for operating that school and teaching the students in that school. All of the money they received for teaching the students in that school was saved money. It was found money, and they were able to put it back into the education system to benefit all of the students in the school district. The closing of a school saved them between \$300,000 and \$500,000 a year.

The students are still being educated. My kids ended up in another school. It's exactly the same distance from our home. It's about two blocks away from Montgomery. That school, Mundy, actually absorbed all of the students that were left at Montgomery and still had room for more, because we had declining enrolment in Coquitlam.

These kinds of issues, where the B.C. Teachers Federation or some other group will take out an ad, tell not

even half the truth but a quarter of the truth, and try to make the public feel like we aren't covering education.... I think that's absolutely ridiculous. School district 43 and the board of school trustees made exactly the right and prudent decision. I applaud them for making the tough choices that they have to make every day, and that was one of them. I'm sure it was a tough choice, but it was one that saved the school district enough money that they could put it back into other programs. Since then, they actually haven't had a deficit. They are now running surplus budgets.

We're now putting \$1.5 billion over 15 years into the accelerated seismic upgrading of high-priority schools. As someone who sat for years on the part 9 standing committee of the National Building Code of Canada, I fought tirelessly 15 years ago to try to get accelerated seismic upgrading of our schools. I recognized that while single-family homes don't fall down in an earthquake, brick schools and concrete-block schools do if they haven't been seismically upgraded.

Our children were in the weakest buildings in our community. Our children were put in the buildings that are at the highest risk. I think it's important that government and people acknowledge that this is the right thing to do — to put as much money as we have to into accelerating the seismic upgrading of all high-priority schools so that the next generation will be going to school in buildings that will not collapse when we get the big earthquake. It's not a question of if, of course. It's not a question of if we're going to get the big earthquake; it's a question of when.

Class sizes. Average elementary class sizes are almost exactly the same as they were ten years ago, as my other colleagues have pointed out, yet we'll still hear all this reference to how these enormous class sizes have sprung up. Special needs funding is up \$75 million since 2001-02. The high school completion rate, which from my perspective is one of the most important measures, has reached a record 79 percent. It is not good enough yet, but it is way better than it was. We have a lot of work to do to continue that rise and make high school completion happen for almost everybody. One of the biggest determinants of whether or not a child will succeed in life is whether or not he completed high school.

[1945]

Per-pupil funding — perhaps that's the best number to look at. Per-pupil funding will increase by 9.5 percent this year to \$7,079 per pupil. That's a tremendous success, yet we hear people say that it isn't enough. I have even heard one person — someone quite knowledgeable about our education system — come up with a statement that if we gave a million dollars per student, it wouldn't be enough. To some degree, for this J.R. of the education funding system, I would have to agree that it might not be enough for some people.

At the end of the day, what we have to do as a government and as a society is take the finite resources we have and make them do the best they can in every field we put money into. That's health care. Make sure we

put the right amount of money into health care and then make sure it works as well as it possibly can. Within education, make sure that we're not heating empty classrooms, that we're actually putting the money into the classrooms that have children in them.

I applaud our government, and I applaud the throne speech. It sets out a new direction for this government — a truly golden decade where I believe this province can achieve things that it has never been able to dream of achieving in the last 20 years, where this province can set its sights on the horizon and beyond, and it can be sure to achieve them.

I look around this room at colleagues that I have come to know, people that I have come to respect and admire for the tremendous capacity they have to work hard, to bring to bear the experiences of their lifetime and to really do an incredible amount of dedicated work for the people of this province. I have never worked with a better, more diverse and more dedicated group of people, and I applaud each and every one of them. I thank you all for listening to me.

**K. Johnston:** I seek leave to make an introduction

Leave granted.

#### Introductions by Members

**K. Johnston:** Joining us in the House this evening is a very good friend of mine — actually, my best Hungarian friend — a fellow named Coleman Tokei. He works on the Vancouver-Fraserview riding executive, but more importantly, he's an absolute professional in the warehousing and container business in Vancouver. I know that he knows things are really prospering, because he tells me there's so much traffic going through Vancouver and through the ports that things are just fantastic. Please help me welcome Coleman to Victoria.

#### Debate Continued

**R. Nijjar:** It is my pleasure to respond to the throne speech. Many of my colleagues before me have spoken about the great things that are in the throne speech or in the budget. What I'd like to do is remind people what this throne speech contrasts to if there is another government in power, another party in power, like in the 1990s.

We know that in a few short days, probably about 80 days or so, all British Columbians will have a choice. They will have a very clear choice. It's quite simple, actually. You're either going to choose the government of the 1990s, or you are going to choose the government of the past four years. All British Columbians can choose which direction they like better.

I'll remind the people that the NDP government was sued more times than any government in the history of British Columbia. They lost every single case — every single case. Now, let's reflect back at what some of the judges have said about this government. The

NDP government is full of arrogance, deceit and unethical conduct — that in regards to the Carrier Lumber case. Carrier Lumber, a family-owned business doing business in Prince George in the forestry industry with forest licences — and what does the NDP government want to do? They want to take that licence away. They want to take that right away, because it serves their long-term political goals with aboriginal rights.

[1950]

Instead of trying to negotiate, instead of trying to work with community groups, they sabotaged and snowballed this business. This poor gentleman and his family were forced to go to court. They go out of their way to hold back documents. They go out of their way to hold back legal proceedings, proceedings of the people. The Premier's office itself in contempt, called arrogant, deceitful and unethical.

Is that the type of government we want back — a government that even their own cabinet ministers say was run by the Premier's office? The Premier's office was run by three people: Glen Clark, Adrian Dix and Geoff Meggs, who is now with Larry Campbell in the city of Vancouver. Glen Clark called Adrian Dix his chief. Well, he was his chief of staff, but he called him his chief adviser and his closest adviser, to whom he entrusted all decisions. Adrian Dix decides now that he's going to run for the NDP in Vancouver-Kingsway, Glen Clark's old stomping ground and the riding which I represent.

Who is Adrian Dix, then? We know that Adrian Dix was the chief adviser to the worst administration in the history of British Columbia. That's not my opinion; it's not the opinion of my colleagues. It's the opinion of the electorate, as they voted in 2001. That government was booted out of this Legislature by the largest margin in the history of British Columbia.

There are so many things that happened under the NDP government that we often forget. We talk about them in generalities. There are just so many things and so many different topics. But do we remember — when now they love to talk about gaming, and they love to talk about how they care so much about those that are involved in gaming and how they care about their well-being — how they themselves tried to force slot machines on the municipalities of Vancouver and Surrey? We have a government here that allows the B.C. Lottery Corporation to run independently — like it should, as a corporation — and allows it to work with municipalities. As we said, no municipality needs to have or is forced to accept a casino business if they do not wish to.

You can choose a government such as the NDP that says: "We don't really care what you choose. We don't care that you have elected officers at city level. We're going to force it down, wherever we wish." Where does that bring us? That brings us to the memo file story. Adrian Dix is the gentleman who wants to stand in this House to represent British Columbians, to represent the people of East Vancouver. He was the chief adviser to the worst Premier in the history of British Columbia.

He created a memo — a completely abject, fake memo — and presented it to the public as a real document, a document saying that Glen Clark advised him that he wants no participation in his friend's application for a casino licence. He wrote that deliberately. He typed it out letter for letter, word for word. He stamped it. He backdated the stamp. He wrote the date on the document at the top, he wrote the date of the document in the text of the body, and he filed it to himself.

[1955]

Now what does he say about that document, which he only admitted to creating after he was caught in a quasi-judicial forum? He says: "Well, I made a mistake." Let me clarify, on behalf of all British Columbians, what a mistake is. A mistake is when you have a good intention; you have an intention to have a certain outcome. Because of carelessness, neglect, lack of knowledge or some other reason, you get a different result. You can call that a mistake. A mistake is not when you deliberately go out of your way to lie and to cheat British Columbians. That is intentional, and British Columbians will have a choice in a few short days if they want a personality like that and a government like that in this House, or a government like this, which in three short years turned around the economy of this province to the point where countries around the world are watching what we have accomplished and looking at the restructuring we have done in education, health care, children and families, economy, taxation, regulations, the mining industry and the forestry industry.

Interjection.

**R. Nijjar:** We have some mining fans in here.

We all remember how much the NDP loves to say that they represent the little guy — those that run charities and non-profit organizations. We all remember when they tried to siphon off gaming proceeds from charities — more than they were allowed to do, more than the law allowed them to siphon off from charities. Why? For themselves. What happened? They got taken to court. What did the courts say? This government has overstepped its bounds and is in breach of the Criminal Code. Only when they were forced to by the courts did they allow the charities to have their money back.

One of the most telling examples of what type of mentality the NDP socialist party has is what they did to non-profit organizations that owned property — churches that have been in existence for 80 years and social service organizations that had senior homes in small towns throughout Vancouver Island, up the coast and all throughout British Columbia. They decided one day, after they ran this province bankrupt, that they had no more money. The union executives were ruling them. The union executives wanted to increase their membership. They said: "Well, wouldn't it be great if we could go to all the non-profits, to all the charities, take them over, get rid of their staff and appoint union staff? Wouldn't that be great? That's what we want you to do, government."

Since the government owed everything to the union executives, that's what they attempted to do. They went out and tried to rip away the actual property of organizations that had been in existence long before these socialists came around. They tore it away for — what? — \$1, \$2 or nothing. I would say that's the most undemocratic government in the history of Canada, if not the free world. I would love for one of them to stand up in this House or anywhere across British Columbia during these next few weeks and explain how that is to any degree democratic, how to any degree they serve anybody except public sector union executives.

I've got several pages of court cases that they've gone through. I tried to highlight all the high points, but I ran out of ink. Let's just go over some of the things that they were accused of doing. We talked about the Carrier Lumber case.

We all know Frank Dixon, a poor old British Columbian. Frank Dixon, a great worker, was hired to run B.C. Transit on behalf of the people of British Columbia by the then minister responsible for B.C. Transit — oh my God, who was that? — Glen Clark. Who was his adviser? Adrian Dix. They had Mr. Frank Dixon working away. They gave him a mandate. When he started enforcing that mandate, all of a sudden they thought: "Hey, we're getting blowback from the unions, so we can't have him do this. Well, we better get rid of him."

They concocted a plan to get rid of him. They got rid of him. He sued them for wrongful dismissal. They challenged him to take them to court, and he did. It was the largest victory over a government ever — \$300,000. Plus, after the arrogance of the government when the proceedings continued, chastising the judge for giving such an award, the judge handed over another \$100,000 for court case costs — \$400,000. What was the government called by the judge? "Harsh and reprehensible, vindictive and malicious." Who advised Glen Clark to be harsh and reprehensible, vindictive and malicious? His chief adviser, Adrian Dix.

[2000]

Half a million dollars goes away because they want to play politics and try to ruin a man's credibility, so they can try to save face because their union executives told them that's exactly what they should do.

Glen Clark's casino scandal: how much did it cost us? Well, \$1.29 million in legal fees, \$1.5 million in Dimitrios's case, and then the Premier was found to have to pay B.C. taxpayers \$53,000, half of the \$107,000 it cost to go through the conflict commissioner's office.

If you add up all these things.... If you add up what happened in B.C. Hydro to John Sheehan, another man just like Frank Dixon, doing his job for the public — what happened to him? We all know the grand plan the NDP had to save the world by going to Pakistan and creating a hydro plant — and by the way, friends, while we create the hydro plant, why don't we: "The scandal revealed that a roster of New Democratic Party and Hydro insiders took advantage of a lucrative private investment scheme funnelled through offshore tax havens." That was the backing of B.C. Hydro's power project in Pakistan.

They were all making money off it. Isn't that great; they were all at the back door making money. Is that the type of government we want — the type of people that appoint political staffers to boards and then concoct plans of how they can siphon money through that Crown corporation to themselves? When they get caught, they get rid of the guy at the top who's innocent, Mr. Sheehan, boot him out of office, get taken to court. An out-of-court settlement cost the public \$1 million — \$696,000 in damages, \$243,000 in legal costs, plus interest.

I only have half an hour. If I had two hours, I would continue on with all the other legal cases. Let's go on. Let's go on.

Interjection.

**R. Nijjar:** The backdated memo to file. Don't worry. It will be coming up many times.

With all these acts of contempt and all these cases where they're held in contempt of the public, what happens to poor old British Columbians? While all of North America was prospering — every single jurisdiction in the 1990s had prosperity, and take-home pay for workers across North America soared — British Columbia was the only jurisdiction in North America where take-home pay went down. It went down by not \$70 or \$700; it went down by a whopping \$1,700 per person. The money you were earning in 1991 was \$1,700 more than what you were earning when they left office in 2001.

Under our government take-home pay is increasing at 3.5 percent, the fastest in the country. We have more people earning \$16 an hour than anywhere in the country and more people earning \$25 an hour than anywhere in the country. We have more people employed in the last four years than anywhere in the country. For the first time in British Columbia's history two million people are working in this province.

Often people say: "You have your stats; the NDP has theirs. Who is telling the truth?" Well, Stats Canada is pretty independent, but forget about Stats Canada. Let's just say that Stats Canada's numbers are wrong. Let's just say you can pull any number you want out of any stat and twist it to whatever direction you want. That's fine. Let's just forget about all that and forget about this Legislature and what anybody says in these debates and look at what the people say, besides election time.

[2005]

For the first time in the history of British Columbia more people were leaving B.C. to live in other provinces than were coming to British Columbia. For the first time in B.C.'s history we were losing people to other provinces. In 1997-98 we lost about 7,300 people to other provinces.

Is that the type of British Columbia you want: where people actually pack their families and leave; where businesses say that they can't get out of here fast enough; where we lose Finning, which was here for 82 years — they moved to Calgary, and they will never

come back — where we lose our stock exchange, for heaven's sake?

We're the gateway to the Pacific Rim. We're one of the greatest places on the earth in which to live, and we lose our stock exchange to Calgary, Alberta. We will never get it back. That's the legacy of the NDP. Under our government this great province is seeing a return of people from other provinces.

One of the saddest of all cases, which reflects and demonstrates the arrogance of a party that believes that because they hold a social conscience, they somehow are justified in their actions because they're reaching a certain end, is the Nanaimo Commonwealth scandal. It wasn't one person in the NDP government; it wasn't two people. It wasn't in just one year, where you could say there's a finite period of time.

This was over more than 20 years, where the NDP had this elaborate scheme that you read in fiction books. I don't even know how it all works, quite frankly. You've got to read the book and memorize it. They took money from charities.... Generally speaking, they took the public's money through charities, ran it through fake organizations and siphoned it to their party for election time.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** And never paid it back.

**R. Nijjar:** And never paid it back.

What do they do? They take that from one election to another election, three elections or four, and then they give it to their federal counterparts, the federal NDP, and they share all the money as they wish. They buy some very nice homes. They buy some homes on the Island in places where they otherwise would not be living.

Then when they get caught, they say.... The rat pack of Moe Sihota and Glen Clark and those guys thought: "We didn't want good old Harcourt around anyways. We're just waiting for a chance to boot him out, so he's the fall guy." He's the guy that, for 20 years of the NDP's corruption, is going to take the fall — thus the rise of Glen Clark.

What do they do with the millions of dollars that they stole? Not a penny comes back to the public — not a penny. And they have the nerve to say: "We want to run the province." They stole money. It's a criminal organization, if you define it by an organization that stole money, has not paid it back, admits it was stolen, was found to have stolen money. They have the nerve to call themselves.... How are they registered as a political organization?

Interjection.

**R. Nijjar:** They stole from charities — stole from nuns, as my colleague said; stole from churches; stole from seniors; stole from children with autism and children with special needs — and are not going to give a penny back.

They faked memos. They're held in contempt of court. They're called deceitful. They increased our debt

from \$17 billion to \$34 billion, doubling it in ten years. We're paying interest of \$2.4 billion a year. Quite frankly, they don't give a damn. Why? Because they don't care. Why? Because that's for another generation to pay. For this generation, as long as they're voting NDP, all is fine. That was the mentality of that government.

This government has to come in and balance those books and create a surplus for three years of hard work and toil that all British Columbians put in together. It'll be one great shame if we go back and reverse what we just accomplished in three years to only have to do it again in five years or nine years from now.

[2010]

They talk about how much they care about health care and the workers of British Columbia, how much they care about nurses and doctors. In ten years they increased the number of nurses in British Columbia by 100. We've increased the number of nursing seats in British Columbia by 2,100 in our three and a half years. There are 2,100 more nursing school seats in British Columbia today. There are over 560 more nurses working today in hospitals throughout B.C. than when we took office.

I ran for office for a lot of reasons, for all the reasons I've listed, but I'll tell you one real telling story, one that really puts a cherry on the top. Under the NDP government, as we all know.... We went to school here in B.C. For many of us that have and for those of you that can recall those days in elementary, you know how at recess time or at lunchtime we were told to go around the school grounds with tongs and pick up garbage. It may only have been for five minutes or ten minutes.

What was the point of that? Was it to keep the grounds clean because there was no staff? Of course not. Did anybody really think we were actually going to clean up every little thing? Of course not. No one is going to rely on eight-year-olds to actually get everything clean. It was to instill some values. It was to teach children that you're responsible for your own area, that you respect what you have and that you take care of what you use. It's about being a good citizen. That's what the School Act says. You don't just learn the three Rs; you learn to be a good citizen.

Oh, but for the NDP that was good enough until CUPE came up and said: "These kids are taking our jobs. We don't want children cleaning in the yards, in the school grounds. It is our job, because the cleaner it is, the less hours we work. The fewer hours we work, the fewer workers we have. The fewer workers we have, the fewer members we have. The fewer members we have, the fewer dues we have. So children can't clean." Since the NDP overrode everybody else, they overrode the school board. They told the school board: "Your children will not clean." That's the type of education system we had.

Now, of course, we have more students graduating at a higher rate than ever before in the history of British Columbia — 79 percent. The aboriginal graduation rate has increased by about 9 percent, I think it was.

about 36 percent; it's now about 44 percent or, I think, almost 45 percent — an amazing accomplishment, 3 percent a year for three years.

We're improving in math and reading and English. We're doing better. Our outcomes are improving. We have 25,000 fewer students, yet we're putting hundreds of millions of dollars more into education. We could have done what the NDP did and said: "Well, forget about putting it into the classroom. We'll just put it into wages and say we've put it into education."

Then let's talk about the NDP's version of health care. I live in Vancouver. It doesn't matter where you live in British Columbia; everyone knows that big, massive tower that was built in the late eighties — I think about '88 or '89 or so — right beside VGH, the new VGH tower. I'm not sure of the name of it, but it doesn't matter. We all know what it is.

**An Hon. Member:** It's not new anymore.

**R. Nijjar:** Yeah, it's not new anymore.

It sat empty for all of the ten years under the NDP. Not one floor did they use up — not one floor out of this tower. They spent about — what was it? I think it was \$250,000 a year maintaining it. It wasn't until our government came in and started putting doctors with doctors, specialists with specialists — started putting the teams together to create centres of excellence — that we started filling this tower where surgeries are being performed.

[2015]

The surgery wait-lists are coming down. Nine out of the 13 lists for various surgeries are coming down. That's quite an accomplishment when you have decades of health care neglect, when a government can come in and, in 36 months, start bringing down the lists.

One of the things that was in the contract.... I know in the first year people said: "Oh, are you changing the contract? Are you changing the contract?" Let me tell you that it's one of the best things that we did, because it was the only way you could get the restructuring you could in health care.

I have many friends that were nurses at that time, and I know firsthand how nursing worked on a day-to-day shift basis. We know in government — documented, it's in the contract — that if there is a nurse on 5-East and that nurse is needed on 6-East, they could not have that nurse in that 12-hour shift move up to 6-East. Even though that nurse had no patients on 5-East, you couldn't ask them to move to 6-East. You had to call in another nurse. [Applause.]

I think that's a signal.

You had to call another nurse from overtime and bring them in. That's what racked up the bills — overtime for such a thing like that. That's in the contract. Why was it in the contract? Because a public sector union executive said that it's going to be in the contract. Since they funded the campaigns, that's exactly what they got.

I can't tell what colour my light is.

Interjection.

**R. Nijjar:** Oh, very nice.

The NDP had five budget restructuring plans — five. They never kept to one of them. In the end they had a government running in a deficit of \$3.8 billion. Let's make this clear. The so-called balanced budget.... Technically, if you ask the auditor general, who is an accountant — he has to just look at the number — yes, it was balanced. It was balanced because they went out to the pension fund, they borrowed a million dollars for one time. They put it into their books, balanced it and said: "Okay, after budget day, after it's balanced and we've declared it, we can move it back outside of government, back to the pension fund."

That's like saying to somebody when you have a mortgage on your house for \$200,000: "I completely own my house. I have no mortgage." And they say "Really? Are you sure? Why don't you prove it to me?" And you say: "Okay." You go to the bank, you borrow \$200,000, you put it into your account, pay off your house and say: "I'm balanced." And then you take out \$200,000, and you put it back. [Applause.]

**Deputy Speaker:** Member....

**R. Nijjar:** It's only because I'm getting so many ovations that I must put some calmness to this Legislature.

**Deputy Speaker:** I'd inform the member that his time has expired.

**R. Nijjar:** Yes. As I see there are no other speakers, I move to adjourn debate.

R. Nijjar moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. P. Bell moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

**Deputy Speaker:** This House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 8:19 p.m.