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6TH SESSION, 37TH PARLIAMENT

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Afternoon Sitting

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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9, 2005

The House met at 2:05 p.m.

Prayers.

Introductions by Members

R. Masi: It's my pleasure today to introduce the immediate past president of my riding in North Delta, Chris McCuaig. Chris is accompanied by her husband, Don Hecker. Would the House please make them welcome.

Hon. J. Murray: I would like to welcome into the House today Dave and Brenda Burton. Dave is a senior executive at Scott Paper, which is a very important business and a major employer in New Westminster. Could the House please make them very welcome.

I would also like the group to welcome Maria Cardona, who's a second-year political science student at UVic with a focus on international studies; and also Barbara Hibbins, who's the executive director, information technology security, in the office of the chief information officer, which is a responsibility of my ministry. Barbara is the chair of the national committee on information security, so she's a real leader in protecting government networks from viruses and other attacks. Could the House please make Maria and Barbara very welcome.

Hon. K. Falcon: Today in the House there are two individuals I'd like to recognize. The first is a grade 11 co-op student from Lord Tweedsmuir in my riding, Steen Hof. Steen has been working in my office learning about government and how government operates and all the great things that are happening in government. We are also joined by Caroline Elliot, more affectionately known as Boomer to her friends and family. Boomer is here as an SFU political science student, and she's learning about government. Please, would the House make them welcome.

H. Bloy: I have a constituent from the riding of Burquitlam, Mel Torrance, who is with us today. He was with the Canadian Lung Association, and they made a presentation to a number of members in this House this morning. If the House would please make him welcome.

Hon. J. Les: It's my pleasure this afternoon to welcome several guests from Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. They are Mr. Rajiv De Silva, who's the CEO; M. Jean-Charles Hebert, who's the vice-president for health policy and reimbursement; and Mr. Mehmood Alibhai, who's the director for health policy in western Canada. Would the House please make them welcome.

W. Cobb: It's my pleasure today to recognize three visitors to the Legislature representing the Multiple

Sclerosis Society. We have with us Paul McNamara, who is the director of the capital regional chapter; Bonnie Poshak, who we met last year and is with client services; and Diane Post. They're all members of the MS Society. I ask the House to please make them welcome.

Hon. I. Chong: In my riding I have some exceptional high schools. Today one is visiting us with a class of grade 9 honour students. But before that, I just want to say that I was there at Lambrick Park Secondary School earlier this month when their Diamonds for Excellence program was highlighted. This is a program that offers young students an opportunity to excel in the diamond fields such as baseball and softball. We were given quite a wonderful display.

Today the grade 9 honour students class is here — there are about 30 of them — with vice-principal, Mr. Stu Barber. They're excellent young people with exceptional minds. I would also like to say a special hello to a neighbour, Cassandra Lum, who is with them. Would the House make them all very welcome this afternoon.

[1410]

R. Lee: I'm pleased today to introduce two visitors from Burnaby North. In the House we have Mira Malatestinic, president of the Celtic Heritage Society of Canada, and Bob Garlick, chief creative officer. They are meeting with the Minister of Small Business and Economic Development. The Celtic Heritage Society of Canada is a non-profit organization with a mission to celebrate, nurture and preserve Celtic heritage and culture in the communities, the provinces and the nation. Would the House please make them welcome.

J. Kwan: I would like to introduce, welcome and thank three very important individuals in the gallery today. They are our interns: Andre Vallillee, Amy Higginbotham and James Steidle.

We, the opposition caucus, have developed a reputation as the little caucus that could. In great measure, it is as a result of our interns who do a tremendous amount of work behind the scenes, as their predecessors before them. Our thanks from the NDP opposition caucus to our interns for all the great work they contribute to holding the government to account.

B. Suffredine: I have somewhat of a remote introduction today. It's sort of a congratulations. The Canadian men's curling championships are taking place in Edmonton. They are just past the twelfth round.

The British Columbia team in that Tim Hortons Brier is not only from my riding; it's a team made up of people from throughout the riding. Deane Horning, who's a woodlands accountant from Nakusp, is the skip. The third is Fred Thomson. Fred is enjoying an unusual opportunity to be popular, because he is a bylaw enforcement officer in the city of Nelson. Don Freschi is the second, and Robert Nibert is the lead.

An Hon. Member: Hurry.

B. Suffredine: Hurry hard. Grant Fines is the fifth, and Terry Bublitz is the coach. They're still in the running for the championship. They're not in the lead at the moment, but if we all cheer them on, perhaps they will win for British Columbia.

**Statements
(Standing Order 25B)**

EDUCATION FUNDING

D. Hayer: Our government has achieved great results in education over the past four years. Our focus on student achievement helped encourage all of our students to realize all their potential and experience true success.

We have a system that encourages our students to achieve their very best. For example, in Surrey 86 percent of staff are satisfied with the system. That is not an idle statistic. I have met with the Surrey teachers union, teachers, parents, administrators and other concerned individuals. They understand this government is working for our students. I brought the Minister of Education to my riding to meet with the principals, teachers, parents and others who care about education.

Students in my district are now doing better in reading, writing and math. Grade 7 writing results have improved by 13 percent since 2003. We have many schools with a foreign language learning program, two fine arts schools, two Montessori schools, and programs in kindergarten and grade 1 to help second-language families encourage and support their children's literacy. Some 5,000 students are in career programs, plus 166 in apprentice programs. Last year 81 percent of Surrey students completed high school, up from 76 percent in '99.

We are putting more money, more resources and more effort into our schools, our students and our future than ever before. This year \$231 million is going to special needs students, and next year the funding will increase by another \$28 million. We are investing \$150 million next year for literacy programs, libraries, arts, music and learning resources, plus \$40 million more for literacy programs this year. It is helping to make real, positive changes.

Since 2000-01, public school funding has increased by more than \$400 million. Yet despite some 30,000 fewer students today than when we took office, we still have about the same number of teachers and schools per student as this province had in 1995-96. Our government has accomplished remarkable things for our children, for our province and for our future.

[1415]

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME
AND ENERGY CONSERVATION

B. Suffredine: Meeting our Kyoto commitment is a worthy challenge. The other day the Green Party told

us to listen to that old Peter, Paul and Mary song. They said: "The answer is blowing in the wind." Wind energy must be considered, but it has challenges around reliability and storage. When you come from farm country like the Creston valley, you usually pick the low-hanging fruit first rather than try to climb the tree.

One sure way to save energy that has been known for years was identified by the National Research Council in 1981, almost 25 years ago. They reported that staying on daylight saving time during winter would save about 1 percent in total electricity consumption and perhaps as high as 3 percent in non-industrial communities. They found that the peak power loading would not shift to the evening, so producers would be able to avoid brownout conditions with lower generating capacity.

By February 15 sunrise times across Canada are such that no one would notice the difference. Sunset times will be noticeably later, so we can stay outdoors to enjoy health and other benefits like that late round of golf.

If we're serious about energy conservation, it's time to consider the options. This is an easy step towards meeting our One-Tonne Challenge to reduce our annual greenhouse gas emissions by one metric ton each. I'll post their report on my webpage and invite everyone to read it.

This fruit is ripe for the picking. Don't let it blow down and spoil. I challenge everyone concerned about energy, including the Green Party, to get behind the National Research Council recommendation. It's time for a change.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

W. Cobb: First I want to thank my colleague the member for Burrquiltam for giving up his spot today.

We're all wearing carnations today in recognition of Multiple Sclerosis Month, and I thank you all for your participation. Actually, May is MS Month, but since we will not be here this session in May, I thought it important to further the cause of MS awareness by helping distribute these flowers today.

The flowers help draw attention to the effects of MS on more than 8,000 British Columbians and on more than 50,000 Canadians, and are used as a fundraiser to assist in finding a cure. One person's diagnosis affects so many more. Family members, friends and employers are greatly affected by the condition. My family can attest to that, as my wife suffers from the disease.

MS is episodic, quite often invisible and often progressive. It is usually a debilitating condition that can affect speech, vision, strength, coordination, balance and other sensory and motor functions. This disease affects different people in different ways and therefore makes the cause and the cure much harder to diagnose.

You can thank the MS Society, the local chapter, for donating the flowers you're wearing today. Normally, we would have to pay for these flowers, but we lucked out today. I thank them for their contribution.

Thanks to the visitors in the gallery — Paul, Bonnie and Diane — for your work and support for individuals who suffer from MS. Good luck on your carnation drive.

Mr. Speaker: That concludes members' statements.

Oral Questions

INVESTIGATION OF CHILD DEATHS AND INJURIES

J. MacPhail: Yesterday three child welfare experts went public with their concerns about how this government investigates the deaths and injuries of children. The former children's commissioner said that if there was another tragic case like Matthew Vaudreuil, we would never know, because the independent watchdogs have been eliminated.

Can the Minister of Children and Family Development tell us how many children known to the ministry have died or been injured since they fired the independent watchdogs?

Hon. S. Hagen: First of all, I'd like to say that I've been the minister since September of 2004 and have not had any requests from any of the three individuals that were made public yesterday about need for a meeting, or even requesting a meeting. I can tell you that since September of '04, I've had the opportunity to discuss with a lot of groups and individuals issues that my ministry deals with — including Judge Gove and Jane Morley, the current child and youth officer.

[1420]

I am more than happy to meet with these three women. As a matter of fact, yesterday I called their offices to arrange a time that would be convenient for them. I can tell you this. We are committed to keeping B.C.'s children safe. We're committed to keeping families together, but at the end of the day, a child's safety always takes precedence over everything else.

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

J. MacPhail: Well, I'm actually shocked that the minister didn't answer my question. I asked a very serious question about children known to the ministry who have died. He gets up and reads a statement completely disregarding those three experts' concerns.

It used to be that the public could get the number of accidental deaths, suicides, homicides and natural causes not only of children in care but children known to the ministry, as was Matthew Vaudreuil. Matthew Vaudreuil was a person known to the ministry, not a child in care. That information has been removed from the ministry's website — whatever little information there was. This is the kind of information we used to get from the independent children's commissioner.

Why is it that this government is not giving that information now to the public? No more ministerial statements that cover up.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. S. Hagen: I can assure the House and all British Columbians that children in care continue to be safe. We have not experienced a rise in child-in-care-related fatalities. Every fatality of a child in care is thoroughly investigated with accompanying recommendations. I'm confident we are well served by the coroner's office, the child and youth officer and the ombudsman, in addition to the work done by our ministry to track significant cases and review practices.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of the Opposition has a further supplementary.

J. MacPhail: By the minister's own information, the number of fatalities of children in care rose from the last year reported from the previous year. They rose by 33 percent. So I don't know what the minister was just doing to this House when he made that statement.

We're not just talking about children in care here. As the former children's commissioner said yesterday, measuring success by the number of children in care tells us nothing about whether kids are safer. All it tells us is that there are fewer children in care. Why? Because the province now has no way of independently investigating the deaths and injuries of children.

Again to the minister: the coroner, by admission, doesn't have the teeth to investigate the deaths of children. If the government's child advocate doesn't have that power, then how can this minister have any confidence that he is telling the facts that fewer children in care improves the safety of at-risk kids? What evidence does he have of that?

Hon. S. Hagen: It doesn't matter which side of the House you sit on, whether you're in the opposition or in the government. We all care about kids. Anyone who tries to paint this as a partisan side is doing us a disservice. I don't care what your political affiliation is. All of us, regardless of what party we belong to, care about B.C. kids.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order. Please continue.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. S. Hagen: I have five children of my own. For opposition members to suggest that the government doesn't care about kids is total nonsense and obviously political. I can tell you this....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. members, we will have order in this House, or we will not continue with question period.

Hon. S. Hagen: I can tell you this, Mr. Speaker, and I'll tell all British Columbians this. Nobody in this government cares more about the kids of this province than the Premier. That's been exemplified by the programs that we've put in place, such as early screening for dental, vision and hearing; the Ready, Set, Learn program for preschool-age kids; and the early literacy programs. These are just a few.

J. Kwan: If the Premier really did care about children, particularly children at risk, he would have answered the letter and met with the three expert child and family advocates, and he didn't. He ignored them.
[1425]

As the minister knows, there have been recent and tragic cases involving the deaths and injury of children — Sherry Charlie, Kayla, and the twins in the lower mainland. If we still had an independent watchdog or watchdogs, there would have been a full investigation into the circumstances surrounding each of these cases. The government and the public would know what happened and what must be learned. But now we will never get to those answers.

Can the Minister of Children and Family Development explain why he thinks this is acceptable when we have cases where children have died or been injured?

Hon. S. Hagen: To put this into context, we currently have 9,000 children in care in the province of British Columbia. Yes, every once in a while something terrible happens. Our condolences and our sympathies go out to the relatives and families of those people.

Having said that, I have the utmost confidence in our social workers, our front-line workers and our foster parents, who every day support these kids we have in care. As I said before, I'm confident that we are well served by the coroner's office, the child and youth officer as well as the ombudsman, in addition to the work done by our ministry to track the significant cases and to review practices.

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

J. Kwan: The independent watchdogs, and their role involving children and families and issues around injuries and deaths, have been eliminated by this Liberal government. The circumstances surrounding the deaths and injuries of these children cry out for an independent investigation. But thanks to this government's broken promise, the public won't get answers. It is not that the government's child advocate is not doing her very best. It is that this government didn't give her the tools or the power to protect children.

Again to the minister: how can he expect the public to have confidence in the child protection system and the minister's answers, when no one has the power to independently investigate the deaths and critical injuries of children in this province?

Hon. S. Hagen: I know that in this House, we all agree on a fundamental issue, and that is keeping our children safe. But there's more than one way to do that, and there's more than one way to have a good system that works. Frankly, the previous system was flawed, in my view. Too much money was spent on management and administration of three separate offices. There were crossovers and a lack of clear mandate for any one of them. I am confident in our child and youth officer...

Interjections.

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

Hon. S. Hagen: ...in the coroner's office and in the office of the ombudsman to make sure that our children are safe.

FUNDING FOR CHILD ADVOCACY

J. Brar: What we're hearing here is not a straight answer. That's what I was hearing about Surrey Memorial. It's the same kind of answers we hear today about this mystery.

In the letter the government claimed it never received, child protection experts also say that the impact of budget cuts to the Ministry of Children and Family Development can't be known because there is no accountability in the system. Because this government is stifling debate on the budget, they're running from these questions in this House.

Will the Minister of Children and Family Development admit that since 2001, the government has cut over \$200 million from the Ministry of Children and Family Development?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Order!

Will the member please state his question.

J. Brar: Mr. Speaker, the question is pretty simple. Will the Minister of Children and Family Development tell this House whether this government has cut over \$200 million from the Ministry of Children and Family Development since 2001 or not?

[1430]

Hon. S. Hagen: Mr. Speaker, I don't think this is a budget debate. But I want to categorically repeat that....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. S. Hagen: I have absolute total confidence in our front-line workers in the coroner's office, the child and youth officer, and the ombudsman's office to investigate any of the wrongdoings that may happen.

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

J. Brar: These are very interesting questions — no straight answers, no specifics. One of the things I learned as a new MLA here is that you can't get any answers from this government — not a great experience but a learning. If we were allowed a debate, we could explore further what's happening in the ministry. But the fact is that this government has falsely inflated the increase by transferring child care money into its budget.

Again to the minister: following yesterday's letter from three of the most respected child welfare experts in the country, will they finally accept that his government is failing at-risk children and reinstate an independent child protection watchdog?

Hon. S. Hagen: As I stated previously, I contacted the folks yesterday and asked them when they could meet. We'll meet at their earliest convenience.

I also want to remind the House that we currently have 9,000 children in care, which is 15 percent less than what we had in 2001. That's a stark contrast to the 45 percent rise in the number of children in care between '95 and '01.

CANCER CLINIC IN PRINCE GEORGE

P. Nettleton: What were the urgent, pressing northern health issues and circumstances that prompted the Minister of Health Services and the junior minister of mining to lobby the Finance minister for approval of a cancer clinic for Prince George?

In light of the final report by the northern cancer control strategy, which in essence says a cancer clinic is not feasible for Prince George, I ask the Minister of Health Services whether she did not have her facts straight before lobbying for the clinic. Or was it merely to be the buildup to another pre-election promise, which now appears to be broken?

Hon. S. Bond: As a lifelong resident of northern British Columbia, I have been and will continue to be a passionate advocate for improving access for all northerners. In fact, the member for Prince George–Omineca should well know the process. The report has not yet gone to the board of the northern health authority. In fact, I haven't received the report. In checking with the Premier, in checking with the previous Minister of Health Services, not once did the member for Prince George–Omineca make representation to the Minister of Health Services about this issue.

[End of question period.]

Petitions

C. Clark: I rise to table a petition forwarded to me and signed by 13,866 British Columbians supporting

the provision of a tax credit for the cost of enrolling one's children in sports and the arts in British Columbia.

B. Suffredine: I rise to present a petition on behalf of residents of the Arrow Lakes asking that the riding name of Nelson-Creston be considered for change to Nelson–Creston–Arrow Lakes.

[1435]

Reports from Committees

B. Lekstrom: I have the honour to present the report of the Select Standing Committee on Parliamentary Reform, Ethical Conduct, Standing Orders and Private Bills.

I would move that the report be read and received.

Motion approved.

Law Clerk:

"March 9, 2005:

"Your Select Standing Committee on Parliamentary Reform, Ethical Conduct, Standing Orders and Private Bills begs leave to report as follows:

"(1) that the preamble to Bill Pr401, intituled University of Victoria Foundation Act, has been proved, and the committee recommends that the bill proceed to second reading.

"(2) that the preamble to Bill Pr402, intituled Pacific Bible College Amendment Act, 2005, has been proved, and the committee recommends that the bill proceed to second reading.

"(3) that the preamble to Bill Pr403, intituled British Columbia Wharf Operators' Association (Corporate Restoration) Act, 2005, has been proved, and the committee recommends that the bill proceed to second reading.

"(4) that the preamble to Bill Pr404, intituled Westco Insurance Company Act, 1966 Repeal Act, 2005, has been proved, and the committee recommends that the bill proceed to second reading.

"(5) that the preamble to Bill Pr405, intituled The John Hussey Foundation (Corporate Restoration) Act, 2005, has been proved, and the committee recommends that the bill proceed to second reading.

"All of which is respectfully submitted.

B. Lekstrom, Chairman."

B. Lekstrom: Hon. Speaker, I would ask leave of the House to permit the moving of a motion to adopt the report.

Leave granted.

Motion approved.

Orders of the Day

Hon. R. Coleman: I call second reading of Bill Pr401.

Second Reading of BillsUNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
FOUNDATION ACT

J. Bray: I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The University of Victoria Foundation Act will accomplish three separate tasks. One, it will combine three pieces of enabling legislation into one. Two, it will allow more modern investing activities to occur including full investment, return investing — similar to other foundations that invest on behalf of organizations. Three, the act will expand the scope by which the UVic foundation can engage in capital fundraising and capital expenditures.

Motion approved.

J. Bray: I move that the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House to be considered forthwith by leave.

Bill Pr401, University of Victoria Foundation Act, read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration forthwith.

Committee of the Whole HouseUNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
FOUNDATION ACT

The House in committee on Bill Pr401; J. Weisbeck in the chair.

The committee met at 2:39 p.m.

Sections 1 to 14 inclusive approved.

Title approved.

J. Bray: I move that the committee rise and report the bill complete without amendment.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 2:40 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

**Report and
Third Reading of Bills**

Bill Pr401, University of Victoria Foundation Act, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

Hon. R. Coleman: I call Bill Pr402.

Second Reading of BillsPACIFIC BIBLE COLLEGE
AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

Hon. R. Coleman: I move, on behalf of the member for Coquitlam-Maillardville, that the bill be now read a second time.

This is a name change from Pacific Bible College to Pacific Life Bible College and has been before the Committee of the House.

Motion approved.

Hon. R. Coleman: By leave, I move that the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House to be considered forthwith.

Leave granted.

Bill Pr402, Pacific Bible College Amendment Act, 2005, read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration forthwith.

Committee of the Whole HousePACIFIC BIBLE COLLEGE
AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

The House in committee on Bill Pr402; J. Weisbeck in the chair.

The committee met at 2:41 p.m.

Sections 1 to 5 inclusive approved.

Preamble approved.

Title approved.

Hon. R. Coleman: I move that the committee rise and report the bill complete without amendment.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 2:42 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

**Report and
Third Reading of Bills**

Bill Pr402, Pacific Bible College Amendment Act, 2005, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

Hon. R. Coleman: I call second reading of Bill Pr403.

Second Reading of BillsBRITISH COLUMBIA
WHARF OPERATORS' ASSOCIATION
(CORPORATE RESTORATION) ACT, 2005

L. Mayencourt: I move that the bill be now read a second time.

Motion approved.

L. Mayencourt: By leave, I move that the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House to be considered forthwith.

Leave granted.

Bill Pr403, British Columbia Wharf Operators' Association (Corporate Restoration) Act, 2005, read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration forthwith.

Committee of the Whole HouseBRITISH COLUMBIA
WHARF OPERATORS' ASSOCIATION
(CORPORATE RESTORATION) ACT, 2005

The House in committee on Bill Pr403; J. Weisbeck in the chair.

The committee met at 2:44 p.m.

Sections 1 to 5 inclusive approved.

Preamble approved.

Title approved.

L. Mayencourt: I move that the committee rise and report the bill complete without amendment.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 2:44 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

**Report and
Third Reading of Bills**

Bill Pr403, British Columbia Wharf Operators' Association (Corporate Restoration) Act, 2005, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

[1445]

Hon. R. Coleman: I call second reading of Bill Pr404.

Second Reading of BillsWESTCO INSURANCE COMPANY ACT, 1966
REPEAL ACT, 2005

Mr. Speaker: The question is second reading of Bill Pr404.

R. Sultan: Hon. Speaker, by leave, I move the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House to be considered forthwith.

Mr. Speaker: Hang on. The question is second reading of Bill Pr404.

Motion approved.

R. Sultan: This bill involves a company that's been in operation since 1996. It's now dormant. It's a subsidiary of the very large and respected Industrial Alliance Pacific Life Insurance Company. Westco has no assets, no liabilities, no operations and is dormant. The parent company wishes to dissolve it. This is the only means by which that can be accomplished.

Hon. Speaker, by leave, I move that the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House to be considered forthwith.

Leave granted.

Bill Pr404, Westco Insurance Company Act, 1966 Repeal Act, 2005, read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration forthwith.

Committee of the Whole HouseWESTCO INSURANCE COMPANY ACT, 1966
REPEAL ACT, 2005

The House in committee on Bill Pr404; J. Weisbeck in the chair.

The committee met at 2:47 p.m.

Sections 1 to 5 inclusive approved.

Preamble approved.

Title approved.

R. Sultan: I move that the committee rise and report the bill complete without amendment.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 2:48 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

**Report and
Third Reading of Bills**

Bill Pr404, Westco Insurance Company Act, 1966 Repeal Act, 2005, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

Hon. R. Coleman: I call second reading of Bill Pr405.

Second Reading of Bills

THE JOHN HUSSEY FOUNDATION
(CORPORATE RESTORATION) ACT, 2005

H. Long: Mr. Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time, with no comments.

Motion approved.

H. Long: By leave, I move that the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House to be considered forthwith.

Leave granted.

Bill Pr405, The John Hussey Foundation (Corporate Restoration) Act, 2005, read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration forthwith.

Committee of the Whole House

THE JOHN HUSSEY FOUNDATION
(CORPORATE RESTORATION) ACT, 2005

The House in committee on Bill Pr405; J. Weisbeck in the chair.

The committee met at 2:50 p.m.

Sections 1 to 5 inclusive approved.

Preamble approved.

Title approved.

H. Long: I move that the committee rise and report the bill complete without amendments.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 2:50 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

**Report and
Third Reading of Bills**

Bill Pr405, The John Hussey Foundation (Corporate Restoration) Act, 2005, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

Hon. R. Coleman: I call committee stage of Bill 20, interim supply.

Committee of the Whole House

SUPPLY ACT (No. 1), 2005

The House in committee on Bill 20; J. Weisbeck in the chair.

The committee met at 2:53 p.m.

On section 1.

J. MacPhail: Can the minister tell us how the over \$13 billion is being divided up over the six months?

Hon. C. Hansen: What this provides for is $\frac{1}{12}$ of the total appropriation for the year. There's not a requirement in terms of interim supply to have that divided down to any further subgroup, according to the precedents that have been followed in this House.

J. MacPhail: I'm not asking about precedents. This government is asking for six months of a free ride on money. How much is the money? Let me see; \$13,139,500,000 is what we're discussing here, Mr. Chair. I'm asking the minister what his government's plans are to allocate that.

Hon. C. Hansen: Basically, it is as has been set out in the service plans for each ministry. The appropriation is $\frac{1}{12}$, and the total appropriation by ministries collectively over that six-month period cannot exceed this allocation that is being requested in this interim supply bill.

J. MacPhail: Can the minister please read into the record what each ministry is being allocated out of this interim supply?

[1455]

Hon. C. Hansen: It is anticipated that each ministry would be allocated about 50 percent of their annual appropriation, as is set out in the estimates documents that were tabled on February 15. They would be incurring those expenses in accordance with the service plans that were tabled on the same date.

J. MacPhail: The service plans don't outline the month-by-month expenditures, and of course, we'll never know the validity of those service plans, because we don't get to debate them.

Is the minister somehow suggesting that each ministry is allocated the money every month on an equal basis?

Hon. C. Hansen: The ministries are not appropriated monthly allocations. That's not the case in a normal year, and it wouldn't be the case this year. The Ministry of Finance monitors very closely the spending

of ministries. Not all ministries spend exactly $\frac{1}{2}$ of their appropriation each and every month. There are differing demands on differing ministries depending on the time of year, so it's not a $\frac{1}{2}$ allocation.

As is the tradition with interim supply, the total aggregate expenditure by government cannot exceed the amount that is being appropriated in this interim supply bill at any point during this six-month period.

J. MacPhail: Exactly how does that work? What's a budget letter going to look like to a health authority?

Hon. C. Hansen: It's our anticipation that the health authorities would be given authority to actually commit and disburse funding up to 50 percent of their annual allocation. So they have to manage their affairs within their allocations.

J. MacPhail: I've seen budget letters to health authorities. What the minister just said doesn't make any sense at all. I'll be getting into lots of specific questions. I thought this was going to be a slam dunk, this little section here, where the minister would actually tell us what their plans are for the next six months.

This is \$13 billion of tax moneys, and it turns out the government doesn't have any plans. Hey, here's 50 percent. Use it as you see fit. In the health authorities there is not a regular flow of expenditures. In fact, there could be some health authorities where in the first six months...

Well, there could be some ministries — let me put it this way, Mr. Chair — specifically, some of the human resource ministries, who in the first six months would spend more than 50 percent of their annual allocation. What happens in that particular case?

Hon. C. Hansen: That's why it is not a specific $\frac{1}{2}$ allocation to each ministry each and every month. Different ministries have different demands on them depending on the time of year it is. If there's one ministry that is going to require more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of its anticipated full appropriation for the year, then there has to be an offsetting underexpenditure by other ministries.

There are some ministries that do have more expenditures in the first six months of a fiscal year. There are other ministries that typically have their expenditures towards the end of the fiscal year. In the course of this six-month period those will balance out. The obligation that we, as a government and as a Ministry of Finance, have is to ensure that government spending across all of these entities does not go even one dime over the amount we are asking for in this appropriation.

[1500]

J. MacPhail: Who is going to know about that? Who makes those decisions for a half-year? Is it cabinet? Is it cabinet that is going to be allocation, ministry to ministry? When are they going to meet? Just tell me the process, Mr. Chair, about how that gets worked out.

Hon. C. Hansen: The management of those allocations is done by staff within the Ministry of Finance. We will be tracking expenditures by ministry, as we always do. We will be putting out a quarterly report, so we will need to make sure that we can tabulate results at the end of the first quarter, as we normally do. I think if you go back and look at quarterly reports that have been issued over the last four years, you will see that not all ministries are spending, say, $\frac{3}{4}$ of their appropriation at the end of the first quarterly report. This year will be no different. That is a process that is managed within the ministry itself.

J. MacPhail: Yes, but those ministries had budgets and budget letters.

Let me ask the minister: have budget letters been prepared for '05-06?

Hon. C. Hansen: Yes.

J. MacPhail: That's all I'm asking for. What do the budget letters say?

Hon. C. Hansen: The draft language which has been put in place for the budget letters that will go out to ministries, subject to the passage of this legislation, is that they would have an appropriation of approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ of what their annual appropriation would be as set out in the estimates. They are required to manage within that on a month-to-month basis and to report to the ministry on a month-to-month basis.

As we identify ministries that have costs that are more front-loaded during the fiscal year, the ministry will then identify other ministries that would have their costs more skewed towards the end of the fiscal year. Those would be managed off to make sure we stay within this appropriation.

J. MacPhail: When will Treasury Board meet?

Hon. C. Hansen: I don't think the question's germane to the debate we're having today.

J. MacPhail: Oh, I get it. Is it under his government that Treasury Board doesn't play any role? Is that why it's not germane? I'm trying to find out who's managing this \$13 billion. Who's responsible for managing it? The minister just said it was the bureaucrats. Sorry; that won't do it for the public.

The government is already denying a line-by-line debate of the budget. They're actually giving themselves six months of money, and the minister just said it will be the bureaucracy that will manage that. Really. Is the minister saying Treasury Board plays no role in this?

Hon. C. Hansen: The role of Treasury Board over the past 12 months has been to review the service plans of each and every ministry and agency of government, to review their spending priorities and to determine what their allocation should be for the coming year.

Those numbers are all in the budget documents that were tabled on February 15.

[1505]

Treasury Board has done a very thorough review of each and every ministry and agency leading up to Budget 2005, and now we are engaged in a process of establishing interim supply. The principles behind this interim supply bill are not any different than the principles that are behind any interim supply bill that has been passed in this House. In fact, I think there has been hardly a year when this House has not used interim supply. I think the only examples are when the government ran on special warrants, which is something that we said we will not do, because we feel that it should have the approval of this House.

The role of Treasury Board is no different this year than it has been any other year. Once the review of spending plans and the review of service plans have been completed by Treasury Board and the budget has been tabled, we will approve an appropriation for six months of the year, and then we will be relying on a very talented and qualified public service to administer that.

J. MacPhail: Let me clearly outline for the minister what the difference is. We are weeks away from the end of the fiscal year expiring. There are at least six weeks left in this sitting, and the budget's not going to be passed. There's going to be an election within the next couple of months. The writ won't be returned until June. Of course, I guess this minister says Treasury Board doesn't play any role anyway. In the interim period the difference is that this government's going out and making all sorts of spending promises in the election — spending promises that have not been passed because the budget hasn't been passed.

The '05-06 budget has all sorts of new programs in it, new spending commitments, that have not been made legal. I'm trying to find out from the minister who's keeping an eye on not funding those programs until the new budget is passed.

Hon. C. Hansen: There is absolutely nothing to prevent government from implementing new initiatives as are set out in the service plans, and I think that is something new to the traditions of this House. An innovation that certainly this government is very proud of is that we bring in three-year service plans for each and every ministry, where they set out their program priorities for the coming fiscal year. Those are tabled before this House well in advance of the start of the fiscal year. Assuming that this House passes this interim supply bill, the government will have the authority necessary to proceed with the programs as set out in those service plans.

J. MacPhail: Is the minister suggesting somehow that when this Legislature passes Bill 20, the service plans have been debated and approved too? Is he going as far as to say that?

Hon. C. Hansen: I think the service plans are part of a level of transparency that we have never seen before anywhere, certainly in Canada. It's a level of transparency that I know other jurisdictions are taking note of and something that we're very proud of. It's a level of detail that has never been presented to this House before, and it's never been presented to the public before. On February 15 every one of those service plans was posted on the website for everyone to see.

This interim supply is different in a few respects, and I think the member noted some of those. Because of the time line we have with regard to the budget and the timing of the return of the writ and also the new requirements — which have never been there before in any election year in history — regarding the level of detail that has to be presented to this House after an election, it is going to take a bit longer.

It is not without precedent, but it is unusual that six months of supply would be requested.

J. MacPhail: Well, it's without precedent in any government I've been involved in — completely without precedent.

The minister keeps referring to 1991. We weren't in government in 1991. Mr. Chair, just to be clear: any government I've belonged to has never done six months of interim supply.

Let me just go back to this. Is the minister somehow suggesting that today we are debating the service plans ministry by ministry? I welcome that.

Hon. C. Hansen: We are debating interim supply, which is a normal procedure in this Legislature.

[1510]

J. MacPhail: No, no. When I asked what programs will be funded, he said they're all outlined in the service plans and that spending will be according to those service plans.

By the way, it was Paul Ramsey that brought in legislation demanding service plans every year — Paul Ramsey. He was a New Democrat. He was the Minister of Finance from '99 to 2001, and this government continued the practice, so stop trying to take credit for it. The government didn't introduce this practice. It was Paul Ramsey. Paul Ramsey implemented it as well, because I, as minister, had to do them.

Just let me be clear. The minister just said the service plans detail how money will be spent. Now, the service plans are part of Budget '05-06. Is the minister suggesting that we're passing, let's see, $\frac{1}{12}$ of the '05-06 budget? Is that his interpretation of what interim supply is?

Hon. C. Hansen: The short answer is yes. We are seeking appropriation for a portion of the budget as presented on February 15.

J. MacPhail: I can't believe this. This government is deeming to have authority for a half year of the '05-06 budget based on a few hours of debate. Is that what the

minister is saying? That when he shuts down the Legislature tomorrow at 5:30 p.m., he's going to assume that a half a year of the '05-06 budget has been approved by this Legislature? Is that what he's saying?

Hon. C. Hansen: Interim supply, as I mentioned earlier, is a tradition in this House. In recent election years, actually, the tradition has been to ask for $\frac{1}{2}$ of the appropriation for that year's budget. Because of some of the changes that have been made to the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act, it would be extremely difficult for government to be able to come back and present the estimates that are required by the legislation in any period shorter than what we are asking for in this piece of legislation.

My preference, to be honest to the member.... I would like to have been able to do it faster. I would have liked to have been able to come back to this House within four months of the start of the fiscal year. Because of the mechanics of what is now required, we realized that would be extremely difficult to do. It is because of those considerations that we are asking for $\frac{1}{2}$ of the appropriation in this particular interim supply.

J. MacPhail: Okay. Let's get clear what the mechanics are. The government is shutting down the House, the Legislature, six weeks before its conclusion. They're denying budget debate, and they know when the election is. Those are the mechanics this government is now using to justify somehow this ridiculous procedure we're going through.

Interim supply is about getting the authority to continue paying the bills of current programs as budget debate proceeds to its conclusion. That's what normally happens. But, no, this government refuses to pass a budget, is demanding interim supply and is going to go to the polls. And somehow this minister is now standing up and interpreting interim supply as if it's the authority for a budget in the future that has not been passed. Perhaps he could cite parliamentary rules that give him that right — right now.

Hon. C. Hansen: Interim supply is to provide authority of the Legislature for the spending programs of government. I think one of the things we made very clear is that we will not use special warrants in the way that previous governments have used them. We will come to this House and seek the authority of the House using interim supply, using full supply and using supplementary estimates rather than past practice around special warrants — where it was, in fact, just the cabinet that by decree decided that government could spend money in areas it felt were priorities.

If the member is interpreting interim supply as being only an authority for continuation of programs as they have previously existed, she is not accurate in that interpretation.

[1515]

J. MacPhail: That actually is the rule from Beauchesne's — Beauchesne and MacMinn. Perhaps

the minister could stand up and tell me where his interpretation derives from. Stand up.

Hon. C. Hansen: We have had individuals look at the parameters of interim supply. It is my understanding that the requirement is for government to stay within the appropriation as set out in this. There is nothing to restrict government from initiating new programs or new initiatives, as was the case previously, the way the previous government used special warrants — and interim supply, for that matter — in years gone by. As I mentioned, I don't think there is a year in the history of this province, in recent history at least, that interim supply was not used as a vehicle to provide appropriation.

J. MacPhail: This minister has absolutely no evidence that previous governments used interim supply to fund new programs — none. Absolutely none, because the budgets were being debated and passed in the time that interim supply was in place. So none. He also doesn't have any parliamentary authority to suggest that new programs are allowed to be funded out of interim supply.

Here's the scenario that we've got just so far. This government is shutting down this House tomorrow — tomorrow. They're stifling debate. Guillotining debate. That's what it's called: guillotining debate. They're going to walk away from this with no budget passed, but they're going to assume they've got authority that half the budget has been legally passed. That's what the minister just said — half the budget.

It's shameful. There has never, ever been any jurisdiction that has interpreted it in that fashion or used it in that fashion. Perhaps the minister could tell me the legal opinion that gives him that right.

Hon. C. Hansen: I might just remind the member of some of the precedent that has been established in this House. In fact, if you want to go back to.... She said I shouldn't talk about 1991. Well, in 1991 the Socred government of the day passed interim supply. The NDP government got elected that year and never did come back to the House. They actually ran virtually the whole year on special warrants, which I think is a travesty of the authority of the House.

If we go back just to the last election, which I know the member remembers vividly, the House was called into session on March 14. The budget, including the main estimates, was introduced on March 15. The budget debate was concluded on March 20, which was actually very quick, because there were only two days and three sittings of the House on the budget debate that year. Supplementary estimates were introduced on March 22, and the interim supply was passed on March 29 with $\frac{1}{2}$.

That was using standing order 81 to a greater extent than we are today, because they used standing order 81 to put through all three readings of the interim supply bill in one day. We are putting it through over the normal three-day minimum for a bill to go through the

House. There was absolutely no debate on the main estimates that were introduced on March 15. The House was adjourned on April 11. The Legislature was dissolved on April 18, when an election was called, and election day was May 16.

J. MacPhail: It's not good for the minister to enter into this debate. It was the then Liberal opposition who refused to debate the estimates because they wanted to get to an election. They actually refused to debate. Now, perhaps the minister doesn't remember that, but that was exactly what they did. There was the opportunity to debate.

Then let me ask the minister: could he demonstrate where that interim supply provided spending for new programs?

Hon. C. Hansen: I think if you look at examples where interim supply was brought in for an election year where the incumbent government was re-elected.... If you look at the 1996 example, when there was a budget tabled and the election was called immediately, we saw a government that proceeded to implement the programs that flowed from that budget. That was done solely on the basis of interim supply.

So we have seen interim supply used in non-election years for three months, and even in the government that she was involved with, they did not hold back the implementation of programs until full supply was granted by this House.

[1520]

J. MacPhail: Actually, there's no evidence of that. The minister stands up here, and there is absolutely no evidence of that whatsoever — none. And he knows it. Anyway....

Interjection.

J. MacPhail: No, I don't make this up. It's 14 years of experience — 14 years of experience that I wouldn't want that minister to challenge.

What we have now is this. Not only do we have a government shutting down debate on a budget, but they're running away, assuming that they've got unprecedented authority to spend. It's shameful, absolutely shameful. But if that's what the minister assumes, then we'll debate the service plans with the ministries that we wish. I'm turning to Health now, the Health service plan.

Does the minister wish to make time for staff or have staff come in?

Hon. C. Hansen: Again, the precedent for interim supply in the House.... This is a bill that's brought forward by the Minister of Finance, and he has managed that process through committee stage. I have Ministry of Finance staff here to assist me.

J. MacPhail: That's fine.

We're into Health now, and I've got a series of questions on that. Thank God I read the service plan, because the minister says we're debating the service plan right now.

This past winter there was a series of crises in hospitals around the province, and the government finally had to admit that they were going to fail in delivering the additional 5,000 long-term care beds by 2006. I'm going to explore in this debate what went wrong, why the government had to change its plan and budget, and find out what the government has budgeted for long-term care.

I'm just going to read some quotes. The 2001 election. The current Premier and the rest of the Liberals committed to "work with non-profit societies to build and operate an additional 5,000 new intermediate and long-term beds by 2006." Then that promise was included in the *New Era* document. The former minister responsible for long-term care said on May 26, 2003: "We are well on our way to meeting this commitment. The commitment is to provide 5,000 beds by the year 2006."

Then here's what the current Minister of Finance said in this Legislature on March 2, 2004, when he was Minister of Health: "What we are projecting is that by the end of 2006, we would have a net increase of 5,000 beds." Another quote: "The total tally in the province will show a net increase by the end of 2006 of 5,000." Another quote: "At the end of the day, we will meet that target." Then here's one from March 3, 2004, from the current Minister of Finance: "In fact, we are well on our way." Can the minister explain what went wrong?

Hon. C. Hansen: I know that the member has canvassed this with the current Minister of Health Services in question period. As she has explained, there are allocations of funds to the health authorities, and out of this interim supply bill, this will not be any exception. As in the past in terms of interim supply bills, the regional health authorities will get a portion of that allocation that can be provided for out of that interim supply authority. Within that, the health authorities will provide for the construction, operation and contracting for intermediate and long-term care facilities.

J. MacPhail: I don't understand what that.... Is that what the minister's justification is for explaining what went wrong — that they can't meet the target? There was a backgrounder released on February 9, 2005, from the public affairs bureau. That's the B.C. Liberal public affairs bureau. Here's what it said: "Wait times for residential care are down." Can the minister explain how he knows that and give us the evidence?

Hon. C. Hansen: I'm here in my capacity as the Minister of Finance. I know that the Minister of Health Services has addressed some of those issues in question period, and I am pleased to respond to questions around the financial allocation that is being made to the Ministry of Health Services.

[1525]

J. MacPhail: No, no. Sorry. There's another flip-flop. He just said he's determined that this is passing $\frac{1}{2}$ of the '05-06 budget. He says that the service plans are part of this discussion. Got to answer the questions. Got to answer the questions, based on what his logic was, of what his interpretation is of what we're debating now.

That's an unacceptable answer. I offered to wait till the proper officials were here to answer these questions. It's based on his own interpretation that we're debating the service plans right now under interim supply. He assumes that he has the authority, after this bill is passed, to fund any gosh darn program he wishes — new, old or whatever — and we're basing these questions on that interpretation he just made.

On February 9, the public affairs bureau issued a background on seniors housing and care that said wait times for residential care are down. Does the government continue to post wait-list data for long-term care?

Hon. C. Hansen: I very carefully want to follow the precedent that has been established in this House around the scope and parameter of debate for interim supply. It is a bill that is brought forward by the Minister of Finance. It is in my capacity as the Minister of Finance that I would be pleased to answer questions around financial allocations.

J. Kwan: I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

J. Kwan: I have the great honour today to introduce some 45 students from St. Francis Xavier School in my riding. They're grade 5 students, visiting the Legislature along with their teacher Ms. Josef. They are here visiting Victoria, touring Victoria, to learn about the history and traditions, particularly in terms of what we do.

I hope that the members of this House not only make them welcome but also actually participate in their best form so as to impress on these young people what we do in this Legislature in ensuring that the business of the people is dealt with and how it is dealt with. Would the House please make them welcome.

Debate Continued

J. MacPhail: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. Is the minister refusing to answer my questions based on the service plan of the Ministry of Health Services? If so, how does that jibe with his previous comments?

Hon. C. Hansen: The members opposite are free to ask whatever questions they would like. I will answer them in my capacity as the Minister of Finance with regard to the financial allocations that are set out in the budget documents.

That is in keeping.... I've actually done a bit of digging to make sure that my understanding of the role of the Minister of Finance in interim supply debates is consistent with my approach, is consistent with how it's been approached in years gone by.

J. MacPhail: This is the minister of convenience. On the one hand, he says: "Oh, we face different circumstances here. There's not enough time to pass the budget before the election is called. Oh, there's an election being called. Oh, it's only 19 days into the next fiscal year. That's the basis on which we can't pass the budget." Then: "Oh, there's no reason why I can't assume that this is a full half of the budget actually being passed." Now he claims that he's using precedence to deny answers.

Well, Mr. Chair, we're going to ask our questions, and if this minister refuses to answer them, shame on his government. He knows full well that this is the only opportunity to get any of these answers, because they're going to guillotine us tomorrow. He's even refusing to use this time to answer questions. He couldn't even answer my question about how much money is going to the various ministries.

What were we supposed to do — sit here and go: "Is it true that you're going to take \$13,139,500,000 by this legislation"? Based on what he's saying, that's probably the only question that he would deem appropriate.

Well, sorry. So far he hasn't been able to answer one single question in the interests of taxpayers. Can't even tell us how the money's being allocated, ministry by ministry. Won't answer our questions. Oh, and he refuses to bring in the officials who can answer this question. It's shameful.

[1530]

Let us continue, then. The public affairs bureau background of February 9, 2005, also pointed out that in 2002, the government did an inventory of residential care facilities. The background goes on at length about some of the findings: 10 percent needed outright replacement, and 40 percent needed some upgrading.

If the government knew all of that in 2002, why did they continue to say everything was just fine until as recently as March 2004?

Hon. C. Hansen: I was in this House when the member asked the Minister of Health Services those exact questions during question period in recent weeks. I know that the Minister of Health Services gave a fulsome answer to that question, and it's on the record in *Hansard* for the member to see.

J. MacPhail: No, we haven't referred to the background in question period. Let's be clear.

Can the minister not answer that question — 10 percent? I've heard the minister actually blame everybody but his own government that there was no planning, that they didn't know the situation they were getting into. They had no idea when they made the promise of 5,000 additional long-term care beds that

things were as bad as they were. There we see the minister's own bureaucracy — sorry; they're political, the public affairs bureau — reporting that by 2002, they knew exactly what the circumstances were.

This is different information than the then Minister of Health Services gave to this House in 2004. If we're debating the Health Services service plan now, these are exactly the kinds of questions the minister has to be ready to answer — exactly the same kinds of questions. The minister specializes in saying that the NDP didn't meet the needs of seniors in the nineties by building only 1,400 additional beds. Those are the beds that the government built in the 1990s. How many beds were built by the private sector in the nineties?

Here's why I asked that question: I quoted from what this minister said in 2004. He said that they will work with non-profit societies to build and operate an additional 5,000 new intermediate and long-term care beds by 2006. The minister then went on to say: "At the end of the day, we will meet that target."

Can the minister tell me: of those 1,400 beds that he claims were actually built, how many were built by the private sector?

Hon. C. Hansen: I certainly appreciate the fact that the member would have liked to have had a full estimates debate on each of these ministries. This is not what we're debating right now. We're debating interim supply.

I can tell the member that on page 95 of the estimates that were tabled on February 15, out of the allocation for the Ministry of Health Services there is an appropriation for regional health sector funding of \$7,157,983,000. Roughly 50 percent of that would be made available to the health authorities over the coming six months, subject to the approval of this interim supply bill.

Within that allocation to the regional funding, the health authorities have the latitude to determine their needs for intermediate and long-term care beds, and they will make those allocations from their appropriations accordingly.

J. MacPhail: Of the 1,400 additional beds the Liberals claim were built in the 1990s, how many of those were built by the private sector?

[1535]

Hon. C. Hansen: In keeping with the scope of the debate that has been a tradition in this House around interim supply, I do not have that level of detail with me. I am certainly prepared to discuss the allocations as set out in the estimates books, to the extent that the Minister of Finance is responsible and accountable to have that level of detail.

J. MacPhail: This minister hasn't given one authority to suggest that what we're passing here is $\frac{1}{12}$ of the entire budget of '05-06 and that then it will become legal. He states that. He states that we're approving the service plans. He used that argument when I asked

him on what basis the \$13 billion will be spent. He said: "Look at the service plans."

Then he stood up and claimed that they're the most open and transparent government and just to look at the service plans. That's the basis on which the money we're passing now will be spent. Now he's suggesting that, oh no, we can't talk about those service plans.

Which is it, Mr. Chair? Which is it? Is it interim supply to keep the current programs going, or is it...? What he now likes to claim is that we're passing a budget — half a budget — legally that includes all of the service plans and new programs. He can't have it both ways. If he's now suggesting he won't answer our questions, then it must be on the basis of the practice of interim supply, which is only to continue funding that which is already in place. He can't have it both ways.

Let us just continue. I'd be happy to, because we've got questions to take us right through till this government will shut us down — right through. Maybe the minister could get it straight on what his role is here. I don't know why he's objecting to this. He goes out in the hallway and claims: "Oh, we're allowing debate on the budget." Just not $\frac{1}{12}$ of it.

Mr. Chair, here's the answer about how many of those 1,400 beds were built by the private sector in the 1990s: zero. That was the number of beds built by the private sector. Zero. All 1,400 were built by the public sector. This government has now switched. It doesn't talk about just not-for-profit beds. He's actually talking about the private sector.

Let me continue to ask some questions. Here's what the backgrounder, February 9, 2005, says about long-term care: "Since June 2001, 4,081 new and replacement beds or units have been developed or upgraded. These include residential care beds, providing 24/7 complex care, assisted-living units and supportive housing units with home support. Taking into account beds that were replaced, this has resulted in a net gain of 171 seniors beds by May 2005." Wow. There's a real net gain.

Where do I begin? I'm going to try and figure out how this sentence is correct. It says: "This has resulted in a net gain of 171 seniors beds by May 2005." I feel badly that we're paying public affairs bureau to write such a lousy news release. May 2005 is in the future, but they've used the past tense here. That aside, let's just see: what is the net gain as of today?

Hon. C. Hansen: Sorry; I do apologize to the member. If I could ask her to repeat the question.

J. MacPhail: Here's the sentence I'm quoting, from the public affairs bureau. That's a public affairs bureau that has millions and millions of tax dollars spent on it to inform the public of government activities. Here's what they say: "Taking into account beds that were replaced, this has resulted in a net gain of 171 seniors beds by May 2005."

Call me crazy, but I was confused by the tense of that, because May 2005 is in the future, and they're using the past tense to say that something has already

happened. What I was actually asking was: what is the net gain as of today, March 9?

Hon. C. Hansen: In keeping with the tradition of interim supply, I do not have that level of detail. I will certainly take some of these questions that the member has and bring them to the attention of the respective ministers.

[1540]

J. MacPhail: This is ridiculous. It is absolutely ridiculous that the minister is taking this approach. These are legitimate questions based on his own analysis of what we're doing right now. I disagreed with his analysis. I disagreed with it. I think that interim supply gives the government the right to continue funding programs that are already in place. The minister says no. The minister says he has the right to spend the money on anything they want — new, old, whatever — and that the service plans are the guide. He just said that service plans are the guide for how that will be spent and that this is the most open and accountable government ever.

These are the questions that arise from the service plan. I'm talking about a backgrounder provided by the government itself to the service plan. The minister won't answer the questions.

Let me just go right here then. The people of British Columbia are actually questioning the minister's stats, so we got calls. We got calls in our office from people — the tiny little office that we have. Two weeks ago my staff contacted the Minister of Health's office to try and set up a briefing on the budget. Nobody replied — no one. I sent a note to the Minister of Health Services across the floor here. I never got a response. So the minister is wrong when he says that we've raised these issues and got answers. He's dead wrong.

Now we're asking these questions, because it's 1/2 of the budget that the minister's assuming he can spend on anything he wishes. Well, I guess he's not going to answer a question on his own public affairs bureau. So let's go to what the numbers are that we've gleaned as of March 2004. We know these numbers aren't accurate now — current tense — because further closures of long-term beds have occurred. But here's the number that the Minister of Health gave to us in this chamber in 2004.

I'm giving these numbers so that the minister can update us on what the current numbers are, and then plans for building, and point out how much money in the budget of this \$13 billion will be spent on meeting that target. That's the line of questioning that I'm pursuing here, Mr. Chair: figures in '04, what the current figures are and what the budget allocations to meet their targets are.

In '04 the minister said that in terms of beds that closed since June 2001, in March of 2004 there were 2,333 long-term care beds closed. The Minister of Health gave the MLA for Vancouver-Mount Pleasant a breakdown of that by health authority, and here's what it was. Number of beds closed since 2001: in the inte-

rior health authority as of March 2004, 704; Fraser health authority, 433; Vancouver coastal health authority, 360; Vancouver Island health authority, 751; and the northern health authority, 85.

Could the minister update us on what those figures are as of March 9, 2005?

Hon. C. Hansen: As I indicated earlier, I do not have that level of detail, nor would it be tradition in this House to have that level of detail available for an interim supply debate.

[1545]

I can advise the member that in the budget documents, in the estimates, there is an allocation, as I mentioned, of \$7.2 billion for regional health sector funding. That funding is, in turn, allocated to each of the five regional health authorities based on a population-needs formula so that everybody gets an appropriate allocation that actually takes into consideration the demographics and the size of their population and other factors that are brought into consideration that are in fact the cost drivers in their particular region. It's on that basis that the \$7 billion is divided up and allocated.

With this bill that's before the House today, they will be allocated approximately 1/2 of what would be their annual allocation. It is out of that money that the health authorities will fund their needs for long-term care beds — whether it's contracts with private sector; whether it's contracts for individual, not-for-profit organizations; or whether it's in fact through facilities that they own and operate themselves.

J. MacPhail: Why doesn't the minister have an answer to my question?

Hon. C. Hansen: I have carefully reviewed the established practice for debate around interim supply. It is in the parameters of that that I guess the opposition or any member of the House can ask any questions they want about the spending.

It is up to the Minister of Finance to respond to those questions within his purview and his responsibilities as the Minister of Finance and to the extent of the knowledge that he should have with regard to all of the ministries and operations of government that this appropriation will fund.

J. MacPhail: I'm getting really upset, Mr. Chair — really upset. I don't understand why this House — those who are in charge of this Legislature — allows this to happen. I really don't. The abuse day after day of this Legislature by this government, day after day, up to and including what the minister just said....

Here's my authority on what interim supply is, which this minister disagrees with. He disagrees with this, and it's on the basis of his interpretation that I continue to ask questions, which he now refuses to answer. It is shameful.

Here's what interim supply means, and I'm quoting. It's Canadian parliamentary procedure, House of

Commons, and there are no precedents contrary to this — none. "The granting of interim supply does not necessarily constitute immediate House approval for the programs to which it applies in the main estimates." While it states "not necessarily," there's not one single precedent to the contrary.

Erskine May quotes from the B.C. parliamentary House that there are very specific limitations to what can be funded prior to debate on the main estimates. That is this: "It is, therefore, the established practice, during one financial year, to seek authority for some provisional allocation of amounts for the financing of the public service during the next financial year, pending parliamentary approval of the corresponding main estimates." It is to be used "for resources and cash to cover the needs of the defence and civil services, House of Commons administration, the national audit office and electoral commission for the first three or four months of the financial year, until final authority can be given by the passage into law of the Appropriation Act."

It is for continuation of government programs while the main estimates are passed. This minister is interpreting it differently. He's saying: "No, we're actually passing $\frac{1}{2}$ of the next budget, the service plans, and we have authority to spend money on whatever we wish — new or old programs." Am I wrong in interpreting what the minister said earlier today?

Hon. C. Hansen: Just to restate what I had said earlier. On February 15 we tabled spending estimates for all of the ministries and operations of government, and this interim supply is to provide authority for $\frac{1}{2}$ of that appropriation, as set out in those documents that were tabled before the House.

That is in keeping with past practice in this House. The only thing that is different about this particular interim supply bill is that we are seeking $\frac{1}{2}$ of an appropriation instead of the $\frac{1}{2}$ that has happened in recent election years and the $\frac{3}{4}$ that happens in non-election years.

[1550]

In fact, if you want to go back to 1983, you will actually find a year when the interim supply was for $\frac{1}{2}$ of the appropriation, as requested in the estimates documents that were tabled. I know the member is interested in history. That was actually approved with very little debate by a unanimous vote of the House, and the NDP opposition of the day actually supported that piece of legislation.

J. MacPhail: Yeah, well, about 20 percent of the people voting in this upcoming election weren't even born then. So I'm not sure what the minister's trying to do there. But hey, if he wants to take credit for a Sacred record, fine. Fill his boots, if that's his model.

Mr. Chair, when I asked the minister on what basis this money would be allocated, he referred me to the service plans. Does he think that Hansard doesn't record this? Does he think somehow he can deny his own words? I'm asking questions from the service plans,

and he's refusing to answer them. It's embarrassing, and it's shameful to see how this House is being treated by this government. It's just unbelievable. He refuses to get the proper officials in here to answer the questions. No disrespect to the officials here, who are excellent officials, but the minister clearly doesn't have the advice to answer the questions, and he should get it. This is \$13 billion of taxpayer money, and these questions haven't been answered at all.

Does the minister have the information...? Well, let me try to give it according to what the minister is offering. He quoted from the main estimates. Isn't that a riot, Mr. Chair? He answered one of my questions by quoting from the main estimates, and yet he won't answer questions about the main estimates, because he says we're in interim supply. Really. How circular can this government get until we're all choked to death by it?

What is the status of the number of beds that have been closed, region by region, and what's the allocation of moneys, health authority by health authority, for long-term care beds?

Hon. C. Hansen: I understand that the member is disappointed that we're not engaging in the full estimates debate, ministry by ministry, prior to the dissolution of this Legislature for the May 17 election. I understand that. I've heard her speak publicly about that both in this chamber and outside. But this is not the estimates debate. This is a debate on interim supply. I can point to exactly where in the spending estimates as tabled.... There is an allocation there. What this interim supply bill does is ask for exactly $\frac{1}{2}$ of the total appropriation that was requested in Budget 2005. In terms of ministry by ministry or agency by agency, it's about $\frac{6}{12}$ of the appropriation that is provided for in this interim supply bill.

I appreciate that the member may want to go into minute detail as she would if we were actually in the estimates debate in this House, but that is not the purpose of an interim supply debate, and it's not why we're here today.

J. MacPhail: Well, educate me, Mr. Chair. Maybe the minister could tell me what he would consider an appropriate question on long-term care beds and their promise to provide an additional 5,000 long-term care beds. Perhaps he could just educate me on what would be an appropriate question that he would accept from me.

Hon. C. Hansen: I have tried to point out to the member where in the estimates funding for interim and long-term care beds is provided for. It's provided through the regional health authorities. I've described to her the formula that is used to allocate this particular appropriation to the health authorities who, in turn, would make decisions around the funding of intermediate and long-term care beds in their particular region. That is set out in the documents, and it's there for everybody to see.

[1555]

J. MacPhail: The main estimates. Let me get this clear. Are we passing the main estimates? No. Am I asking questions of the government about $\frac{1}{2}$ of the spending? Yes. The government denies me answers based on: "We're not passing the main estimates." But he's assuming he'll have $\frac{1}{2}$ of those main estimates, and he quotes from them. That's how ridiculously circular his arguments are.

In the budget letters to the health authorities, will there be any specifics? The minister just said that budget letters are going out. Will there be any specifics on long-term care?

Hon. C. Hansen: The budget letters that I referred to, that I would be sending out, would be budget letters to the ministers who are responsible for those various ministries and agencies of government. There will be one of those letters that will go forward to the Minister of Health Services with regard to what she and her ministry can anticipate with regard to the funding that would be approved by this interim supply bill. It is then the responsibility of the Ministry of Health Services to ensure that the population needs-based formula is utilized to determine the allocation to the various health authorities. They will then draft a letter that is signed by the Minister of Health Services that will go to each of the regional health authorities, setting out the parameters for the expenditure of that appropriation.

J. MacPhail: On what basis is the appropriation?

Hon. C. Hansen: The appropriation to the Ministry of Health Services is approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ of what is set out in the estimates tabled on February 15. In that document, as I mentioned earlier, there is a line item for regional health authorities and the regional health sector. They will allocate funding according to the population needs-based formula that I discussed earlier.

J. MacPhail: What's the legal basis for the appropriation upon which the minister will write the budget letter?

Hon. C. Hansen: It would be this bill that is before the House now.

J. MacPhail: That's why I'm asking my questions — because the appropriation for $\frac{1}{2}$ is based on this bill, and no other authority exists. We have every right to ask these questions based on that appropriation, and we have every right to expect answers — every right. You cannot avoid any other conclusion than the one I have just outlined, Mr. Chair.

I don't know. Is somebody going to write a book on the way this House was conducted over the last four years? Is someone going to write a book about the abuses of this Legislature by this government? They should. And this is a full chapter.

I'm just going to continue asking my questions. Is the minister wanting to do that until 9 o'clock tonight and 5:45 tomorrow? We'd be just happy to. Then we'll have a wealth of information to show what this government refuses to admit to, refuses to answer and is hiding from. Unfortunately for the Minister of Finance, it will all be under his name. I don't think any other Minister of Finance will have that kind of record. But there will be the list of questions that he refuses to answer. Yet he's going to assume, because of the tyrannical majority of his party, that he has the right to spend money as he sees fit, based on the passage of this.

The February 9, 2005, backgrounder says.... Again, it's a government document. Of the 4,081 new beds in the backgrounder, how many of those are 24-7 complex care, versus assisted-living and supportive housing units with home support? What I want to identify is how many there are. Then I'm going to ask region by region, and I'm going to ask how much money is being spent in this interim supply on adding to those beds.

Hon. C. Hansen: Just to address some of the member's earlier comments, the use of interim supply is a tradition in this House. The only thing that is different about this supply bill from ones that have been done in recent history, and that's subsequent to 1984, is that this is asking for six months of appropriation rather than the four months of appropriation that has been the tradition in recent history.

[H. Long in the chair.]

I'd be glad to engage in any questions the member has as to why we are seeking six months instead of four months, as happened in a previous election year. I've outlined some of that, and I'd be pleased to do so.

[1600]

As for specific, very detailed questions about internal operations within individual ministries, I will endeavour to make sure that those very specific questions are passed on to relevant ministers. I am sure that when this House does engage in the full debate of estimates, there will be ample opportunity to canvass all of that in specific detail.

J. MacPhail: What part of the service plans to which the minister referred me talks about whether it should be six months interim supply or four months interim supply? He referred me to the service plans to justify the spending. So what service plan was he quoting from?

Hon. C. Hansen: I'd be pleased to outline for the member reasons why six months of supply is an appropriate request in this year. I outlined some of this earlier — that as a result of amendments to the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act, there is now a requirement that within 90 days of the swearing-in of executive council, there have to be new estimates that are tabled before this House.

While that is not a budget as we know it, it constitutes as much work now as a budget would constitute, including the requirement for the forecast council to convene to look at their forecasts. All of the assumptions have to be reviewed as they would be reviewed for an annual budget. New service plans would have to be presented for all of the ministries. Post-election, we don't know whether the ministries would wind up being constituted in the same way they are now. That is certainly an option for the new government and new Legislature subsequent to the election.

Based on consultations with officials in the ministry and looking at that calendar as it's now set out for us in more precise detail than it's ever been set out before in an election year, it was our determination that there was a need for $\frac{1}{12}$ of appropriation for us to make sure that we can live up to those obligations under those various pieces of legislation.

J. MacPhail: So is that it? Is that what the minister has for all of his answers? He says that what we're debating here is: why $\frac{1}{12}$ or $\frac{1}{12}$? Is that it?

Would the minister like a recess so we could actually get staff in to answer these questions? Because these questions are in order and appropriate, and they're the responsible questions for a government to answer if they actually think they're accountable to the taxpayer. So would the minister like a recess to get the proper staff in here to answer these questions? Or is he going to continue to refuse to answer them? I'd be happy to have the chamber clear, and we'll just read our questions for the next nine hours. We'll just read them into the record.

Hon. C. Hansen: I am fully aware of the precedents in this House around interim supply. I am aware that any member of the House is free to ask whatever questions they wish to ask, at whatever level of detail they wish to ask. It is up to the Minister of Finance to answer whatever questions are within his purview as the Minister of Finance. That is a precedent that I think is appropriate for us to follow in this case.

J. MacPhail: Well, I wasn't going to refer to this, but when I was Minister of Finance, I brought in ministers during interim supply to answer questions. I showed some respect for this House and to the then opposition. Maybe that's the precedent the minister would like to live up to. Maybe he's forgotten that precedent. And I wasn't the only Minister of Finance to do that.

We actually took that the opposition had a serious role to play, and we treated them with respect. This minister has completely done the opposite. There is a precedent for bringing in ministers to answer questions, and given the highly unusual circumstances of this government going to guillotine debate, he should do the same. He should absolutely do the same.

[1605]

We're talking about long-term care here, Mr. Chair. We're trying to find out how this government's budget is going to provide the commitment for long-term care

that they promised. They've been caught out that they've failed in their commitment. The Premier admitted that they haven't delivered on their commitment which, to his credit, he acknowledged. We're trying to find out before this election. If this is anything but a pre-election budget, this government should answer this question.

Their own discussion document, dated January 13, '03, is entitled *Meeting the Ongoing Care Needs of Seniors and People with Disabilities. A Planning Model: Home Support, Assisted Living and Residential Care Services*. It had an outline of how many beds would be built and when.

Can the minister update us from this document about how many beds would be built when and in what year?

Hon. C. Hansen: Actually, I did go back and review *Hansard* for the period of time that the member was the minister. When members of executive council came into the chamber as part of an interim supply debate, it was specifically with regard to the use of special warrants. That is a provision, for those that may be watching this, where cabinet, by decree, allocates themselves the right to spend money on the public's behalf without the pre-approval of the Legislature of this province.

I've gone back and read as much as I can. I must confess that I didn't read every single page of *Hansard* over the last 20 years, but maybe the member can find me some precedent that would speak otherwise. I do want to respect the precedents of the House with regard to this piece of legislation.

As I said earlier in this debate, if she has very detailed, specific questions about bed allocations or where beds are going to be built around this province, I'd be pleased to bring those questions to the attention of the minister responsible.

J. MacPhail: I don't know where to begin. Somehow the minister now uses the fact that the previous government brought ministers in here to answer questions as a negative, as opposed to what he's doing, which is refusing to answer questions. How bizarre is that?

I actually feel very sorry for this minister. Clearly, he's been put out on the end of a skewer. Well, he's going to be on that skewer till 5:45 p.m. tomorrow. It's shameful. It's embarrassing. He's been abandoned, and he's treating every British Columbian with disrespect — absolutely a lack of respect.

He stands up and cites precedents about how ministers came in here to answer questions as to why he's not going to do it. He won't answer any questions about long-term care. Well, Mr. Chair, believe you me, if this government, during the election which starts on Friday — because their government is shutting down this Legislature, and they're hitting the campaign trail on the taxpayer dollar — makes one statement about a commitment to long-term care beds, his words will be coming back to haunt him on billboards — about what he refused to answer completely. It will be his fault

that that exists, if they say one word about long-term care — one word.

What's the difference between complex care and assisted living?

Hon. C. Hansen: That is a question for the Minister of Health Services during an estimates debate in this House. I know it has come up in past years. I know that previous ministers have answered that question in detail, so it is on the record in *Hansard* from previous estimates debates. The answers that were given at that time by the Minister of Health Services or the then Minister of State for Intermediate, Long Term and Home Care are the same answers that would stand today. They are on the record.

J. MacPhail: Perhaps the minister could tell me where they're on the record.

The Chair: Is that through the Chair, member?

J. MacPhail: Sorry — yeah.

Hon. C. Hansen: That would be referenced in the *Hansard* index and could be found.

J. MacPhail: I can't find it in *Hansard*. He just said it was in *Hansard*. Could he please tell me where.

Hon. C. Hansen: If the member is not able to find a specific reference in *Hansard*, I believe there is a website that is under Independent Living B.C. that would provide some of those definitions for her.

[1610]

J. MacPhail: It's a mockery. Actually, this minister is making a mockery of this House by somehow suggesting that these questions are illegitimate because they've been answered before. They haven't been answered before. We have a very small staff, but we do our research properly. I think that's been demonstrated over the last four years. These are legitimate questions that remain unanswered, and for the minister to somehow suggest otherwise is ridiculous.

Let me just outline my logic here. There is a projected growth rate of seniors over 45 — seniors over 85. My apologies. That would make you barely a senior if it had been the former.

The government itself has said that the demand for residential care beds has gone down. That's what they said February 9, so I'm trying to figure out what their plans are for this $\frac{1}{2}$ that we're passing for residential long-term care beds. Perhaps it's zero, because they said long-term care demand has gone down. He won't answer my questions.

Well, let me ask this question. What is the projected growth rate for seniors over 85 here in British Columbia?

Hon. C. Hansen: I would never suggest that the questions the member is putting are inappropriate

questions. I just do not have a level of detail with me as Minister of Finance to answer that level of detail, nor is it necessary to provide those kinds of detailed answers during an interim supply debate.

The appropriate time for the kind of questions that the member is seeking answers for is during the ministry estimates debates. As I said earlier, I appreciate how much she would like to be engaged in a ministry-by-ministry debate at this point. That opportunity will present itself prior to the expiration of this interim supply allocation or on the authority of the House, as may be set out.

J. MacPhail: Why is it that we're not in main estimates now? Why is it that we're not debating main estimates now?

Hon. C. Hansen: There is a tradition in this House that the government seek interim supply if the full supply has not been passed by the Legislature prior to the start of the fiscal year. Again, if you go back through history, prior to the last four years I don't believe there was a time when full supply had ever been allocated prior to June 1. In fact, probably into June would be the most recent that supply had ever been fully allocated.

Governments have always depended on interim supply to make sure that the operations of government are provided for until such time as full supply is done. That is no exception this year. We are approaching interim supply as it has always been approached. The only exception is that we're asking for $\frac{1}{2}$ instead of the traditional $\frac{1}{2}$ allocation, and I've outlined the reasons for that.

J. MacPhail: We're not in the main estimates because this government refuses to call them. This parliament exists by law until April 18. We have plenty of time to debate the estimates. This government refuses to call them.

In fact, there is no need for interim supply until March 31. Today is March 9. We could reach agreement to have the main estimates completed by March 31. I proposed April 18; the government didn't respond. I'd be happy, given this despicable treatment of parliament, to now propose that we have them done by March 31. No, not this government. They're going to ram it through.

Well, the minister had better review history in *Hansard*. In March 1999 the member for Vancouver-Hastings was the Minister of Finance debating interim supply. The Minister of Children and Families and the Minister of Health answered questions posed by the member for Vancouver-Quilchena. Perhaps he overlooked that part of *Hansard*. That's one example, just one. What a selective memory or a selective research the minister has, because, of course, the current Minister of Finance is the member for Vancouver-Quilchena.

[1615]

Well, Mr. Chair, I continue. Does the Minister of Finance agree, in his budget planning for asking for $\frac{1}{2}$

of a year's budget, that the need for long-term care was going to shrink?

Hon. C. Hansen: What this interim supply bill would provide for is an allocation to the Ministry of Health Services, which in turn would provide budget letters to the various health authorities. The health authorities would then determine what their needs are going to be for assisted-living or residential care beds or, as we used to refer to in the old days....

I know we're using some of this terminology interchangeably. In years gone by, we'd refer to it as intermediate long-term care. Today the health authorities are looking at the need for assisted living and residential care, which is probably the more current terminology that I should have been using earlier in the debate. Those decisions would be made by the health authorities.

J. MacPhail: In the minister's estimate of asking for $\frac{1}{12}$ of interim supply, did he determine what need, if any, there was to spend on residential care beds, new care beds? And on what basis did he determine that?

Hon. C. Hansen: In Budget 2005 and reflected in the estimates that were tabled on February 15, there is a \$1.5 billion increase in the appropriation for the Ministry of Health Services, cumulative for the term from the '04-05 to '07-08 fiscal years. In that is an increase of \$1.044 billion.

Included in that are services which would include a range of things, but they would include increased options for frail seniors in the assisted-living and residential care sector. There are increased dollars allocated in this budget that flow to the health authorities, from which they have to determine how they best need to meet the needs of seniors in their respective regions.

J. MacPhail: The Minister of Finance, in this House, promised that 5,000 new, additional beds would be built by 2008. He just referred to a combination of different kinds of beds. How much of that money to which he just referred will be spent on assisted living?

Hon. C. Hansen: That is a determination that would be made by the respective health authorities based on their existing supply of residential care versus assisted-living beds in their respective regions.

J. MacPhail: The minister referred to.... He read a statement that there's going to be \$1-point-something billion spent on various programs, which included assisted living. Does he have magic documents over there that sometimes he's going to refer to and sometimes he's not?

How much of that money is going to be spent...? It was this minister in this House this session who said that they would have 5,000 additional long-term care beds built by 2008. How much of that is going to be spent on assisted living? How much is going to be spent on supportive housing? How much is actually for long-term complex care units?

Hon. C. Hansen: The document that I was reading from is *Budget and Fiscal Plan 2005/06-2007/08*, which was tabled in the House on February 18. I was reading from page 18. It's a document that I know the member has. What it does is set out the increased allocation over that time period that will flow to the health authorities, from which they can fund the various assisted-living and residential care and supportive housing initiatives that meet the needs of seniors in their respective regions.

[1620]

J. MacPhail: In planning to spend $\frac{1}{12}$, what thought processes, what research did the Minister of Finance do to ensure that his commitment to deliver 5,000 new long-term care beds by 2008 would be met in the first six months of the budget '05-06?

Hon. C. Hansen: The work towards achieving that target is an ongoing process. As we know, different health authorities are at different stages in achieving those targets. As the member knows only too well, the target date has been extended to the end of 2008 to achieve a goal that we previously thought would be achieved by the end of 2006.

J. MacPhail: Can the minister tell me of a situation from his research when interim supply was passed without being in the middle of budget debate on the main estimates?

Hon. C. Hansen: Probably the best example is 2001, where interim supply was brought in on March 29 and passed for $\frac{1}{12}$ of the spending. It was passed through all readings in one sitting using standing order 81, and there was no debate at all on the main estimates.

J. Kwan: But that was in the middle, when estimates were being debated. That has been the historical pattern of when interim supply was being debated. From time to time, yes, that is true. Interim supply bill debate tends to be short, because it happens in the middle of estimates debate with ministries.

This year it is completely different, wherein there is no ministry-by-ministry, line-by-line debate at all. The questions my colleague has put forward to the minister are questions that the minister should answer on the basis that this government will be spending some \$13 billion of taxpayers' money on new programs. British Columbians have the right to know how their tax dollars are being spent, so I ask the minister to answer the question.

Hon. C. Hansen: I guess the other example to go back to is the election of 1996, if the member is looking for precedent. Actually, what happened that year is that government operated for two months under special warrants, because they brought in a budget and then called the election without any debate at all on the budget. Interim supply was actually brought in on June 27 of that year. In the example there, they were funding

out of special warrants without any debate in the House at all.

J. Kwan: Sorry, the minister is mistaken. Under the '96 scenario, it is my understanding that interim supply was brought in on the basis of the previous budget. The new budget was tabled, and then it went to election. Interim supply was never for future programs in the '96 scenario.

In this instance, what the government and the Minister of Finance are asking is this — that \$13 billion of taxpayers' money be put towards new programs on which there would be no debate whatsoever. There's no accountability with respect to how that \$13 billion would be spent. That's the difference. In the past, interim supply had always been targeted towards existing programs, so you'd know where the dollars went and what those programs were. They had been established, and that's what the dollars were for, in interim supplies of the past. Not so in this instance.

[1625]

The valid question around health care is this. Given that there would be \$13 billion spent without a line-by-line debate on the budget, how many of the beds that would be new, that would be built, that would be from the interim supply budget...? What would be going towards funding these new beds, both capital and operating?

Hon. C. Hansen: To address the specific question, as I indicated earlier, I would be pleased to pass on detailed questions about how many beds and where they might be. I'll be pleased to pass those along to the Minister of Health Services. When this House addresses the full estimates of the Ministry of Health Services, I'm sure the minister will be prepared to answer questions.

I think that as we've gone back and looked at other election years, the approach we are taking with this interim supply bill is certainly in keeping with past practice, as I mentioned earlier — the only exception being that we're asking for ½.

J. MacPhail: I would like to offer a recess to the Minister of Finance so that he can get the appropriate staff here from the ministries, and we'd be happy to tell him the order in which we're going to debate these matters. I'm offering that to the Minister of Finance.

We will be debating health matters until 6 o'clock. Then we'll be moving on to children and families after that, and women's services from 6:30 till probably conclusion. I'm offering the minister a recess so that he can get the appropriate staff in here to answer these appropriate questions.

Hon. C. Hansen: As I indicated, I can understand why the members want to start on a full debate that is part of an estimates debate, ministry by ministry. That is not the purpose of a debate that takes place on an interim supply bill. I want to be respectful of practices in this House, and I will answer questions to the best of

my ability in my capacity as the Minister of Finance. I have staff here that can assist me with that scope.

J. Kwan: Let me just say this. We will only get to ask questions of the minister until 6 o'clock tomorrow. Today debate will go on until 9 o'clock and then tomorrow until 6 o'clock. There is no opportunity whatsoever to do ministry-by-ministry, line-by-line debate in full debate. That is not what we're doing, and the minister knows that, because the government is going to shut down this House.

[1630]

What we're doing, however, is this. The government wants to spend \$13 billion of taxpayers' money prior to the election, and the government wants to go and do that without any debate in this House. Well, I am sorry, Mr. Chair. The opposition's job is to hold the government to account even in the limited time that the government is allowing the three opposition members to do that, and we will. By any stretch of the imagination, \$13 billion is not a small sum. Less than two days' debate.... Trying to get some answers and some accountability from this minister is hardly unreasonable.

By no means is this a line-by-line debate and full estimates. It is only a portion of the questions that we will get a chance to ask, and we have no choice over the matter. However, the minister has a choice to answer these questions and provide some answers to British Columbians.

I will ask the minister again. The backgrounder goes on to state: "A further 823 supported housing units without associated health care services have also been built, bringing the total of new or replacement beds to 4,904." If these beds have no health care services, how can they be counted towards the total replacement beds for long-term care? Is the government trying to use social housing dollars from the federal government to buffer its broken promises around long-term care beds?

Hon. C. Hansen: I will make sure that the minister responsible is aware of the question so that when the next Legislature gets into the debate on the Ministry of Health Services, I'm sure the minister would have the information available to provide that kind of a detailed answer to that kind of a detailed question.

J. MacPhail: Why has the government not called the main estimates? What's preventing the government from calling the main estimates?

Hon. C. Hansen: I guess if you look back over past election years, it is in keeping with past practices, generally speaking. I think the only thing that's different this year is that our government has actually got away from the unpredictability of election dates. What's different this year is that we have known for four years now when the election would be held, and it is May 17. A writ will come down April 19. That is, I guess, what's different from past election years, when governments sprung that kind of information on the public by sur-

prise. We have predictability in that, but that's the only thing that's different about this particular election year.

J. Kwan: The minister is the Minister of Finance, so he should be able to do the math. There are some six weeks before the writ is dropped. What is there to prevent the government from calling main estimates debate and passing them before the writ is dropped on April 19? It is only March 9 today.

Hon. C. Hansen: If you look back over the history of the province, prior to these last couple of years — if you go right back to about 1986, which I have on this list — the previous earliest that the final supply was completed by this House prior to our government was, in fact, on June 20. That actually happened in 1994. That was the earliest that full supply had been arrived at.

Interjection.

The Chair: Order, member.

Hon. C. Hansen: I appreciate that the NDP members of this Legislature had indicated that they thought we could get through it faster this year. That would not be in recognizing that other members, both those who are government members and non-government members, may also wish to contribute to that estimates debate. Therefore, work that would be done towards estimates this year would.... It would be highly unlikely that there would be enough time to complete final supply. Therefore, much of that work would have to be repeated by the next Legislature, which will be elected May 17.

[1635]

J. MacPhail: Absolute balderdash, what the minister just said. It is shameful how he tries to do what he does to misdirect the public from the truth. He did just that. He misdirected the public away from the truth. He knows full well that the estimates can be easily passed by April 19, unless his own government caucus members refuse to do so. It would be highly unusual for him to accuse his own government caucus members of refusing to pass the budget to make it legal.

Last year's estimates debate was 27 days, including every single question asked by every member of the House, and there are 27 days of sitting. Why doesn't he just have the guts to stand up and say he doesn't want to shine the light on his budget? Why doesn't he stop this charade that somehow it's not possible? Are we now to assume that one of the consequences of their fixed election date is that we have a 65-day election campaign at the taxpayers' expense and no ability to pass a budget? Is that the only conclusion we can reach? Shame on him.

He knows full well that he can call the main estimates today and that they can be passed by April 19, because what he also has available to him is the very same section they used to pass this interim supply bill — standing order 81.1(2). He can allocate time. He

could use the very same piece of legislation he's used to guillotine the debate tomorrow at 5:45 to guillotine it on April 19, and they've used it before. There is absolutely nothing to prevent this government....

How much federal money is targeted for social housing in the first 1/2 of the budget for '05-06?

Hon. C. Hansen: I certainly have, as part of the budget documents, the transfers from the federal government. I don't have the specific breakdowns of that, but I will be pleased to make the member's question available to the minister.

J. Kwan: When will the minister make that information available?

Hon. C. Hansen: As we discussed before, that kind of detail is appropriate in questions to be put forward during an estimates debate. I'm sure, based on the questions the members want to put on the record today, that ministers will be prepared to address those to the best of their abilities at that time.

J. Kwan: Then let me just put this on the record. In the last four years this government has actually brought in closure in the Legislature, shutting down estimates debate as well as debate on legislation. Nothing stopped the government from doing that. They proceeded to do that, and then they allocated time for each of the ministries and for the legislation that was to be debated. If those items were not completed, they were deemed to be completed within the time allotted to them, and then debate was shut down. At the end of that, the government proceeded to pass everything. That's what the government did, and that's been their track record in the last four years.

[1640]

There is nothing that prevents the government from actually bringing forward the main estimates debate to allow for some questions until April 19. In fact, the opposition has already made the offer, and we stand by the offer, to conclude all the business of the House — the line-by-line, ministry-by-ministry debate — by April 19, before the writ is dropped. We would commit to that time line. There is nothing that would not allow for the government to finish ministry-by-ministry, line-by-line debate, as the Minister of Finance claims. Nothing prevents that from happening. So why won't the minister allow for that?

Why is the government so afraid to debate their own budget, which they praise and claim to be so proud of? Why won't the minister answer the basic questions that the opposition has put to him? What's preventing them, with the exception that the government does not want British Columbians to know the truth? Is that the issue here — that the minister does not want British Columbians to know the truth about their budget?

Hon. C. Hansen: I must say that it's a little hard to take, coming from members of that political party who

in 1996 brought down a budget and called an election without any debate at all. That was a bit hard to take.

Even in 2001, when there were not fixed election dates, when we did not know when the writ was coming down, that government at that time did not allow for a full estimates process before they called an election.

We have...

Interjection.

The Chair: Order, member. Order. Let the minister finish.

Hon. C. Hansen: ...in this House a tabled budget, with a far greater degree of transparency and information, posted on the website for everybody to see and for the public to look at critically. It is a budget that we have every reason to be very proud of, and in terms of the feedback from around the province, that is certainly reinforced by the public.

We've had a full debate — all six days of the budget debate — in this House, which was voted on by members of this chamber last week. We are now putting forward interim supply, which is part of a standard practice in this House, and that's what's before us today.

The only thing that's different about this one, as I've mentioned many times, is that we are seeking $\frac{1}{2}$ of an appropriation as opposed to $\frac{4}{12}$ of an appropriation, and I have outlined the reasons why that is necessary.

J. Kwan: Sorry, minister. Previous interim supply bills actually dealt with funding for existing programs where people already know what the track record is and what the money goes towards.

This interim supply bill deals with new programs and new commitments that have not been debated or mentioned in this Legislature. That is the difference. Maybe the Minister of Finance will actually wake up and see the difference and tell the truth to British Columbians.

There is nothing to prevent main estimates debate. It is this government and this minister that brought down the guillotine to shut down the debate by tomorrow. There is no reason for that to happen. By the government's own standards, they said that with the fixed dates the House would actually not adjourn and doesn't need to adjourn until April 19. There is ample time to engage in a fulsome debate.

[1645]

I'm going to give the minister another opportunity to answer some questions. But before I do that, I would ask that the minister introduce the new staff who have just arrived in the chamber. Perhaps they would assist the minister. I trust that the minister will allow them to assist him to answer the questions that the opposition has put to him so that British Columbians could get some answers and have some accountability for this government's action.

Hon. C. Hansen: Actually, if you go back and look at the interim supply bills that have been introduced in this House over recent history, they're always based on twelfths. It's always a percentage of the annual appropriation based on twelfths. In this case we're asking for $\frac{6}{12}$.

It is also the practice of this House that it is a percentage of the appropriation for the budget that was tabled — not the previous year's budget but the budget that is actually tabled before the House. That is based on.... Today what we are doing is asking for $\frac{1}{12}$ of the appropriation for the spending plan...

Interjection.

The Chair: Order, member.

Hon. C. Hansen: ...as set out. There is absolutely nothing that prevents government from allocating part of the interim supply of appropriation to new programs, and there is nothing in the practice of this government in this province that would restrict the government to just previously existing programs.

J. MacPhail: That's what my colleague just said. We're debating new programs here, and we're asking questions on it.

What the heck does the minister think his obligation is to this chamber? Based on $\frac{6}{12}$ of the new budget, how much money from the federal government targeted for social housing is the government spending on assisted living? And would the minister mind answering the question about newly arrived staff, please?

Hon. C. Hansen: The staff member who joined us is Michael Shepherd, who is legal counsel for the Ministry of Attorney General.

J. Kwan: The bill that we're debating — just so everyone knows — is that the government is asking for authority to spend \$13 billion of taxpayers' money without answering any questions on the details of how those dollars will be spent on the operating side. Then the government is asking for authority to spend ten billion capital dollars without any answers to questions on the details of those capital programs. That's what the government is doing. This one-page bill, Bill 20, Supply Act (No. 1), 2005, is stating exactly that.

The government is seeking that authority to spend some \$23 billion — not \$23, not \$2,300, not \$23,000, not \$23 million, but \$23 billion of taxpayers' money. The Minister of Finance wants to spend that money without providing British Columbians with any answers on the details of how those moneys will be spent.

But you know what? We in the opposition are going to continue to ask the minister these questions because they are valid questions, and British Columbians have the right to know.

Let it be on the record that the minister just refused to answer the question around assisted-living beds

and all the other questions that my colleague from Vancouver-Hastings had put on the record earlier.

[1650]

I'm going to keep going, Mr. Chair. The backgrounder also states: "Over the next 18 months, strategic investments by the government, the health authorities, non-profit and for-profit housing and care providers will add an additional 2,561 net beds or units with care services. This will bring the total number of beds completed to 2,762 by December 2006. By 2008, the government will achieve its goal of adding 5,000 beds to the inventory inherited in 2001." That, by the way, was 25,000 beds.

It is interesting to note, comparing what I just read to the new-era promise, which is: "Work with non-profit societies to build and operate an additional 5,000 new intermediate and long-term care beds by 2006." That's a direct quote.

The new promise for 2008 includes for-profit providers. How many beds will be built by the government, the health authorities and non-profits, leaving out the for-profit beds?

Hon. C. Hansen: I'm not sure if it's exactly the question her colleague asked previously, but it's very close to it. As I indicated at that time, I will make sure these very detailed questions are brought to the attention of the respective ministers, but in keeping with the practice of this House for interim supply debates, I will do the best to answer questions within the scope of my responsibilities as the Minister of Finance.

J. Kwan: Let us be clear on the record to show that the Minister of Finance refused to answer that question, refused to tell British Columbians about that commitment of 5,000 new long-term care beds — about how many of those will be non-profit beds, how many will be for-profit beds and how many will be built by the health authorities. Let it be on the record that the minister refused to answer that question, refused to tell British Columbians the truth.

I'm going to keep going. You know what? By not answering these questions, it is actually at the peril of the government. Why do I say that? Because their credibility is at stake. If they want to show British Columbians that their word actually counts for something, that they will somehow build those 5,000 non-profit, new, long-term care beds by 2008, then they will tell British Columbians what is going on. By refusing to do that, the government then is only assisting themselves in creating even a greater credibility gap on this question.

I'm going to keep going and ask these questions that British Columbians have the right to know. They have revised the promise to deliver the beds by 2008, but there is no money to fulfil the promise. Let me quote the Minister of Finance's budget speech: "Over \$200 million more to improve access to home care, residential care and palliative care as well as mental health and addictions services." But wait. That's over the next three years, to boot.

How much of that \$200 million is dedicated to new, additional long-term care beds in Budget 2005, and how much will be spent in the six months this interim supply lasts?

Hon. C. Hansen: I do want to just correct this for the record. I know the member was talking about a number of \$23 billion, and I just want to be clear for those that perhaps have been following the debate that what we are seeking is a sum of just over \$13 billion for government operations, which is ½. We are seeking, in a subsequent section which we haven't got to yet.... It's a section that provides for \$956.4 million. There's nowhere near the \$23 billion. I'm not sure what the member may have been referring to there.

[1655]

Again, the question the member asked is one that requires a fair amount of detail. I don't have detail here, nor is it appropriate in an interim supply debate. I will make the minister aware of the member's question.

J. Kwan: Let me actually provide the answer for the minister: \$200 million to provide for home care, residential care, palliative care as well as mental health and addiction services. That's what the budget says over three years. That's the minister's budget speech that he delivered.

By the government's own *New Era* document for candidates, they estimate that to bill for long-term care beds is about \$130,000 per bed. If you use that calculation on the 5,000 new long-term care beds, the government falls way short of delivering that, based on the 2005 budget. In fact, the government would have to commit over \$170 million each year, starting now, to ensure that those 5,000 beds are actually funded — to ensure that they would be built. There's nothing in the budget that would allow for that.

The minister won't answer this question. There's got to be a lingering question in the minds of British Columbians. They have already broken their promise of meeting the 5,000 new long-term care beds by 2006. So far they've only built 174 beds and shut down 4,000 along with that. You do the math and figure out how many beds they're short, Mr. Chair. Somehow, without the funding in the estimates, they will actually have British Columbians believe that they will meet their new commitment, the campaign commitment — a second campaign commitment on long-term care beds — of building 5,000 new long-term care beds by 2008.

Well, here's the problem. In addition to what I've just outlined, the Liberals have created chaos in the health care system by failing to deliver on their promise. Emergency rooms are overcrowded, seniors are in acute care beds while they wait for more appropriate placement, and sick patients are being placed in the halls.

How much is the government committing with this interim supply to deal with the crisis they have created?

Hon. C. Hansen: In terms of the budget speech that I presented to the House on February 15, the member

references the \$200 million to improve home care, residential care and palliative care as well as mental health and addiction services. Those are additional dollars provided in Budget 2005 for operating expenses for some of those various programs over three years.

As I indicated earlier, there is an appropriation to the Ministry of Health Services. Part of that is a \$7.16 billion appropriation for regional health sector funding so that the moneys for the operating side of assisted-living or residential care facilities is built into that appropriation. That is allocated based on a population needs-based funding formula to the various health authorities in the province. It is from that that they would fund the operating dollars. I think that when the member is using some of these examples and stats, she may be confusing operating dollars and capital dollars.

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

J. Kwan: Then answer the question. Answer the question, and shed some light on how much of the \$7.6 billion will be going to expanding access to long-term care beds.

[1700]

Hon. C. Hansen: That is a determination that will be made by the respective health authorities based on the budget letters that will be provided for them from the Ministry of Health Services, which in turn will be based on the appropriations as set out in the estimates. What we are asking for is $\frac{1}{2}$ approval for that allocation.

J. Kwan: Surely the Minister of Health, the Minister of Finance, somebody in government — the Premier, for that matter.... They have promised 5,000 beds by 2008. Surely the Minister of Finance can tell us how the government intends to deliver on that promise. Surely there's a plan somewhere with all those planning staff doing work. Surely the government would have some sense of what's going on. If they're going to make that promise, they would want to make sure that they'll deliver on that promise. Or is it that we're going to follow the same pattern in 2006 as we have seen? The government made the promise in 2001, and then four years later demonstrates that they have failed to deliver that promise.

Is that what we've got to go by? Is that what the minister wants the public to go by — their own record? I know they don't want that, but short of answers in this House, that's the only thing that British Columbians can go by: the track record of what the government has done to date. I would expect the minister to have some answers, some sort of plans in place to ensure that that promise for the second time is going to be delivered.

Hon. C. Hansen: As is the practice in this House, the place for that kind of detailed discussion is during the estimates debate. I understand the member's frustration — that she would like to have that estimates

debate now and not subsequent to the swearing in of a new Legislature — but that is the way that it will proceed this year, which is not unlike the approach to full estimates debates in previous election years.

J. Kwan: No, it's not just me who's frustrated. I actually believe that the government owes British Columbians this much. The minister wants to spend \$13 billion. That's what this bill allows for — \$13 billion of spending authority for ministries. The minister wants to spend this money without answering any questions. One would have thought that British Columbians have the right to know how their hard-earned tax dollars are being spent before they're spent.

I've heard endless lectures from this government about financial accountability and management, talking about spending within your means, knowing where you're going to spend the money, how you're going to get value for money, making sure that you actually get value for money, making sure that you don't spend more than what you have, making sure that there's a plan in place before you spend the money, making sure there are goals that can be measurable before you spend the money.

These guys want to claim to be the great managers that they are, the people who are accountable to British Columbians. You would think they would get to know how \$13 billion is being spent at least to some degree of detail before those moneys are spent. You would think they'll get to see the plans of how their hard-earned tax dollars are being spent before they are spent. That's why we're here debating this bill.

[1705]

We could do it in such a way that would allow for detailed questions of each ministry, line by line, on how those moneys will be spent, but not so. The government has decided that they will bring down closure, meaning that they will shut down the debate by the end of tomorrow. We in the opposition have no choice over that matter. All we can do is continue to do our work, which is what we're doing now — at least to get some answers from this government on the \$13 billion that would be spent on the operating side. It isn't unreasonable to ask the minister these questions. British Columbians should have the right to know before the money is spent — at least to have a glimpse of how this money will be spent.

We know there's got to be some sort of plan. Well, at least we hope there is. In 2003 the Ministry of Health wrote a discussion paper called *A Planning Model: Home Support, Assisted Living and Residential Care Services*. The Minister of Finance should be aware of the report. We discussed it in estimates last year.

The paper highlights three possible scenarios — high, moderate and low — for substituting assisted living and home support for residential care. The moderate- and high-shift scenarios would lead to even larger cuts than the April 2002 announcement of 3,300 closures. In the high-shift scenario, 5,654 residential care beds would be cut by '06-07 and replaced by assisted-living

units and enhanced home support. We have the information that shows the table associated with that.

I would like to ask the minister: could the minister please outline the costs associated with the construction and operation of a long-term care bed? Maybe we could start there to try and figure out how it is that the government would actually meet their commitment of building 5,000 new long-term care beds by 2008. What is their projection now on how much it costs to build one bed?

Hon. C. Hansen: That would require a level of detail that I do not have with me, nor would that be the tradition of an interim supply debate in this House. I am pleased the member is putting the question on the record, and I will make sure it's brought to the minister's attention.

I would like to go back to something the member said earlier. In this House we have far more information that is presented to the public around the spending plans of each of the ministries. Each ministry and government entity produces service plans for three years — not just one year, but three years — and those were all posted on the government website as of February 15 for everyone to see. Included in that are some of the performance measures that each of those ministries and organizations are held accountable to.

J. MacPhail: Mr. Chair, I want to ask the minister a question before I then ask you for a recess.

The government, in bringing in their guillotine rule in order to.... They refuse to call the main estimates. They've used the guillotine rule to stop debate as of March 10 at 5:45, and they've allowed from now until that time on the supply. They refuse to call the main estimates, and the government is using the argument now that they don't have to answer these questions.

I took a break from here, Mr. Chair, because I went down to see what the Premier's commitment had been. He said that we'll have a full debate on the budget — a full debate. He made that commitment. What is the intent of the government from now until 5:45 during this debate?

Hon. C. Hansen: The commitment that was made by this government and enunciated by the Premier is that we would have a full debate on the budget. That is a debate that, by the standing orders of this House, lasts six days and eight sessions. We had that full debate, and it was voted on.

There is a process in this House — I know the member knows this, but for the benefit of those that are following the discussion — for an estimates process. It is the estimates process that is the ministry-by-ministry process where many of these very detailed questions would be appropriately put and answers would be sought. Ministers and their respective staff would be available to answer those detailed questions to the best of their abilities.

[1710]

We have allocated time for the interim supply debate. In my view, certainly, what was allocated under standing order 81 would be far greater than any other time allocation, to the best of my knowledge, for an interim supply debate in the past. That should be more than adequate to respond to all of the member's questions within the parameters of what has been established for appropriate debate in the committee stage of interim supply.

J. MacPhail: Let me get the minister's argument clear. He says that there's way more time allocated than is necessary for interim supply; that the government is under no obligation to answer questions on the main estimates during this period of time; that government won't call the main estimates, even though the line-by-line is the budget debate; that he's claiming that what the Premier meant by "fully debating the budget of '05-06" was the government caucus members standing up and railing in a political way against past jurisdictions, previous administrations, without the minister having to answer one single question about the budget. That is this minister's interpretation of what the Premier meant by full debate.

Given the fact that the minister refuses to answer any questions about this budget, we assume, then, that the government is going to stymie us, stonewall us and take a budget to the electorate without answering one single question about it. That's what we can assume based on what the minister has said.

Mr. Chair, we have until 5:45 on Thursday, so I would ask for a recess of just five minutes in order for us to contemplate what the opposition will do with that period of time.

The Chair: Hon. members, we will take a five-minute recess.

The committee recessed from 5:12 p.m. to 5:21 p.m.

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

On section 1 (*continued*).

J. MacPhail: Prior to us recessing — and thank you very much for that; we appreciate it — my colleague from Vancouver–Mount Pleasant asked the minister to outline the costs associated with construction and operation of a long-term care bed. He refused to answer.

Why are we concerned about that? Why is it of concern to us? Well, here's the Liberal record on their promises on long-term care beds. Let me just read it into the record. During the 2001 election, the Premier and the rest of the Liberals committed "...to work with non-profit societies to build and operate an additional 5,000 new intermediate and long-term care beds by 2006." That seemed pretty straightforward to us — non-profit groups, nobody else, no talking of using for-profit, and an additional 5,000 new intermediate and long-term care beds.

My colleague's question was: how much do those...? They made that commitment. They continued to make that commitment. How much was that going to cost? The former minister responsible for long-term care was insistent that they had not broken their promise. On May 26, 2003, the former minister said: "I have not broken any promise. We are well on our way to making this commitment. This commitment is to provide 5,000 beds by the year 2006."

Okay. That's less than two years ago. You'll note that there was a little bit of nuance in the language from their original promise, though. She omitted the words "additional" and "build" from her updated language. Of course, she was forced to omit those words from her language, because the government was not building 5,000 new additional beds. Some were conversions that the government was well aware that it would need to do when it made its promise, and many were being built by the private sector.

On April 22, 2002, a presentation was made by that former minister of state, and she broke down the 5,000 beds this way. This is her new version. She said that 3,500 will be supportive living units. Of that, 1,000 of those will be rent supplements in the private market, 1,500 would be new apartments built, and 1,000 would be converted from existing developments. Therefore, only 1,500 would actually be new residential beds. Well, all hell broke loose then. All hell broke loose that the government was breaking its election promise.

At the time, the ministry had to admit that the baseline they were working with was roughly 25,000 intermediate and long-term care beds. That's what they agreed existed as of 2002. That meant that their promise would be this, if they lived up to their election promise. There would be 30,000 beds by the year 2006 if this government were not breaking its promise.

[1725]

That's why we were exploring these issues over the year. What we were trying to figure out was how much they'd budgeted to meet this election promise, if they were serious about it. That was the basis of our questions. That's why we were asking questions about how much the government was allocating from the federal funds for social housing to meet their promise for long-term care beds. We knew that in the past, in order to skirt around the truth, they were actually using some of the funds from social housing to say that they'd honoured their promise for intermediate and long-term care beds, even though we know that social housing in no way provides long-term residential care for people with health needs. That's where we were coming from.

In 2004 the then Minister of Health carried on with that complete misconception that they were well on their way to meeting their election promise. He did confirm that the base number from which their promise would be delivered was 25,000 long-term care beds. But at the time, he then admitted that he couldn't give an exact breakdown of the numbers between for-profit and not-for-profit housing. He just didn't have that because, of course, he didn't want to admit that what-

ever beds had been built were by the for-profit sector and the not-for-profit sector.

So we have, as of 2004 estimates debate, the then Minister of Health still saying that they were on target. Yes, it would be 30,000 beds by the year 2006 that they would have for intermediate and long-term care beds — residential care beds. Well, there was a report that came out, and here's what the report showed about this government's record: that over all, there would be 5,000.... Let me just read it. It's the B.C. Health Coalition report. I know the minister will probably just discount it, but these are the professionals working in the field. Here's what the health coalition found, and they used the Health ministry's own records.

This was a document, a discussion paper, that was leaked to the health coalition, and we have it here. We have the discussion paper here, and it shows that by their own records, instead of increasing long-term care residential beds, 3,111 long-term units would actually be cut by '04-05. But in that period of time, the government would replace those with 3,799 assisted-living units. Assisted-living units are not long-term care beds and are not not-for-profits.

The health ministries then, nine months later, produced a discussion paper and a planning model for three possible scenarios for meeting this government's election promise that to date had not been met. Here's what it showed. It showed that the actual shift that would require the greatest input, to shift to actually meet the election promise — the real election promise of the government — would actually show that they would have to replace 5,654 residential care beds that would have been cut by this government by '06-07.

In other words, the government's real plan, released by their own document from 2003.... I'll tell you what the title of that document is. It's a discussion paper from January 13, 2003, from the Ministry of Health Planning and the Ministry of Health Services titled: *Meeting the Ongoing Care Needs of Seniors and People with Disabilities. A Planning Model: Home Support, Assisted Living and Residential Care Services*. From that document the bureaucrats showed that there was actually a net loss across the system of 5,654 beds — a net loss of that — and that their plan was to replace those with 6,728 assisted-living units. And they call it substitution.

[1730]

That's the truth of the matter. They knew themselves that they would have closed down 5,654 beds and that they weren't going to replace those residential and long-term care beds with anything other than assisted-living units, which would be provided by the private sector.

No wonder the minister doesn't want to answer any questions about their election promise and how much money is allocated for long-term care beds. That's what their real record is. That's why he's shamefully refusing to answer any questions about the truth about long-term care.

I know that the minister doesn't want to answer those questions. That's why we are here today in this sham — absolute sham — of the minister refusing to

use the time available to deliver on their promise to be the most open and accountable government, to deliver on the promise that the Premier said — that there would be a full budget debate.

I understand that the minister wants to make sure he doesn't break any parliamentary practice here by actually answering questions that we ask, but they're very happy to break the parliamentary practice by refusing to call the budget estimates when there's plenty of time to do it. They're very happy to go to the electorate with a budget that is fake — it can't be described in any other way than fake — otherwise, they'd pass it through this House. They're just happy to go to the election with the budget that's not real and upon which they won't answer any questions.

We're happy to take the time to outline to British Columbians exactly what the record of this government is, and we will continue to do so. My colleague from Surrey-Panorama Ridge has some remarks and questions based on exactly that — what the record is in his own riding.

J. Brar: Mr. Chair, I came here as the new MLA from Surrey-Panorama Ridge to do my job. My job is to stand up in this House and speak for the people of my riding and hold the government to account. As a new MLA, I understand that one of the major and key tasks during this last session is the budget and debate on the budget.

It becomes more important when we see that we are going to get into an election. The people need to know exactly what is in the budget, but what I hear from the government is that they are not prepared to debate the main estimates. It's totally shocking to me. It's totally shocking to the people I represent that this government — which writes in big, bold letters in the *New Era* document that they are going to provide the most transparent, open, accountable government — is not prepared to debate its own budget.

[1735]

I wonder, as a new MLA, why they are avoiding the debate. I wonder, as a new MLA, why they are not prepared to answer questions from the opposition. I wonder, as a new MLA, if there is anything they're hiding in this budget. I wonder, as a new MLA, where that openness is that was promised to the people of British Columbia in 2001. I wonder, as a new MLA, where that accountability is that was promised to the people of British Columbia in the *New Era* document. I wonder, as a new MLA, where that transparency is which was promised to the people of British Columbia in 2001.

I also wonder, as a new MLA: what is the rush? Why are they in a hurry, when we have more than enough time to debate the budget before the writ is going to be dropped? The opposition members have made it very clear that we are prepared to live with the time line before the writ is dropped — that we are going to finish the full debate line by line, ministry by ministry. Why this rush? I don't understand that. The people of British Columbia don't understand that as well.

I also wonder, as a new MLA: is it fair to the taxpayers to send elected MLAs on the campaign trail 65 days before election day? This government was big on set dates, and in my opinion, this is a new set date — that this election campaign in British Columbia is going to be 65 days rather than 28 days, which has been the practice in the past. People are going to ask these questions.

I am totally surprised that for any question we ask the government, even on the interim supply act, the answer we get is: "Those are the answers you will get in the main estimates in full debate." But we don't know when that debate is going to happen. I have tons of questions. My constituents have a lot of questions as to what this budget offers them, but the government is not prepared to answer any questions.

I also wonder, as a new MLA: what is the purpose of debating this interim supply bill? What is the rationale behind it?

Mr. Chair, I have questions about Surrey Memorial Hospital. There are tons of them. I have questions about the education system in my riding. I have questions about the Port Mann Bridge. This government, during the by-election, made a big promise in Surrey that this is the key issue for Surrey. I want to know: is there any money allocated in this budget? People of Surrey want to know: is there any money in this budget? People of Surrey want to know: was that a real promise or a shallow one? I also have questions about public transit in that city, but this government is refusing to answer those questions.

[1740]

One example is about Surrey Memorial Hospital. The emergency room of Surrey Memorial Hospital — according to the latest report, the Cochrane report, which was prepared under the advice and direction of this government — has the capacity to serve 50,000 patients in one year. In reality, it is serving 72,000 patients in one year.

If we combine the communications challenges in that hospital because it's a very multicultural community, Surrey Memorial Hospital is the busiest hospital in the country — not in the province. That's their own report. The report came under the direction of this government.

Then the former CEO of Surrey Memorial Hospital, Bob Smith, presented his own report to this government and asked for funding to fix the problem in emergency rooms of hospitals of the south Fraser authority. They have that information, as well, available to the government.

Then they also have a report prepared by the Surrey Memorial Hospital Foundation. According to their report, Surrey Memorial Hospital serves 33 percent more patients compared to Vancouver General Hospital, which is the largest hospital we have in the province. They also indicate that Surrey Memorial Hospital serves more patients, more heart patients, compared to VGH and St. Paul's combined.

Having said all that... I have been asking that question about the situation at Surrey Memorial from

the very first day I came into this House, without getting any straight answers from this government. Under tremendous pressure, this government advised south Fraser authority to direct \$28 million towards dealing with the problem in the emergency rooms at hospitals falling under the south Fraser authority.

According to the vice-president of the south Fraser authority, whose letter came last week, the \$28 million which has been taken out of the operating funds is nowhere close to fixing the problem at Surrey Memorial Hospital, even if all \$28 million goes to only Surrey Memorial Hospital.

Those four different reports I am talking about come from their own officials, not from the opposition. The people appointed by them, the people working for the Fraser health authority.... They are saying it, but the response of this government has been: "Everything is fine. We have a plan, and we are excited about it."

[1745]

My first question to the minister is.... After explaining the situation — which hopefully he already knows — about Surrey Memorial Hospital, I want to know, under this interim supply act, how much money is going to be allocated to the south Fraser authority to deal with the expansion of Surrey Memorial Hospital.

Hon. C. Hansen: First of all, just a comment on some of the points that the member made earlier in his presentation questioning what the rationale is for interim supply.

There are three ways that government can have the authority to spend taxpayers' money. One is by special warrants, which were originally developed to be used only in very unusual circumstances. But what we saw in this province is that it was being increasingly used. That was an authority that is really directed by cabinet without the pre-approval of the Legislative Assembly.

As a government we made a commitment that we would only use special warrants in the most unusual of circumstances and would not use them, as had been used in previous years, to fund the basic operations of government ministries unless it was an absolutely catastrophic event, for example. That was really what special warrants were originally designed for.

The other means by which Legislature can approve spending authority is via the full supply, and that is following a full ministry-by-ministry debate on the estimates...

Interjection.

The Chair: Order, please.

Hon. C. Hansen: ...of each ministry. That is the time and the opportunity in this House that detailed questions can be put to individual ministers and the kind of detailed questions that I know the members were seeking earlier.

The third vehicle is the one that's before us today, and that's interim supply legislation, which actually provides for a proportion of the fiscal year to be

funded. It is a measure that has been used in this House, I think, virtually every year in recent memory. I think the difference that's happening now is that we're using it instead of the way previous governments had used special warrants. In the past, special warrants were used in addition to interim supply. We feel that it's appropriate for us to come to this House and seek the vote of this Legislature for the interim supply that's going to be required for government operations until such time as the next Legislature can review the ministry-by-ministry estimates and provide for the full supply, as is the tradition in this House.

With regard to the member's second question at the end of his remarks about health authority allocations, as I had mentioned earlier in the debate, \$7.157 billion has been allocated through the Ministry of Health Services for the regional health sector, which is the health authorities in essence. By approving this interim supply, we will be approving $\frac{1}{12}$ allocation of the overall appropriation for government for the coming fiscal year.

The Ministry of Health Services would be allocated their $\frac{1}{12}$ share of that, and it would be reasonable to assume that they, in turn, would provide budget funding letters to the various health authorities of roughly $\frac{1}{12}$ of what their allocation would be for this year had the full supply bill been passed during that period of time. Each of the health authorities will see an increase in their appropriation in this coming fiscal year, and the Fraser health authority is no exception in that regard.

J. Brar: The minister, in fact, didn't answer my question. It was a very simple, straightforward question. I can assume from the answer given by the minister that the people of Surrey cannot know for the next six months what the plans of this government are for the expansion of the emergency room. That's what my assumption is from the answer from the minister.

My question is very specifically related to Surrey Memorial Hospital. I have detailed all the reports prepared by the officials working under this government. The total money which has been allocated is only \$28 million, and I don't know — and I'm sure the minister is not prepared to answer that question — how much out of that \$28 million goes to Surrey Memorial Hospital. Can you tell me that?

[1750]

Hon. C. Hansen: For the benefit of the member.... You know, as a new member, those are the kind of detailed questions that get put during an estimates debate when we go through spending estimates ministry by ministry.

I do know, because I happened to see it come across my desk yesterday, that the Minister of Health Services put out an announcement yesterday which actually sets out how those particular moneys are going to be expended. I know that anybody is free to look that up on the website. It's there for anyone to look at. I guess it's actually a little bit out of the scope of this particular

discussion, because what he's referring to is moneys that would come out of the current fiscal year, not the coming fiscal year.

J. Brar: So the people of Surrey don't know, out of that \$28 million which were announced last week, how much money is going to be dedicated to Surrey Memorial Hospital. That's why I'm asking questions about this interim supply act. Any estimates, and particularly estimates from the Surrey Memorial Hospital Foundation.... Their rough estimates indicate that to fix the problem at Surrey Memorial Hospital will take a minimum of \$65 million — just to fix the emergency expansion situation.

We don't know whether this budget, the interim supply budget, has any hope for the people of Surrey. We will not know for the next six months, because this government is not prepared to answer this question — not today and for the next six months. That's the direction we see the government is going in, because the interim supply act is for six long months. So the people of Surrey will not have any answer from this government about the expansion of Surrey Memorial Hospital.

During the last four years what we saw in the Fraser health authority was that about 480 long-term care beds have been cut under the direction of this government. That is the major cause for the backlog in emergency rooms, the major cause according to all different reports presented by different officials and experts we have seen.

I want to know whether the people of Surrey have any hope for additional long-term care beds in this interim supply act. Is there any money allocated to build additional long-term care beds so that we can take some pressure off the emergency room crisis?

Hon. C. Hansen: The answer is yes.

J. Brar: How much is that money? And how many new beds can we expect from this government?

Hon. C. Hansen: As I indicated earlier in the debate, there is increased funding for each of the health authorities. As I indicated in my budget speech in this House, there is an additional \$200 million over the next three years that's going to be allocated — 200 million more dollars to improve access to home care, residential care and palliative care, as well as mental health and addiction services.

J. MacPhail: Well, Mr. Chair, isn't that interesting that the minister finally answers a question and that he says over \$200 million more to improve access to home care, residential care and palliative care, as well as mental health and addiction services? So that's the full amount of money for the next three years for all of those health services.

But wait, Mr. Chair. How much of that \$200 million is dedicated to new, additional long-term care beds, let alone the beds for Surrey? And how much of that is

going to be spent in the next six months? The minister won't answer those questions.

[1755]

You know why they won't answer, Mr. Chair? Because they've got a big, gigantic problem in that they've broken their promise, and there's not even money in this budget to correct it.

By failing to deliver on that promise, the Liberals have created chaos in the health system, as my colleague from Surrey—Panorama Ridge points out. They've cut 480 beds. The emergency room in Surrey Memorial Hospital is in chaos because there are people who should not be in acute care beds but should be in long-term care beds. Instead, this government has cut those beds. Sick patients are being placed either in the emergency room or in the hall, and this government won't even answer the question about how much of the \$200 million they've got for long-term care.

What we do know by their own estimate that they put out before the last election — their own estimate that they gave to all these Liberal candidates — is that it would cost \$136,000 for one long-term care bed — one long-term care bed. Based on them matching their own revised promise of delivering 5,000 additional beds by the year 2008 — "revised" is the kind word for it — they would have to budget \$200 million in each of the next three years just for long-term care, by their own numbers.

Now we know why this minister won't stand up and answer the questions. He doesn't have any answers that won't point the finger at them for breaking their promise.

Hon. C. Hansen: Noting the hour, I would suggest that we recess until 6:35 p.m.

The Chair: The House will stand recessed until 6:45 p.m.

The committee recessed from 5:57 p.m. to 6:47 p.m.

[K. Stewart in the chair.]

On section 1 (*continued*).

J. Brar: The minister said that the Liberal government has allocated \$200 million for long-term care beds, mental health and addiction services. Since we don't have the specifics, my assumption is that it's for three years. That means for one year it's less than \$70 million, and for six months it's less than \$35 million.

My question is: can the minister provide us with a breakdown as to how much money is going toward long-term care beds, mental health and addiction services?

Hon. C. Hansen: What I had indicated prior to the break was that in Budget 2005, there is an additional \$200 million that is going to be going to those services over the next three years. That's on top of the base that has already been provided to the health authorities.

The health authorities then determine how best to allocate it.

J. Brar: The minister didn't answer my question. It's a very simple question. That money is allocated for three different purposes, which include long-term care beds. They also include mental health, home support and addiction services. What is the breakdown of these different services for the next six months, if that's available?

Hon. C. Hansen: As I'd indicated earlier in the debate, given that this is an interim supply debate and not the full ministry-by-ministry debate, detailed questions like that would be put to the minister at the time of the ministry's estimates debate. I have undertaken to make sure that the relevant ministers are aware of the various questions that are posed.

I have undertaken to provide the best answers I can, based on the information that I have within my capacity as the Minister of Finance and within the scope of my responsibilities. The question that the member is seeking an answer to is outside of that scope. It's during the actual estimates debates of a ministry when a question with that kind of detail would best be put.

J. Brar: It's very hard for me to understand one thing. What is inside the scope of asking questions on this interim supply act? Any question we ask is not part of that. I fail to understand.

[1850]

I would like to ask the minister to clarify that. What are those questions which can be asked under this debate? Is there any question which can be asked to get the right answer, the accurate answer or the specific answer? We have been asking questions since morning. Each time, we don't get the straight, specific answer.

That's why it's very important, before we go to the election, to debate the budget line by line, ministry by ministry so that the people of British Columbia have a very clear understanding of what this government is offering, so they can make up their minds on May 17.

What we hear from the government is that they don't have any answers. But they have this debate. Before I ask my next question, I would like to clarify: what are those questions which can be asked for this interim supply bill and which the minister is prepared to answer? What are those questions?

Hon. C. Hansen: As it pertains to interim supply, the tradition in this House is that there is not substantive debate. As I indicated earlier, the opposition is certainly free to put whatever questions it wishes before the House, and I as Minister of Finance will endeavour to do the best I can to respond with the information I have available within my scope as Minister of Finance.

If you look back over the history of practice in this Legislature at times when it comes to the actual interim supply, the scope of the discussion has actually been

quite narrow, particularly around whether or not the time that is being asked for is justified — and we had some discussion about that earlier today — and also around just the purpose behind the use of interim supply as a vehicle to ensure that government operations continue after the start of the fiscal year on April 1.

When you go back and look at some of the debates that took place in recent history, a lot of the substantive debate was not actually around interim supply. The substantive debate was in fact around the special warrants that came down. Because that was money approved solely by cabinet without the preapproval by the Legislature, in those cases those ministers had to come in and be accountable for how those moneys had been spent.

In our view, the use of special warrants for routine matters of government is not in keeping with the accountability that government should have, and so we've made a commitment to refrain from using special warrants. We use them in only the most unusual of circumstances. That's what they were originally intended for. In fact, if you go back and look at the history of debate around interim supply, it is traditionally very limited in scope.

I might just provide the members with a bit of background as to what happened in 2001, which was the most recent election year in which a supply act was brought in. The Minister of Finance of the day, when he brought in second reading, for example, spoke. There are three paragraphs. The opposition Finance critic of the day, who was Gary Collins, stood up and basically said that he understood why this was required and noted that at that time it was for four months supply, not three months. The reason for that was because it was an election year.

As I've indicated earlier, we are doing something that is a bit unusual by asking for six months, and I've explained that. I will be pleased to answer any questions that the member has regarding why we feel it's necessary to go to six months of interim supply.

With that, actually, Gary Collins then indicated that the opposition was going to support the interim supply bill, and that was the sum total of the debate on second reading. I can share with the member what happened in committee stage as soon as I find that.

[1855]

J. Brar: Once again, there is no answer to the question. As the new MLA, I'm totally surprised about all this. As I said, any question you ask.... The government is not even clear as to what kind of question can be asked in this. What I have seen until now is that no matter what question you ask, the answer is: "This could be debated in the main estimates debate." We are talking about 13 billion hard-earned taxpayer dollars. This government is not prepared to answer questions, not prepared to debate it and go line by line, ministry by ministry.

Just for clarity again, just for example, can the minister clarify if one single question...? Give one example to me of "this is the question which can be asked here."

Because any question you ask, they are not prepared to answer. There's no answer. So give me one example of what question the opposition can ask that you're prepared to answer.

Hon. C. Hansen: In fact, I did find the *Hansard* from the supply debate in 2001. The reason why that's an important one to refer to is that that was also an election year. Although we didn't have a fixed election date so that the House wasn't absolutely certain when the election was getting called, it was a government that was actually run to the end of the five years of its mandate.

Interjection.

The Chair: Through the Chair, please.

Hon. C. Hansen: At that time, there was actually no debate in third reading at all, and I think it was in recognition that interim supply...

Interjection.

The Chair: Through the Chair, please, members.

Hon. C. Hansen: ...is in fact a routine matter for government. In fact, the interim supply act.... When it came in, the Chair called for approval of the sections. They were approved, and it was actually done without dissent in the House about it going through. Interim supply is something that is a routine measure by governments. It's been used almost every year, whether it is a regular year or not a regular year.

As the member noted, it is a debatable thing, and that's why we're here. He asked for some specific examples around the kinds of questions that we could engage in. Certainly, as I've indicated, we are asking for six months of supply instead of what is the normal precedent of four months in an election year. I'd be pleased to engage in a discussion as to why that is a necessity. I tried to outline that a bit earlier today, but I'd be pleased to elaborate on it if the member would like more detail.

Aside from that, I do want to follow what is a normal process for interim supply in this House with regard to the scope of debate. It's not an opportunity to go and do the line-by-line detailed questioning of ministry by ministry. The appropriate time for that is in the estimates of the House.

The member can put forward whatever questions he has. He's free to do that with very broad scope. I will do my best to answer with the available information I have within the scope of my responsibilities as the Finance minister. I'm pleased to field questions.

The ones I can't answer because of the level of detail.... There have been lots of examples of that earlier today, where I know the opposition members have been seeking very precise detail that should be in questions that should be asked when we eventually get to an estimates debate. I'll be glad to make sure that those

questions are brought to the attention of the respective ministers to be addressed when the estimates process is called before this House.

J. Kwan: Let's just set the record straight. The Minister of Finance knows very well what's happened previously on interim supply bills. Those are tabled at a time when estimates debate had just preceded those interim supply bills. The minister knows that.

Line-by-line ministry debate took place, and then time ran out. Interim supply was required in order to meet the deadline of the fiscal year-end. It was brought in to carry it over, and then line-by-line debate resumed. The minister knows that very well.

[1900]

This situation here is completely different. There has been no ministry line-by-line debate during this spring session. For the ministers to somehow pretend that interim supply debate is a normal routine matter and that the government is not responsible for giving any answers in spending \$13 billion of taxpayers' money is ludicrous.

Just think about it for one moment. For a family or individual, would you commit and authorize spending — never mind \$13 billion; let's just say \$1,300 — to renovate your house without knowing what work is going to be done, how it is going to be done and who's going to do it? Would anybody do that? Would you go and buy your car without knowing what car you are going to get and authorize a blank cheque?

This is what this government is asking this House to do. Somehow we in the opposition are just supposed to accept that. I don't think so, and I don't think that British Columbians would accept that. This government is asking British Columbians to hand over \$13 billion — a blank cheque — so that the government can do whatever it wants. Based on their track record to date, in the last four years, would you do that, Mr. Chair? Absolutely not.

This minister knows the difference. The question was put to him: what question can you ask under this interim supply bill that the minister would actually answer? I'll tell you that the only question the minister would answer is this: will you hand over a \$13 billion blank cheque to this government so that it can do whatever it wants without telling you between now and the next six months? That's the question the minister will then get up and answer: "Yes, that's exactly what we want you to do."

British Columbians would not accept that. This is not an accountable government by any stretch of the imagination. It is not a transparent government by any stretch of the imagination if the government wants to spend \$13 billion without answering one single question on the details of how those dollars are to be expended.

In the priority area of health care there's \$200 million in this year's budget for mental health services, for home support, for long-term care beds and for addiction services. Yet the minister cannot break down how much of that \$200 million will go into what area. We're

to believe, just on the government's word, that when they say they will build 5,000 new long-term care beds by 2008, they will somehow deliver on that.

Never mind that they couldn't deliver on that promise for 2006 when they made that promise in 2001. Never mind that this government actually cut mental health services in the community and that people with mental health illnesses could not get access to living rooms in the community where people go and get the kind of support they normally do. Never mind that.

[1905]

The government says: "Oh, trust us. We are going to deliver mental health and addiction services." Really? I'd like to ask the minister this question on the \$13 billion that he's asking British Columbians to just write this blank cheque for so that he can spend it in whatever way he wants over the next six months without any accountability whatsoever. How many of those dollars are targeted towards emergency services in British Columbia?

We know that in some communities the wait is as long as eight hours. We know that in Surrey, with Surrey Memorial, we have a situation where people are being sent home without a bed in cases where they should not have been. How much of this \$13 billion will go towards emergency services, region by region, in the province?

Hon. C. Hansen: Prior to the break I talked about the allocation that's in the budget within the Ministry of Health Services for the regional health sector funding. We see a significant increase in this fiscal year coming forward, bringing that amount now up to \$7.158 billion. In this appropriation from interim supply, they would be provided with about $\frac{6}{12}$ of that amount. It is distributed according to the population needs-based funding formula that the Ministry of Health Services uses to allocate to the various health authorities. Within that budget, the health authorities are expected to manage and meet the needs of acute care and other health care services in the region, and that would include emergency service delivery.

J. Brar: This government has allocated \$200 million for the next three years for long-term care beds, which includes addiction services and mental health as well. If we look at the situation at the Surrey Memorial Hospital alone, the information from the Fraser health authority tells you that the Fraser health authority has a capital funding deficit of \$50 million this year alone. According to their estimates, this is going to grow to \$150 million by next year. The funding on the table for the next three years is \$200 million, so I don't understand what hope the people of Surrey have out of this budget and the projections for the next three years.

I would like to ask the minister: what specific dollars are going to go towards Surrey Memorial out of these \$200 million for the next six months, which the minister is now asking for approval from the House?

Hon. C. Hansen: That is a very appropriate question for the member to put to the Minister of Health Services when the House considers the estimates of the Ministry of Health Services. This is an interim supply debate. There is no tradition in this House to go into that level of detail, but I would certainly be prepared to make that question known to the minister.

J. MacPhail: We're going to continue asking our questions. It's surprising, the number of people who are actually watching this debate. They are completely — the kindest word is — perplexed by what this minister is doing. They fail to understand what every other Liberal MLA is doing, sitting here in their silence.

These are legitimate questions. The member for Surrey-Panorama Ridge heard from his own riding constituents about why these questions can't be answered. A person actually e-mailed in and said: "Well, what will you debate during the election?" They actually said that. The minister isn't coming clean with any of the facts around what's in the budget, so they're completely perplexed.

[1910]

Here's why the issues are so important about long-term care. It's because we know that the Liberal government has broken its promise of an additional 5,000 long-term care beds. We know that. The opposition has challenged them with that for the last three years, and now, finally, the Premier has come clean and said: "No, we didn't deliver on that promise."

What is the state of long-term care in British Columbia since this government has taken over? We know that it's this government's practice — it's actually a despicable practice, but it is their practice — to blame the previous government for everything. Of course, the reason why they have to do that is because they can't run on their own record. Their own record is completely rejected by the population, so they're trying to turn the clock back and blame others. It's the only strategy they have left. If they actually had to run on their own record, they would fail miserably.

Here's what the record for long-term residential care has been under this government. These are the ministry's own statistics. They came from the Ministry of Health Services. They started with 25,156 beds in '00-01; 25,156 long-term care beds existed and were open in '00-01. As of '04 the number of beds remaining open, according to their own statistics, was 22,382.

Mr. Chair, you will see that there are approximately 3,000 fewer long-term care beds open than what this government inherited. What does that mean? Here's what it means. The cuts in residential care beds will leave British Columbia with the lowest ratio of beds to people aged 75 and over of any province. It got worse under this government — got worse. The closures translate into 82.3 beds per 1,000 people who are 75 years and older. The Canadian average is 99.8 beds per 1,000 senior citizens of 75 years or older. Of course, as more cuts are brought in, this will get worse.

The current plan, by the ministry's own calculations from their own records, represents less than 50 percent

of what the ministry's own report indicates is required by 2006, when one factors in, legitimately, a 3 percent annual growth in the population of people 75 years and over. Of course, the government is no longer saying that they're going to provide not-for-profit, publicly run residential care beds. They're now saying that the for-profit sector will provide those beds. There are fewer beds, and amongst those fewer beds, there's a greater proportion of for-profit beds, for which seniors will have to pay thousands of dollars per month to stay in.

Let's actually look at what this government's doing to seniors and what they're charging seniors for being in long-term care. Quite an interesting change has taken place under this government. I want to talk about long-term care fees and exactly about this budget.

Now, in order to actually get the $\frac{1}{2}$ of the budget, the minister has to predict how much revenue is coming into the province. Of the \$15 billion being spent on interim supply, how much is he predicting will come from revenue from fees for long-term care?

[1915]

Hon. C. Hansen: The revenues that would flow from assisted-living or residential care facilities would flow to the individual health authorities. They actually don't flow back through the consolidated revenue fund of government.

J. MacPhail: So in putting together this interim supply bill, there is nothing calculated for revenue from long-term care fees?

Hon. C. Hansen: First of all, I guess, we should acknowledge that this is a bit out of the scope of the discussion, because what we're discussing is spending approval. We're talking....

Interjection.

The Chair: Member, through the Chair. Let the minister respond.

Hon. C. Hansen: In terms of the fees that would be charged for long-term care facilities or assisted-living, residential care facilities in the province, in the cases where the health authority either owns the facility or contracts for the bed, those revenues would flow back into the health authority. Those are not reflected in the consolidated revenue fund because they don't flow into the consolidated revenue fund. But because we have now moved to generally accepted accounting principles, which includes all of the SUCH sector, they are reflected in the aggregated revenue numbers that are in the budget documents tabled on February 15.

J. MacPhail: And have been for years. I don't know why the minister's avoiding this.

Mr. Chair, this question is completely in order. In order to justify \$13 billion of spending, surely the Finance minister has to determine the source of revenues

to pay for that \$13 billion. If he hasn't, we're in big trouble. Sources of revenue are completely in order as questions for interim supply, or this is as phony as their phony election budget.

How much revenue has the minister calculated will come from long-term care fees in order to justify this budget, and what's the change from last year?

Hon. C. Hansen: Actually, Mr. Chair, I would accept some guidance from you on this. My understanding is that questions about revenue are not germane to an interim supply bill, because this is for a spending authority that is being presented.

All of the revenue assumptions and all of the forecasts for revenue are set out in the documents that were tabled on February 15. They're posted on the website, and there's lots of detail for the member or anybody else to peruse, because it's displayed on the website.

The Chair: Members, just for clarification, we're on section 1, "Voted expenses appropriation." We're allowing a fairly large latitude with regards to this question, but that is what we're on right now.

J. MacPhail: Let me get this clear. The government's asking to spend \$13 billion, and they can't justify where they're going to get the money from? And somehow the minister says that's out of order and seeks to weasel his way out of answering the question? Sorry. Wrong. The underlying assumptions for the expenditures are perfectly in order for interim supply.

Or let me ask this question. The minister is going to spend \$13 billion of the taxpayers' money without any line-by-line examination, and he doesn't know where he's going to get the money from? Is that what he's saying?

Hon. C. Hansen: As I stated, all of the revenue assumptions and the revenue forecasts are set out in the budget documents that were tabled on February 15. It clearly is set out that those revenues are there.

I'm pleased to see that the member opposite is in fact perhaps a convert to the idea that governments should now actually identify their revenues before they do spending. We certainly didn't see that while she was Finance minister.

[1920]

J. MacPhail: That's so ridiculous. I don't even know why the minister goes there. Actually, I do. He wants to divert attention from the fact that he's refusing to answer any questions, but actually, he's insulting the families of people who are in long-term care. Let him continue. He's besmirching his own government. These are legitimate questions brought to us by the families of people in long-term care, and the minister is basically thumbing his nose at the question — thumbing his nose at the family.

Here's why they're asking us to ask these questions, Mr. Chair. In 2003, this B.C. Liberal government jacked

up fees for people living in long-term care facilities, and it was estimated that many seniors saw increases of between 5.7 percent and 30 percent. At the time, the government expected to collect an extra \$17 million per year. Now the government is asking for 15 billion bucks. They want to take two days to debate it, and I want to know how much more the government is anticipating getting from long-term care fees in '05-06.

Hon. C. Hansen: As I indicated to the member earlier, in the budget documents we do reflect various revenues that come into the entity of the provincial government, aside from those that specifically flow through the consolidated revenue fund. If the member would refer to page 14 of the budget and fiscal plan tabled on February 15, there is actually a line item for what's referred to as "Other health care-related fees," which would include the fees she's referring to.

Last year, for example, there was a budget estimate of \$195 million. The updated forecast of that was down to \$190 million for this fiscal year just ending, but for the fiscal year to come, that number drops to \$176 million. I am advised there has been some change in terms of definition and accounting treatment, so it wouldn't be fair for me to try to convey to the member that this was specifically — what would that be? — a \$14 million decline from last year. Some of the changes in the accounting treatment may actually account for some of that, but I'm not sure how that would break down.

J. MacPhail: How much of that in both years is from long-term care fees?

Hon. C. Hansen: That's a level of detail I do not have. Again, it's a very legitimate question that could be put during the estimates process in this House when we're dealing with the Ministry of Health Services. But those fees would be included in the numbers that I indicated.

J. MacPhail: Yeah. Well, we're not going to get to debate the health care estimates. We're not going to get to debate them. The government is denying us the right to debate that. Why does the minister keep going through that charade? It's ridiculous. He goes through the charade of saying: "Oh, ask those questions." Well, we're being denied the right to ask those questions — denied by this government.

It's a complete farce that the Minister of Finance refers us to some other forum that doesn't exist. He is living in *Alice in Wonderland*. He's asking us to go through the looking glass to accept his arguments. It doesn't exist, the forum to which he's referring us. These are questions that we've been asked by citizens. These are not New Democrats asking these questions; it's the public asking these questions.

Let me just tell you what the Liberal record is on long-term care fees. The minister won't answer the question. He misleads by somehow using an accounting change to suggest that the fees are going down.

They're not. I'll just put it on the record, and I welcome the opportunity.

If anything, the last few months have highlighted just how much the Liberal broken promise has done to health care in British Columbia. Since they failed to meet the promise of delivering an additional 5,000 long-term care beds, many seniors around the province are staying in acute care beds in hospitals. We've seen that day after day. Day after day.

In fact, the Minister of Finance actually admitted.... He calls them bed-blockers, and I understand that term. He said that's the reason why people are in acute care beds and why there's a problem in the emergency rooms, so he admitted to that himself. Why are they bed-blockers? I'm not criticizing the minister for using that term. That's the term that the system uses.

[1925]

What it means is that instead of a senior being in a long-term care bed, which would be the appropriate place for her to be, she is in an acute care bed. That failed assignment blocks other people who need an acute care bed from utilizing it. Because they haven't delivered on their promise of 5,000 additional beds, seniors who should be in long-term care are in acute care beds. This, in turn, impacts departments like emergency room and surgery.

Here's what the result of that is on seniors. Let me share with the minister the story of Maxine Benson — a real story, real person, real tragedy. She contacted my office back in the fall and had her story told on B.C. Television, BCTV, on November 23 of last year. Ms. Benson had taken up residence in Acropolis Manor, a long-term care facility in Prince Rupert. Last fall she felt pressured to leave the facility, as authorities believed home care would better suit her. So she did.

She left, and she started home care. She then experienced a series of falls and seizures that required numerous trips to the hospital. Her condition reached a point where she was admitted to hospital because she couldn't be returned to her former residence of Acropolis Manor. There was no room for her there, they told her, even though there were empty beds.

That happened to her in late 2003. In March 2004 the northern health authority began to bill Ms. Benson \$27.60 a day for long-term care, even though she was in a crowded hospital room with no privacy and had been refused admittance to Acropolis Manor. By November of that same year, 2004, Ms. Benson had been charged more than \$2,000 in long-term care fees for staying in an acute care bed in a hospital.

Had Ms. Benson been able to stay at Acropolis, she would have had access to a private room and private bed. She would have been billed the same daily rate, so the minister doesn't have to stand up and say that there was no harm done to the woman. She knows that. She would have been billed the same daily rate, despite not having access to the care she had before authorities switched her to home care.

On top of this, the health authority demanded interest to be paid on the outstanding fees. By what legal authority, under the Canada Health Act or any other

piece of legislation, is the government permitted to charge long-term care fees for an acute care bed in a hospital where it is designated as an acute care bed?

Hon. C. Hansen: In keeping with the traditions of this House, I am here to answer questions in my capacity as the Minister of Finance. The question is totally appropriate to be presented during estimates. It is not the kind of detail that would be expected of a Finance minister to be able to respond to in what we are doing, and that is an interim supply debate. I will make sure the minister responsible is aware of the member's question.

J. MacPhail: Well, of course it is the Minister of Finance's responsibility. He is the one that legally gets to collect taxes and fees. The authority rests with the Minister of Finance. This is exactly in his purview — this question.

I want to know under what law the Minister of Finance is collecting these fees, but once again he refuses to answer the question. He hides behind some sort of farcical procedural aspect of his own creation to deny answers to the population. He won't even admit that, yes, this is his jurisdiction, where he is charging seniors inappropriately.

[1930]

First of all, his government is placing seniors in an inappropriate level of care, so it's not the best care for them, and then his government is actually charging them fees in a hospital setting, which I think is completely in violation of the Canada Health Act. This is an acute care hospital, and you tell me where it's legal to charge fees for staying in an acute care bed.

The minister won't answer the question. Very interesting. I guess the citizens of Prince Rupert will just take it that the minister and his government have said to them: "We don't care how your seniors are treated. We don't care that they're being charged fees that are wrong, against the act, that they never should have been charged. We don't care about your seniors. We're writing them off, because we want to get to the election campaign."

Let's go through some other hospital crises in this province. A big part of the emergency room crisis is a lack of long-term care beds, and the government won't answer any questions on what they're doing on that. They refer us to a mythical process that may exist down the road, as they want to tear out of here and hit the campaign trail. I mean, they need to hit the campaign trail, because they've got a lot of ground to make up with the citizens of British Columbia. They'll have more ground to make up after this ridiculous debate.

What we do know is that the biggest part of all of the emergency room crises is a lack of long-term care beds and that acute care beds being taken up by seniors who should be better placed in long-term care beds. We also know that the Liberals knew this was a problem for months, if not years, and did absolutely nothing.

It took the total public relations nightmare of Surrey Memorial Hospital and, frankly, the election of a New Democrat MLA in Surrey-Panorama Ridge in October of this year to crack the story there. Not one of the six Surrey MLAs did a thing on behalf of their citizens — not a thing. But we now know, because of documents, that the crisis has been going on for months.

Let me ask a question about Kamloops. The minister said last week in this House when the opposition asked him questions about a huge crisis in Royal Inland Hospital.... Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops was in such a crisis that the staff there said it had never been worse. The Minister of Finance stood up and said: "The NDP did nothing all throughout the 1990s. Don't worry. It's just a temporary thing. These fluctuate. These things happen. There's no problem." That was his response.

We actually know that the problem had been identified and had been going on from at least June 2004. It had been reported on the front pages of the local Kamloops papers and had been discussed in the media from June 2004 on — and on and on. Let me read the headlines. From June 17, 2004, *Kamloops Daily News*: "Emergency room full of patients, but they shouldn't be there. The emergency room is stuffed to the gills with patients who shouldn't be there, said the Kamloops doctor."

Oh, but didn't the Minister of Finance just tell us last week there was no crisis and that these fluctuations happen, and that we're scaremongering and oh, by the way, it was your fault in the 1990s? The reason why this is coming to our attention is because the citizens of Kamloops were outraged, and they sent these articles in to us to show how misleading this government was.

[1935]

Then July 9, 2004:

"Bed Shortage Plagues Royal Inland Hospital.' Patients who don't belong in Royal Inland Hospital but have nowhere to go are causing doctors to postpone surgeries, because there are no beds available. Dr. David Kincaid said: 'There's this impetus to do everything we can to not admit patients in hospital.'"

That's a three-page article.

Then, of course, in March of this year, 2005:

"Emergency at Royal Inland Hospital.' A backlog of patients waiting for beds at Royal Inland Hospital is bringing frustration to a 'boiling point' among emergency doctors, nurses, paramedics and patients."

Mr. Chair, my colleague has arrived, and she has to move on to questions in other areas of the government's spending, but I'd like to ask a final question in canvassing this area. Since last week, when this story re-emerged as a crisis in the Royal Inland Hospital, what did this Minister of Finance do to allocate extra funds in this interim supply so that the Royal Inland Hospital could stem the crisis?

Hon. C. Hansen: In the budget estimates presented on February 15, there is appropriation for the health authorities. As I indicated earlier, that is increasing by.... I still need my glasses for this. Last year, the ap-

appropriation for that particular line item was \$6.83 billion. In this year's Budget 2005, for this coming fiscal year it increases to \$7.158 billion.

Each of the health authorities, including the interior health authority, will receive an increased allocation as a result of that. Subject to the passage of this interim supply bill that's before the House, it is anticipated that each of the health authorities will get about $\frac{6}{12}$ of the allocation that they would be entitled to for the full fiscal year.

J. Kwan: So far, the record that this Minister of Finance has performed on the interim supply debate has shown that he will not answer one question on how this government intends to spend their \$13 billion in the area of health that my colleagues from Vancouver-Hastings and Surrey-Panorama Ridge have tried to pose to the minister.

Given that the government is going to bring forward the hammer tomorrow at 5:45, we have to move on to another area within the government and put these questions to the minister. By no means — I want to be very clear — have the questions in the area around health that we want to put to the government been exhausted. We're simply running out of time, even at the pace at which this Minister of Finance and this government refuse to answer the questions. Even at that pace, we're running out of time.

I'd now like to move on to another area. It's the area of Children and Family Development. Let me just put this information on the record by way of a backgrounder, and then I'll ask the minister questions.

The B.C. Liberal government is refusing to provide answers, as I mentioned, to important questions on its budget. As established in the questions on health care about long-term care beds that the government has failed to provide, despite its promise in the 2001 election, this government may not want to provide answers before going to the election. Nonetheless, it is still the opposition's role to ask these questions on behalf of the people of British Columbia, so we're going to keep asking the questions.

[1940]

In the area of children and families — services to children, to the most vulnerable people in this province, the budget for the Ministry of Children and Family Development provides a clear example of why line-by-line debate is needed. The B.C. Liberal government is claiming that they're boosting the Ministry of Children and Family Development budget from \$1.498 billion to \$1.577 billion, a purported hike of approximately \$79 million.

Now, let's just dissect those numbers for a moment. Not only does this follow millions of dollars in cuts since 2001, but since the last budget, child care has been moved from another ministry to the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Last year the budget for child care in the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services was \$172.8 million.

By this act, the government is falsely inflating the increase to the Ministry of Children and Family Development's budget by about \$170 million. That more than wipes out the purported increase that the B.C. Liberal government is claiming for the Ministry of Children and Family Development. In fact, when the shift of the child care budget is taken into account, the cut to the Ministry of Children and Family Development between 2001-02 and 2004-05 increases to \$200 million.

This is why questions need to be asked about this budget. It is impossible to know how much this government is putting towards child care — or anything else, for that matter. Of the \$13 billion that the government is seeking the Legislature to approve to spend in the supply act — the six out of the 12 months, if you will, or more plainly put, the half of this year's budget that this Minister of Finance is seeking legislative approval to spend — how much will be spent on funding the Ministry of Children and Family Development?

Hon. C. Hansen: The member is right. There were program transfers into that ministry. If she's got a pen handy, she may want to just jot down some of these numbers.

If you look at the budget target for the ministry last year, it was \$1.382 billion. What we transferred in.... The program transfers-in were \$138.4 million. Then there was also early learning and child care funding of \$9.5 million, which is offset by federal funding. That gives you the total number, which is stated in the estimates book, of.... Sorry. That's \$1.529 billion.

In the coming fiscal year, if you restate those numbers, then in fact there's \$146 million that would be reflected in those programs that are transferred in and still the \$9.5 million of early learning and child care that's offset by federal funding, for a budget of \$1.549 billion.

J. Kwan: By the minister's own admission, then, the \$79 million increase is nothing, because in reality, that's only a portion of the child care budget being transferred from another ministry into the Ministry of Children and Family Development. That's by the minister's own admission just now, with the figures he just put on record. He proved that point, but my question was: of the \$13 billion, how much would be allocated to the Ministry of Children and Family Development?

[1945]

Hon. C. Hansen: Just to clarify, the budget for the ministry this coming year is \$1.577 billion. That, as the member indicated, is a \$79 million lift. Now, it's a \$79 million lift over what the ministry's budget would have been last year if those programs had been in that ministry. Last year's numbers are, in fact, restated to include those new programs. The program has gone up by about \$8 million.

Had those programs not been transferred over and had they stayed in the original ministries where they were last year, then that increase to the other programs that are in the ministry would in fact have been \$71 million. About \$8 million of that is accounted for by the

increase in the budget for the new programs that were transferred into the ministry.

J. Kwan: Then there you have it. The minister and the government put out that they actually increased the budget by some \$79 million, but in reality it is only \$8 million. The minister just said it just now: \$8 million for the Ministry of Children and Family Development. That is in the context of.... Of course, Mr. Chair, you've got to take into account the amount of dollars the government had cut over the last four years. You have to take that into account.

The net result, of course, is that the government is putting less money in to replace what they have cut over the last four years. That is the net impact of this year's budget. I ask again to the minister: on the \$13 billion that we're debating under the interim supply bill, how much of that would be allocated to the Ministry of Children and Family Development?

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

Hon. C. Hansen: The total budget is \$1,577,388,000. The amount that would be reflected in this interim supply bill would be approximately 50 percent of that number.

I do want to go back and just correct something the member said earlier. Of the \$79 million increase in the ministry's budget for this coming fiscal year, \$8 million of the increase is accounted for in an increase in funding for the child care programs that were transferred into the ministry. In terms of the programs that were stated in the ministry last year without that transfer-in of the new programs, it would in fact be a \$71 million increase on those programs and an \$8 million increase on the child care programs that were transferred into the ministry.

J. Kwan: How much were the child care programs under the former Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services? Was it more than \$8 million?

[1950]

Hon. C. Hansen: I would refer the member to the estimates blue book that was tabled on February 16. On page 178, under schedule A of the document, it shows how ministry expenses were restated, given the transfer of programs between ministries.

What it shows here, and I'll just share it with the member, is the total expenses in the 2004-05 estimates of \$1,381,568,000. Then transferred from the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services are the child care programs that were transferred into the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Those amount to \$173.155 million. That is the cost last year of the programs that were transferred into the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

There were other program transfers, and I'll just outline those, so the member can appreciate how the new numbers are arrived at. There was a transfer out to the Ministry of Health Services of physical fitness con-

sultation services that amounted to \$84,000. There was a transfer to the Ministry of Management Services of the help desk function; that was \$76,000. There was a transfer to the Ministry of Education from Children and Family Development. That was the Community LINK program. The value of that was \$35.229 million.

There was also a transfer to the Ministry of Management Services for common IT services. That's \$19.112 million. Also, there's funding for e-government, which is \$548,000. Then there are client services, again going to the Ministry of Management Services, to the value of \$2.423 million.

If all of those transfers had happened at the start of the last fiscal year and we then had to restate the value of the ministry's budget for the last fiscal year, it would be \$1,497,571,000. Then from that base we increased the budget by \$79 million to the \$1,577,388,000 that we had discussed earlier.

J. Kwan: Well, then, let's get the breakdown of how much is going to what program and see if the numbers add up — not the transfers, but the budget within the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Let's get the breakdown of what area is getting how much money.

How many dollars are going to the adult community living area?

Hon. C. Hansen: As I indicated earlier, I am pleased to share with the member information that I have available to me. As I outlined, these are the values of the programs that have been transferred between ministries as set out in the budget documents. I know that some of the detailed questions are questions that would be more appropriately put directly to the minister in estimates, but I will endeavour to share with her what I can.

In terms of the core business of the Ministry of Children and Family Development, there is a budget for this coming year — and these would be net of external recoveries — of \$520.478 million for adult community living services. For child and family development there is \$589.842 million. For early childhood development, child care and supports to children with special needs, there is \$395.588 million allocated; for provincial services, \$53.717 million; and for executive and support services, \$17.763 million.

J. Kwan: The minister says: "Oh, the detailed questions around what program dollars are allocated where will have to be dealt with later." The problem is this. It's that I actually don't trust this minister and this government in what they're saying with respect to what they will actually deliver by way of programs and what dollars will be attached to them.

We just heard earlier in the area of health care.... The government says: "Don't worry; trust us. We will build 5,000 new long-term care beds by 2008." When you go into the ministry's budget breakdown, you actually don't see sufficient dollars there to provide for that commitment. We have tried to ask the minister those questions, which he didn't answer.

[1955]

Now, in the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the minister says: "Trust us. We will deliver these programs, and in fact, there is a real lift." Except everyone else outside of government is saying: "No. When you net out the transfer in programs, when you net out the cuts over the last four years, the budget for the Ministry of Children and Family Development and various areas in program delivery actually went down, not up." Quite frankly, I don't trust this government, based on their record to date.

I would like to know on behalf of British Columbians exactly how much is being allocated where, at least out of this \$13 billion for the interim supply bill, so that I can add it up — add up the numbers on the basis of this year's budget and on the basis of last year's programs — to see whether or not there really is a lift. Then I'll ask some questions about the delivery of these programs.

Let's start again in the area of adult community living. How much of the \$13 billion is going into this area under the Ministry of Children and Family Development?

Hon. C. Hansen: Last year the adult community living services budget was \$493.943 million. In the budget that is allocated for this coming year, the gross number is \$520.628 million. That's roughly an increase of just under \$23 million in that area. There are recoveries, and I must confess I'm not exactly clear what the recoveries are, but it's \$150,000 for a net budget in that area for the coming year of \$520.478 million.

Just to continue the answer to her question about what portion of the \$13 billion is being asked for in the interim supply, that is for $\frac{1}{12}$ of the year. The budget allocated for adult community living would be roughly $\frac{1}{12}$ of the \$520 million that I indicated, but as we had discussed earlier in the afternoon, not all ministries have expenditures that flow on an equal $\frac{1}{12}$ basis month by month.

That's why I say that even though the overall allocation in the interim supply bill is precisely $\frac{1}{12}$ of the total anticipated expenditures for government for the upcoming fiscal year, when it comes down to ministry by ministry, it's approximately $\frac{1}{12}$. That gets adjusted to take into consideration ministries that spend more towards the end of the year and also those ministries that spend more in the start of the year. On balance, the authority of this House is not being asked for anything to exceed precisely $\frac{1}{12}$ of the budget.

J. Kwan: Then let's just explore this area a little bit more. The minister claims there is lots of money in the area of adult community living services. Well, this pre-election budget has tried to paper over the past, allocating \$91 million over three years for adult community living services, with \$22 million this year, \$28 million in '06-07 and \$41 million in '07-08. Already groups such as the B.C. Association for Community Living are raising the alarm bell about how the amount of money this government is now putting into this pre-election

budget comes nowhere close to undoing the damage that they have done over the last three years in terms of cuts. In fact, there is a rally in the lower mainland tomorrow protesting this government's community living policies and budget cuts.

[2000]

Here's what the B.C. Association for Community Living says. They actually sent out a news release, dated March 1, 2005, based on this government's budget in this area: "Golden Decade or Fool's Gold? BCACL Responds to B.C. Budget." This is a direct quote from their news release:

"Finance minister's" — sorry, it names the minister — "February 15 announcement of 91 million "new" dollars for adult community living supports over the next three years is absolutely inadequate and unacceptable," says Laney Bryenton, executive director of the B.C. Association for Community Living. BCACL advocates for the rights of children, youth and adults with developmental disabilities and their families.

"While the February 15 budget speech promised an infusion of \$91 million — roughly \$30 million per year — to support adults with developmental disabilities and their families, Bryenton says those very same adults and families are reeling from the effects of cutbacks to services and supports, amounting to \$50 million annually.

"The "new" money will not even give back what was taken out of the budget. But more importantly, we knew three years ago that the existing community living budget was not sufficient to meet growing needs or to prevent health and safety crises. Individuals, families and agencies have gone the extra mile to find budget savings, but they have reached their limit. This provincial budget simply will not address the critical issues that individuals and families are facing in the community: growing wait-lists, health and safety crises, youth reaching adulthood, and aging parents who are trying to care for adults with disabilities," said Bryenton.

"The budget also promised \$40 million to be directed to children with special needs and their families for early intervention services and respite care for families. BCACL welcomes the infusion of the funds in this area, but without details, it's difficult to assess the impact it will have. 'We are still hearing from desperate parents whose children are on two-year wait-lists for therapies that are critical for them to receive early on in life, so there is certainly an urgent need.'

"The budget announcements come at a time when BCACL and other community groups had hoped to be nearing completion of setting up Community Living B.C. and making major changes that will provide more flexibility and give consumers greater control in planning. 'We're very concerned that this budget does not allow for the proper implementation of Community Living B.C. And the Ministry of Children and Family Development's recent community living service plan suggests it has retreated from many of the original principles that drove this change....' 'We'll certainly be raising these issues with government and within the community, and urging our members to voice their concerns to the government in the coming weeks before the election.'"

So just in the area of community living, the experts in the field are saying that the government, in this year's budget, even with the supposed lift, doesn't actually cover what the government had taken away from them in the last four years. If, in fact, more money

went into the Ministry of Children and Family Development, more money went into the community living sector, why would BCACL make these statements? Why would they send out a press release after the budget was tabled and raise these concerns? Why would they plan a rally tomorrow? Is it because they've got nothing else better to do, Mr. Chair? I don't think so.

[2005]

Should we trust this minister and this government, who say: "Hey, everything is just great. We've dumped a whole lot of money into these services, because we want to support the people who are most vulnerable in the community"? In reality, if you check what really happened, you find out that they've actually made cuts instead of giving a real lift when you take in, collectively, what the government and this Premier have done over the last four years in this area.

Why does the Minister of Finance believe that the BCACL made the statement that the Finance minister's February 15 announcement of 91 million new dollars for adult community living supports over the next three years is absolutely inadequate and unacceptable? Why would they say that if in fact it is true that the government actually put more money into those services than they took away?

Hon. C. Hansen: I think the point that the member is making actually sort of draws me back to the discussion we had earlier today, where the members were trying to insist that all we had authority to do on interim supply was to just extend what we were doing last year, which is not the precedent of the House. In fact, we do have opportunities with interim supply to fund increases and expansion of programs and more dollars than were actually in budgets from the previous year.

I am pleased to advise the member that our interpretation of the authority that flows from interim supply is that we can in fact get on with flowing additional dollars to the various ministries for these particular programs. In this case, the line item for adult community living services will see an increase in its budget from \$494 million to \$521 million. We will be able to start to flow the additional dollars reflected in that increase from the previous fiscal year. We'll be able to do that as a result of the interim supply based on $\frac{1}{2}$ of this amount being allocated to the ministry to get on with the increase in funding for those programs.

J. Kwan: If there really was a real increase to the ministry's budget in this area.... That's comparing this figure over the last four years in total, not just picking one year for comparison so that the minister can say: "Hey, look at us. Look at how great we are just three months before the election. We actually increased the budget for the area of community living." In reality, if you look at the total sum of this government's action over the last four years, it is actually a net reduction in the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and

more specifically in this area that we're debating today, right now — the area of community living.

Why would a community association that's dedicated to delivering services to British Columbians in the area of community living, advocates for British Columbians in the area of community living, make the statement that those very same adults and families are reeling from the effects of cutbacks to services and supports amounting to \$50 million annually? Why would they make such a statement if in fact what this minister claims, what this government claims and what this Premier claims is true — that they actually increased the budget to the Ministry of Children and Family Development and, more specifically, the area of community living when you look at that figure over the course of their four-year mandate? Why would they say that? Are they lying, then?

Hon. C. Hansen: For the benefit of anybody following these debates, they can actually go on line to the government website. They can find the documents that we tabled on February 15, where it clearly shows that in terms of the spending estimates that were tabled for this coming fiscal year.... That particular line item the member's referring to, adult community living services.... They can go to page 54 of the estimates book, and it will show the budget there last year.

[2010]

As we discussed earlier, that was restated to reflect the program transfers between ministries. From there, there is a very real increase in that line item of \$27 million approximately, if I've got my arithmetic right — basically, from \$494 million up to \$521 million for this coming fiscal year.

J. Kwan: That's for one year. When you look back at the record of this government and this Minister of Finance, you will note, Mr. Chair, that the total sum of the cuts amounts to \$50 million annually. The minister should be able to do the math.

When you add that up, the dollars that the minister is putting back now, three months before the election, do not add up to the cuts that were made over the last four years. To that end, the increase in this year's budget amounts to a net decrease. That is the truth of it.

I once heard that partial information or omission of information is equivalent to a lie, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Hon. member, you're getting very close to the line here, implying that the minister is lying.

J. Kwan: I am simply making a statement, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Member, I'm just cautioning you that you're getting very close to the line of being unparliamentary, so just be very cautious.

J. Kwan: I am making a statement. Let me outline and walk you through it.

This minister is omitting to provide information over the last four years of what this government has done in the area of the Ministry of Children and Family Development and, more specifically, in the area of adult community living. He's omitting to provide the information to be clear on this government's record in this area. The minister is absolutely trying to pull the wool over the eyes of British Columbians in the hopes that they will not know the difference, in the hopes that they will somehow just take their word, "Trust me; I actually gave you more programs and supports in these areas," when in reality they're giving them less.

I would trust the community's voice over every one of the government bench members any time of the day, including the Premier — especially including the Premier and this executive council. BCACL says.... If you look at all the documentation — which I know the government is quick to erase and take down so that people can't track their real record — their record shows that they actually cut \$50 million annually in the area of community living. That's the net impact.

I'd like to ask the minister: why would BCACL say that the new money will not even give back what was taken out of the budget? Does the minister believe that the BCACL stated, as well, that the government knew three years ago that the existing community living budget was not sufficient to meet growing needs or to prevent health and safety crises? Why would they make that statement?

Can the minister now stand by his claim that the increase in the budget for the area of community living will actually meet the needs of the people in the community living sector? If he really believes that this government actually increased their budget, then get on the record and state that he believes the dollars allocated will actually meet their needs. I challenge the minister to do that.

[2015]

Hon. C. Hansen: What I can state is that there is a budget allocation for adult community living that increases from \$494 million last year to \$521 million for the year to come. That's a factual statement as set out, and anybody can go and check the estimates for it. This interim supply will provide for about 50 percent of that allocation.

J. Kwan: I think I stated earlier: omitted or just plainly and conveniently forgot to mention. I think this minister thinks the overall record will somehow get him through the day, and more importantly, he thinks that it would actually fool British Columbians on May 17. Well, again, I don't think British Columbians will forget what this government's done, and I think that British Columbians will hold this government to account.

The people, the experts in the field, say differently than what this minister is now saying. They're saying something different. The minister won't answer my question. If he thinks that there's a real lift to the Minis-

try of Children and Family Development in the area of community living over the last four years with this budget and he thinks that the lift — the increase in the budget — would actually meet the needs of those in the community living sector, he would actually state that on record, yet he refused to do so. Why? Could it be because, at the end of the day, just maybe this minister knows that he can't get away with this kind of false pretence? He can't actually make that statement because he knows that at the end of the day he would be caught.

The Chair: Member, I must admit, you are getting past the line now at this point in time, where you're implying that the minister is not telling the truth and purposely so. Your language is becoming unparliamentary. I ask you to retract that, please, and then proceed.

J. Kwan: Well, Mr. Chair, I must say....

The Chair: Member, I've asked you to retract it, please.

J. Kwan: Well, the fact of the matter is this, Mr. Chair....

The Chair: Member, I've asked you to retract the statement. Take your seat, and rise when you retract it, please.

J. Kwan: Well, you know, Mr. Chair, the rules of this House will make me retract that statement.

The Chair: Member, I want you to retract that statement unconditionally. Unconditionally retract that statement.

J. Kwan: I will have no choice but to retract that statement, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you. Now proceed.

J. Kwan: Because that's the rule of this House. But you know what? You know what? The people in this chamber, I must say, Mr. Chair, are strangers to the concept of truth.

The Chair: Member, now you're way out of line. You're way out of line. Retract that and get on with the questioning. You've said you had lots of questions to ask. Please proceed, but, first of all, you retract that. You claim that everybody else in this House is not telling the truth, and that is absolutely unparliamentary.

J. MacPhail: Point of order, Mr. Chair. I'm sorry; I assume from past parliamentary practice that that is in order.

The Chair: Member, it is not in order. It is unparliamentary to imply that members of this House are not telling the truth. It is absolutely unparliamentary, and I ask her to retract it.

J. MacPhail: All I'm saying is that in the past both sides have used the term "stranger to the truth," so we are setting new rules here.

The Chair: Member for Vancouver–Mount Pleasant, please proceed.

[2020]

J. Kwan: Well, I gotta say, there are new rules every day. But you know what? They're new rules that apply to the opposition only. I would have no choice but to retract those words.

You know what? Let me put it in the context of what the community living sector is saying about this government. They are saying that this government is purposely providing false information to British Columbians to make them think that over the last four years they have actually increased their budget when, in fact, the real truth is that this government had reduced their budget by \$50 million annually since they took office. That is the real truth that this government and every single member in this House could not deny. That is the truth.

Interjection.

J. Kwan: I voted against that budget, unlike the member for Victoria–Beacon Hill who will no longer be here after May 17 because he failed to actually advocate for his community on any issues.

An Hon. Member: That's right.

J. Kwan: Absolutely. You better believe that is right.

British Columbians will call this government and every single government bench member of this House for what they are, using the language that they choose. That is that this government has not told them what they have actually, really done and have not told them the truth.

It is interesting to note that the community living sector folks are saying this: "Individual families and agencies have gone the extra mile to find budget savings, but they have reached their limit." Then they went on further to say: "This provincial budget simply will not address the critical issues that individuals and families are facing in the community: growing wait lists, health and safety crises, youth reaching adulthood and aging parents who are trying to care for adults with disabilities."

Why would they make that statement if it wasn't true?

I'd like to ask the minister this specific question. In the area of community living for which this minister claims there is somehow an increase in their budget — and that is evaluating the increase in budget in the context of the last four years, not just one year — what are the dollars allocated to the specific programs under community living? Can the minister show, when you

add up all of those dollars, that those figures will actually exceed what the budget was in 2001?

Hon. C. Hansen: I don't have a breakdown of how this budget of \$251 million is allocated to the individual programs that fall within that line item of the budget. I'm sure the minister responsible would. Again, as I have indicated on other occasions today, that's a very appropriate question, and it's a question that should properly be posed during an estimates debate. I will make the minister aware of that, but I would reiterate what I mentioned earlier.

What I'm saying and what I said earlier is that if you look back to the fiscal year that we're currently in, the 2004-05 fiscal year, and look at the restated budget.... Given the program transfers, the budget that we're currently in, '04-05, is \$494 million. The new budget for the year to come is \$521 million. That's the claim I'm making. That's the documentation I have in front of me, and I'm pleased to share that with the member.

J. Kwan: The claim and the box that the minister will only stick to, of course, are the lines he wants to deliver. That, of course, is not the complete story. As I mentioned earlier, deliberate omission is just equal to deliberate misrepresentation. That's what the government is doing.

[2025]

The Chair: Member, we've talked about this before. By implying it's deliberate, that means it's purposely not telling the truth. Let's get off this, please, and carry on. Just drop it.

J. Kwan: I've got to say: if the shoes fit, wear 'em.

The Chair: Member, you retract that, please. Retract it.

J. MacPhail: Oh, God. It's not day care.

The Chair: Well, it seems that way.

J. Kwan: Mr. Chair, I'll retract that. You can make the opposition do whatever you deem to be the right thing to do. We have no choice but to do that. But it does not mean....

The Chair: Member, I'm asking you to retract that unconditionally — not with a speech after it to claim that you're really not retracting it but I'm making you do it. These are the rules of the House. It's unparliamentary to use the language that you're using.

You know what? I've been sitting here for four years as well. I've been listening to and watching the disrespect that you have for this chamber. Actually, I find it astounding. I'm asking you now to retract.

J. MacPhail: Mr. Chair, with the greatest of respect, for the Chair to insert himself in the debate is unparliamentary.

The Chair: Member, I am not inserting myself in the debate. I am merely trying to maintain the rules of this House, and you are not complying. I'm asking you to retract the statement. You've retracted it. Now let's proceed with the debate.

J. MacPhail: I'm going to speak for my colleague. For four years we've been subjected to an imbalance of treatment just demonstrated by the Chair right now, with no avenue of recourse. It's shameful. I don't know why the government needs such protection. They sit there....

Interjection.

J. MacPhail: No, we're not capable of challenging the Chair, because there are three of us and 74 of you people, who are little toadies.

It's outrageous — the Chair inserting himself like that in the debate. But I guess it works to your agenda, doesn't it?

J. Kwan: Let's just be clear on what this government has done over the last four years. Let's put this on record, and let this Minister of Finance defend this government and tell me where I'm not telling the truth. Tell me where I'm not telling the truth, and tell me where I'm lying. I won't challenge that to be unparliamentary, because I know what I'm telling is the truth and what the government is telling is the opposite. Let me just say, and put this on the record. I challenge the Minister of Finance to tell me that I'm lying.

This is what the Liberal record has been. They promised in the last election:

"It's time we put real accountability into the system and devote the resources to the job needed to put the interests of kids first. Make children the number one priority and devote adequate resources. Stop the endless bureaucratic restructuring that has drained resources from children and family services. Enhance training, resources and authority for front-line social workers to properly protect children at risk and improve services to families. Fund the autism treatment program that parents of autistic children want."

That's what they promised in 2001.

Let's see what they've done. This is what this B.C. Liberal government did once elected: eliminated the independent offices of the child, youth and family advocate and the children's commissioner, which had acted as government's watchdogs and protected children, as one of the Premier's first acts; axed dozens of programs for high-risk youth; laid off hundreds of front-line child protection workers; eliminated internal child protection audits and changed child welfare legislation to punish any foster parent or other caregiver who goes to the media to act as an advocate for children in their charge; cut funding to inner-city schools and cut school-based programs such as hot meals, until intense public pressure forced them to only put some, not all, of that money back.

[2030]

They tried to cut ministry funding by a whopping 23 percent in a plan that considered 65 extreme cost-saving strategies, including halving the budget for troubled youth, moving adults with severe mental handicaps out of their group homes, and ending investigation in cases of moderate sexual and physical abuse of children. They bowed to public pressure but only downgraded the reduction to an 11 percent cut.

At the same time, they attempted a vast restructuring of services that created complete chaos in the ministry, throwing successful programs and services into disarray, and hurting the vulnerable children and families the government is supposed to serve in the process.

They appointed Liberal insiders and failed businessman Doug Walls to run the Interim Authority for Community Living, resulting in gross mismanagement and scandal for this government and hundreds of thousands of dollars wasted that should have gone to services for children and families.

They wasted hundreds of thousands more dollars on other contract scandals in the ministry, including another Liberal insider, John Appleton, and his company. They threatened community living agencies that if they did not voluntarily cut \$35 million on top of earlier reductions, the ministry would find lower cost-saving providers. They would force agencies to sign a letter saying they supported the cuts. Then they turned around and said: "Those were voluntary cuts." That is the truth of this government's actions.

They pledged to create 11 semi-independent authorities to deliver services to children and developmentally disabled British Columbians. But after four years of delays, insider scandals and financial irregularities, the government has created only one authority and has pushed off the start date for the remaining ten until 2006-07.

Despite their election pledge to provide sufficient resources and stop endless bureaucratic restructuring of the Ministry of Children and Family Development, this government spent four years turning the ministry upside down, creating chaos and disruption, and hurting the children and families that the ministry is supposed to serve.

The government says it balanced the budget through deep cuts to two ministries. That is the truth — to the Ministries of Children and Family Development and of Human Resources in a mean-spirited way, in an attack on the most vulnerable people in British Columbia.

Then weeks before the election they say: "Hey, we are not mean. We really care about you. Look, we increased the budget." Well, they forgot to tell you: "By the way, if you add up all the numbers over the last four years, it's actually a net reduction as opposed to an increase." That is the truth, and I challenge this minister to tell me where I haven't told the truth in putting this information on the record.

Hon. C. Hansen: The detailed discussion of the comments that the member has made could be ade-

quately canvassed during an estimates debate. It's not the kind of... Well, the member has the right to make whatever statements, comments and questions she would like during this debate, and I will do the best to answer them to the ability that I have in my capacity as Minister of Finance.

Those are specific issues that should be raised with the Minister of Children and Family Development during the estimates debate. I will make sure that the member's previous comments are brought to that minister's attention.

J. Kwan: This minister wouldn't actually tell us how much of the \$13 billion will go into each of the programs under these different areas — whether it be community living, in terms of what dollars will go into what programs in the area of community living. The minister wouldn't actually tell you how much money is going to provincial services. He wouldn't tell you how much is going into executive and support services. He wouldn't tell you how much is going to early childhood development and its programs — the child care area, children with special needs and the programs under that subheading.

Yet, the government wants.... Hey, you know what? Don't worry. Just give us the bucks. Give us \$13 billion, and we'll spend it the way we want it, any way we want it.

By the way, British Columbians, you're supposed to believe that we have actually increased the services to you. We're supposed to believe that somehow, when in reality if you add up the last four years of this government's record and their actions, the numbers simply don't add up. There is no real increase. That is the truth. That is the real truth that nobody except for the opposition would actually say openly. Nobody in the government would actually admit to that. Shame on them.

[2035]

I'm going to ask some questions in the area of children in care and children at risk. The pre-election budget that the government is refusing to debate made a big deal about the \$26 million it is putting into children in care and family development over the three years. That's \$8 million promised for '05-06. But this sum, of course, looks pretty measly when you consider the amount of cut this government has made over the last four years. Some have actually calculated that amount to as high as \$200 million.

The B.C. Liberal government insists, against all the advice offered by experts on restructuring, that the Ministry of Children and Family Development... At the same time as they've made these massive budget cuts, they spent four years turning the ministry upside down and creating chaos and disruption, hurting children and families that they're supposed to support. The government says: "Oh, but everything is now back on track."

Of the \$8 million targeted for children in care and family development, how much is allocated to the protection of children in care?

Hon. C. Hansen: The member may be referring to the numbers in the budget and fiscal plan. As she indicates, they do show a lift of \$8 million for the coming fiscal year for children in care and family development. I don't have the exact breakdown of that, but if you look at the aggregate amount for that appropriation, it goes from last year at.... Actually, the overall budget for child and family development in the appropriation goes from \$573.369 million to \$589.843 million. I don't have the detail in terms of the breakdown of the individual programs that fall under that, but I'll be pleased to make that question known to the minister.

J. Kwan: That's pretty well the stock answer from the minister: "I don't know. We'll get back to you."

Can you trust this government and this minister, given their performance to date over the last four years? Will you believe them? It's sort of like inviting someone who you know had just come into your home and very discreetly took away valuable things. Then the individual turns around and says: "Don't worry. Trust me. I'll put it back at some point in time." Would you trust that individual? I think not.

The minister says: "I don't know how much money is actually going into the protection of children, for children in care." Well, how much is being allocated?

We heard earlier today in question period from the Minister of Children and Family Development, who says that everything is just fine with respect to deaths and critical injuries related to children in care in British Columbia. Is that so? I'd like to know how much is being allocated for the investigative part of the ministry related to protection of children in the area of investigations. How much money is being directed in that area?

[2040]

Hon. C. Hansen: Again, this is the interim supply debate. It is a time when it is a tradition in this House to seek temporary appropriation for government expenditures. It is an obligation of the Minister of Finance to try to answer the broad questions about budget. I've tried to do that.

The level of detail that the member is asking for is not something that I have at my disposal. It's a question that should properly be put to the minister during an estimates debate. I will share with the member information that I do have in this regard. I'll just read this, if that's okay with her.

"Through various service transformation initiatives focused on keeping children in their families safely, the number of children in care has been reduced by over 13 percent" — that's about 1,000 individuals — "since April of 2002. While these transformation initiatives, including providing support for out-of-care options, continue to produce good results, challenges remain to reduce the number of aboriginal children in care. An additional \$26 million has been provided to continue to support prevention and out-of-care options to keep children safe within their families and communities."

J. MacPhail: The Minister of Children and Family Development just made a new commitment today after

being grilled in question period by us, by the opposition. He made a commitment to take new action that had been un contemplated by this government. We're trying to find out what the spending authority for it is, and this minister won't answer the question.

When will the line-by-line budget estimates debate occur?

Hon. C. Hansen: As the member knows, the election will be held on May 17 — the first time there's ever been a set election date in this province. Following the election, executive council will have to be sworn in. I believe it's a date that would have to happen early in June. Then estimates that are far more comprehensive than have ever been required during the middle of a year in the past would have to be tabled with this House. Those have to be tabled within 90 days of the executive council being sworn in. The House would therefore have to be reconvened at some time in September. The next government, the next Legislature will have to be convened to start that process at some time then.

J. MacPhail: Well, Mr. Chair, the minister skates over the law. He doesn't even really understand the law.

What's clear is that this isn't a budget, because what he outlined was about if his government is re-elected, and that's up in the air. In order to avoid answering the questions, he uses over and over again very specific questions about announcements that his government made as recently as a few hours ago that commit public moneys. He won't answer the question.

He knows full well, by his own answer, that this is not a real budget. It's not a legal budget. It's a pre-election budget, by his own admission, and none of this could last beyond — has any reality to it until well after — the next election. Yet he stands up and in an insulting way to British Columbians says that somehow these questions will be answered at a time down the road instead of now, as is his legal obligation. He stands up, answer after answer, and he knows full well that the answers he gives have no bases. The answer that these questions can be put in main estimates sometime down the road has no basis in reality, unless he's assuming a certain outcome of the election, unless he's taking for granted British Columbians' votes — and he does that at his own risk.

J. Kwan: The minister likes to counter criticisms by saying it has reduced the number of children in care. But as the former children's commissioner stated yesterday, measuring success by the number of children in care tells us nothing about whether or not children are actually safer. All that it tells us is that there are fewer children in care.

[2045]

I'd like to ask the minister this question — in fact, a number of questions, because I see that we're running out of time very quickly. How much money is the government putting into costs for keeping a child in care?

How much does this government anticipate in savings from reducing the number of children in care this year? How does the ministry keep track of children who are known to the ministry or who die or are injured? What funding is devoted to monitoring these deaths and injuries? What funding is allocated for prevention? What funds in the current budget, out of this interim supply, are being allocated to reversing this trend? That is that the last time the ministry made data public on children who had died or had been injured in care, there was a 33 percent increase in these numbers.

What services does the ministry anticipate providing in the area of children in care and at risk with the new funding announced in the '05-06 budget? I'd like some answers, please, in these critical areas where this government — this minister, this Premier — said was their number one priority in 2001.

Hon. C. Hansen: As I've indicated earlier, the opposition has the right to put these questions forward. This is not the opportunity, not the forum and not the item before the House. It is not the time for us to get into the very detailed kind of answers that she is seeking. As I've indicated before, this is an interim supply debate. It's a debate that provides for temporary authorization of the House for spending. When we get into the full estimates debate, that's the time for members of this chamber to put the kind of detailed questions forward that the member just has.

It's important, I think, to put on the record that what we are doing here with this process today of seeking the Legislature's approval for interim supply is unlike a practice that has happened in the past, where previous governments have actually run government based on decrees of cabinet, which are referred to as special warrants. Then, only subsequent to spending the money do they come back and seek the Legislature's approval for it. We've made it quite clear that we're not prepared to do that. We're seeking the approval of the House for this interim authority prior to the start of the fiscal year.

Going back to the comments of the member for Vancouver-Hastings where she talks about us not having the opportunity to debate line by line the spending estimates book prior to the election, I would just like to remind her and the House that in 1996 when she was a member of this chamber and the member for Vancouver-Mount Pleasant was running for the first time, they actually had a budget that came down in this chamber and an election was called immediately — before any debate in this House on that budget.

We've had a full and complete six days of debate on the budget. We've had lots of opportunity to canvass issues before this House, and we have made a commitment in this budget to the people of British Columbia that these are the priorities for our government should we be re-elected. It is a budget that we're proud of.

We've passed all of the tax changes that were required in it, so those are already in place and approved by this chamber. The tax changes have happened, and

with this bill that's before us, we'll be seeking the authority to get on with the spending plan as we presented on February 15. We tabled with the House all of the necessary documents, which are far more extensive than any government has ever done before. They are there for the public to see on the website and to assess and analyze.

With that, I move that we rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

[2050]

Motion approved on the following division:

YEAS — 28

Wong	Chong	Locke
Barisoff	Roddick	Wilson
Bray	Cobb	Lee
Thorpe	Hansen	Bond
Abbott	Coleman	Jarvis
Hogg	R. Stewart	Chutter
Trumper	Masi	Bhullar

Lekstrom	K. Stewart	Bloy
Suffredine	Whittred	Sultan
	Hawes	

NAYS — 2

Kwan	MacPhail
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The committee rose at 8:55 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

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

Hon. I. Chong moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: The House is adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 8:56 p.m.