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6TH SESSION, 37TH PARLIAMENT

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CONTENTS

Thursday, March 10, 2005
Morning Sitting

Routine Proceedings

	Page
Introductions by Members	12441
Petitions.....	12441
V. Roddick	
Tabling Documents.....	12441
<i>Third Follow-up of 2000-2001 Report 4: Management Consulting Engagements in Government,</i> auditor general report No. 12, 2004-05	
Committee of the Whole House.....	12441
Supply Act (No. 1), 2005 (Bill 20) (<i>continued</i>)	
J. MacPhail	
Hon. C. Hansen	
J. Kwan	

THURSDAY, MARCH 10, 2005

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

Prayers.

Introductions by Members

V. Roddick: In the gallery today are four representatives of TRAHVOL, Tsawwassen Residents Against Higher Voltage Overhead Lines: Cecil Dunn, Margaret Atchison, Bernadette Kudzin, Karsten Holmsen. They are here today to present a petition on behalf of our community. Will the House please make them welcome.

Orders of the Day

Hon. G. Bruce: I call committee stage of Bill 20. [1005]

Committee of the Whole House

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

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

The committee met at 10:06 a.m.

Hon. G. Bruce: With leave of the House, I would ask that we rise and report progress and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 10:07 a.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

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

Petitions

V. Roddick: I would like to table a petition. On behalf of the concerned citizens of Tsawwassen, I hereby deliver a petition of over 2,000 signatures collected in a two-week period that is submitted by TRAHVOL, Tsawwassen Residents Against Higher Voltage Overhead Lines. They wish to have BCTC abandon its plan to use the present right-of-way through the residential community of Tsawwassen for its major power upgrade project, and they direct BCTC to pursue an alternative or a safe underground route.

Tabling Documents

Mr. Speaker: Hon. members, I have the honour to present auditor general report No. 12, 2004-05, *Third Follow-up of 2000-2001 Report 4: Management Consulting Engagements in Government*.

Hon. G. Bruce: With that, I would call committee stage of Bill 20, interim supply.

[1010]

Committee of the Whole House

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

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

The committee met at 10:11 a.m.

On section 1 (continued).

J. MacPhail: My colleague and I are going to be discussing some issues around the Ministry of Forests.

The total estimated workers, FTEs.... FTE stands for full-time-equivalent, but what that really means is the number of people working in the public service on full-time hours. The number of people working as full-time-equivalent public servants for the Ministry of Forests in 2005-06 is 3,245. This is 20 percent less than in 2001-02, at which time there were 4,061 full-time-equivalent public servants working in the Ministry of Forests.

The reason why I'm raising this matter is because we have heard complaints around the province from the forest sector itself, from the Cattlemen's Association, from people who use the land for recreational purposes — those who know their passion in life is land stewardship. We have heard over and over again from those very diverse sources that the Ministry of Forests has been cut so much that there is chaos in land use planning and in enforcement of land use regulations. It is actually harming the economy because there are so few people working in the Ministry of Forests.

Of course, this statistic looks better than it actually is, because some people have been restored to work in the Ministry of Forests in this budget, but the cuts were even deeper in the Liberals' first three years. This is an economic issue, Mr. Chair. It's an issue where so much of our economy is dependent on proper land use — proper land use regulation, proper land use planning — and that requires a strong public service to be present for that.

In the *New Era* document, which has now disappeared from the website of the Liberals, the B.C. Liberal government stated that they were going to "invest in research to promote forest stewardship." That's on page 12 of the *New Era* document. Could the Minister of Finance explain how they're planning to deliver on that promise with 20 percent fewer people working in the Ministry of Forests?

[1015]

Hon. C. Hansen: Just for the benefit of those following the debate, this is a debate on the committee stage of an interim supply bill. As is the tradition in this House, it is a bill brought forward by the Minister of Finance to provide temporary spending authority for government at the commencement of the fiscal year.

It is not the full estimates process that allows for the ministry-by-ministry detail, but the Minister of Finance, to the best of his ability in his capacity as the minister, will endeavour to try to answer as many questions as possible. The detailed answer I think the member is looking for should properly come from the Minister of Forests during the estimates debate.

I can inform the member that one of the initiatives of the Ministry of Forests over the last four years has been to look at the regulatory burden or the prescriptive nature of the Forest Practices Code, as it existed before, and to try to streamline that so that there is still the appropriate oversight — but to do so in a way that achieves those objectives in ways that do not add a lot of prescriptive, regulatory processes, which really would require the kind of staffing levels that perhaps the ministry had in the past.

The member is right that there was a reduction of FTEs in the ministry. She also noted that in this budget, there was an increase in FTEs. We actually go from the 723 FTEs that were in the '04-05 fiscal year to 737 FTEs in the coming fiscal year.

J. MacPhail: I'm happy to have the Minister of Finance stand up and make his pat statement about how we should be asking these questions in the main estimates, but it is just dawning on the public out there, and more particularly on the media, that there will be no main estimates. That's because this government is shutting down the Legislature, closing off debate, choking off debate, guillotining debate at 5:45 today, even though there's plenty of opportunity to do the main estimates.

So the minister can repeat that statement. People are laughing at his government out there in the public. The media are reporting on it. I did an interview this morning on the radio, and the commentator was outraged that this government is shutting down this Legislature with all this important work to do.

The Minister of Finance's answer just doesn't ring true at all, because of course, his own government has thrown land use planning into such chaos that his government has had to delay the implementation of their Forest and Range Practices Act for a full year. It was supposed to be fully implemented by 2006. Earlier this session — again, this went unnoticed by those out there in the world, but the NDP protested it — the Liberal government delayed that implementation by a full year, so now there's no hope of stability until the year 2007.

Isn't it interesting that there are thousands of people out there who are suggesting that perhaps the Forest Practices Code, as it had been revamped and modernized under the previous administration, would work much better than the chaos this government has thrown land use planning into?

Let me just read some of the findings. I'll read from a letter that the Cattlemen's Association sent to this government just a few weeks ago about land use in this province. This is exactly why I'm asking my question

about this 20 percent reduction in the Ministry of Forests staff.

Again, the minister stands up and says: "Oh, but we've increased staff this year." My statistic was that from '01-02 to '05-06 — right now — it's still a net 20 percent reduction, so the cuts were even deeper before this budget. Again, this government likes to put a dozen stones in one shoe, take out one and then claim what a good boy they are.

[1020]

Here's what the British Columbia Cattlemen's Association wrote to the cabinet of this government last month:

"Over the past four years, the Ministry of Forests has focused its efforts on the need of large timber companies in an effort to restart that economic engine. In the process, the interests of more than 1,700 range tenure holders have been left behind. Downsizing has resulted in the loss of range staff."

Range staff — they used to work for the Ministry of Forests.

"Restructuring has resulted in the loss of the range branch. Remnants of the range program are now run by foresters rather than agrologists. Ranchers have become poor second cousins in a ministry that has no mandate to advance the ranching industry and a service plan that does not enhance or even maintain the forage resource that the ranching industry relies on. The emphasis on timber has made the BCCA efforts to work collaboratively with MoF on legislation and regulation reform most unproductive, despite the sincere efforts of certain individuals."

The letter goes on to detail the specifics of those very, very troubling concerns by the Cattlemen's Association. To date, their concerns have gone unanswered.

Secondly, they've been dealt another serious blow by the U.S. ensuring that the U.S.-Canada border is closed to Canadian cattle. They've been dealt another serious blow. They turned to get some succour from their own government, and they're slapped away with no support whatsoever. Their concerns remain unanswered by this budget.

Now, let me read from another source. I'm sure that the Liberal government caucus will just say: "Oh well, look at the source." This is from the Sierra Club of Canada. It is a very, very detailed, well-researched document, but I know this government will just say: "Oh, look who they are." This was written in November 2004. It's entitled *Axing the Forest Service*. Here are their ten key findings.

It's a very detailed report, but let me just read the ten key findings into the record.

"(1) Eight hundred jobs have been lost in B.C.'s Forest Service in the past three years of Liberal cuts.

"(2) British Columbia's Forest Service today employs 1/10 the number of people than does the U.S. national Forest Service on all federal forest lands in the United States.

"(3) On average, each B.C. Forest Service employee is now responsible for 18,000 hectares of forest land, an area equal to 45 Vancouver Stanley Parks. In the U.S., national Forest Service employees are responsible on average for an area equivalent to five and a half Stanley Parks.

"(4) Cutbacks to the Forest Service mean that at most, only one in every 147 truckloads of logs is spot-checked to ensure that the public gets fair value for its timber.

"(5) If spot inspections" — and, Mr. Chair, just as an aside, that's how the government determines how much tax has to be paid for you taking these logs, so it's extremely important for the Minister of Finance to be aware of this — "were increased and just 1 percent in added value was recovered, stumpage revenues" — or tax-on-logs revenues — "would increase by \$10 million. If 5 percent were recovered, nearly \$50 million would be gained.

"(6) The deepest cuts to B.C.'s Forest Service in the past three years — 38 percent — were to compliance and enforcement staff."

Compliance and enforcement staff in the Ministry of Forests have been cut by 38 percent under this government.

"The public is losing its eyes and ears in the forests, while government cuts regulation governing forest company activities.

"(7) Eleven British Columbia communities, many with limited job prospects, have together lost more than 500 B.C. Forest Service positions.

"(8) More than 100 Forest Service employees were encouraged to transfer out of the Ministry of Forests to the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, only to lose their new jobs a year later.

"(9) In the past decade, the number of public service staff calculating how fast our trees grow has dropped by 85 percent. This work is the critical component in determining how much forest is cut every year. Now, the companies that log our public forest lands do more and more of this work.

"(10) A decade of cuts to other important areas of historic Forest Service responsibility include range, 42 percent cut; scaling, 38 percent cut; and research, 45 percent cut."

[1025]

The Minister of Finance has determined today that we're going to walk out of this Legislature passing expenditures of \$13 billion, yet his own government is undermining a key source of revenue to sustain those programs. We're going to vote today. Every Liberal caucus MLA is going to stand up and vote today to say: "Here, cabinet, you've got \$13 billion." Yet a key source of revenue is at risk.

Is it at risk in the short term? No, it's not. It's not at risk in the short term, because lumber prices are sky-high. Demand for lumber in the United States is as high as it ever could be. I think the spruce-pine-fir rate is about 425 bucks per thousand cubic metres — unbelievably high. We're not at threat in the short term, but how about the medium and long term?

This government has failed to diversify the economy so that our resource revenue is still key — after MSP premiums, I might add — to sustaining these programs. What is this Minister of Finance doing about these deep and troubling cuts that directly affect our economy in the forest industry, the cattle-ranching industry and recreation?

Hon. C. Hansen: I think the point the member is making may, in fact, differentiate where she comes from with her political beliefs from where we come

from with our policies and the approach we bring to government. Quite frankly, I would not measure the success of a government ministry based solely on how many people are employed by the ministry. I think you've got to look at what the ministry should be accomplishing. We've recognized that there needs to be appropriate oversight, and we believe that is happening. You don't do that by maximizing the number of regulations government produces.

In the past, the Forest Practices Code that we saw brought in by the previous government.... I remember seeing a visual demonstration of it. All of those regulations stacked up — the binders for the Forest Practices Code under their government — were about six and a half feet high.

We have actually eliminated 55 percent of the regulations that were under the old Forest Practices Code. We have moved to a more results-based initiative that still ensures the necessary oversight is there — but not oversight to the point where you're choking an industry and destroying jobs in that industry. That is what we saw in the past.

We have moved to a new approach. I recognize that there are still some challenges. I think, in the fulsome debate that will happen during the estimates debate on the Ministry of Forests that will happen later in the year, I'm sure there will be an opportunity to get into great detail with the minister responsible in terms of how those challenges do still exist and what's happening to manage those challenges.

Generally speaking, we have seen a resurgence in the forest industry in British Columbia. We see that revenues to government are up from the forest sector. In fact, if you look at what was budgeted last year in terms of forest revenue, we had budgeted for \$999 million, and we're anticipating that the year will come in at about \$1.3 billion. We've been conservative in our forecasting in terms of what lumber prices might look like, and for the coming year, we're forecasting \$1.08 billion in revenues from the forest sector.

Those are important revenues to government. We need to make sure that those revenues continue, because they support the social programs we have in this province and the health and education programs. You can't do that by choking off an industry. I think, as the member pointed out, that there are still some challenges, and we will be addressing those challenges.

J. MacPhail: If the Minister of Finance were actually describing the current circumstances, maybe we could take some comfort in it, but he's not describing the current circumstances. He's not describing the state of regulation for land use in this province.

[1030]

He clearly hasn't talked to the forest industry itself. He clearly hasn't talked to the Cattlemen's Association, or maybe if he's met with them, he hasn't listened to them. They're saying out there that there aren't enough people on the ground to approve permits, to do enforcement and compliance. The forest industry itself is saying that.

We heard forest industry executive after forest industry executive come before the legislative Finance Committee touring the province in the fall. We heard from the cattlemen last year.

I acknowledged that — of course, revenues are steady, because the price of lumber is so high. This government has lucked out in being at a 25-year high of worldwide commodity prices across the board. They're lucky, and British Columbians are lucky. Then they, themselves, have imposed huge increases of gambling revenue on top of that and MSP premiums on top of that. So they've balanced their budget, but there is nothing in their government's actions that has contributed to the sustainability of the forest sector, as I've just pointed out.

I just read into the record that, on average, a B.C. Forest Service employee is now responsible for 18,000 hectares of land. So one employee is responsible for an area equal to — for those cappuccino-sucking yuppies — 45 Stanley Parks. One person is responsible for the stewardship of that area. Why? It's because 800 jobs have been lost in the British Columbia Forest Service.

Let me just tell you what the Cattlemen's Association is saying about this government's record on the Forest and Range Practices Act. The minister stands up and tries to say: "Oh, we cut regulations, so aren't we good?" Well, here is what the Cattlemen's Association said last month — and I'm quoting from their letter:

"A lack of staff capacity and continuity, questionable commitment and poor communication has meant not only that outstanding issues have not been addressed; B.C. Cattlemen's Association members now find that ministry staff have differing interpretations of the legislation and regulation changes that have been agreed to. Lacking clear direction, confused Ministry of Forests staff now implement their personal views, resulting in a patchwork regulatory framework across the province."

That's their view of the importance this government pays to ranching in this province.

Given the fact that this government itself has delayed by one full year from '05-06 to '06-07 the implementation of the Forest and Range Practices Act, and given that the government is required to run dual systems of regulatory enforcement, how much money in this first six months of the budget is being spent on ensuring a smooth transition, given the delay of the implementation of the Forest and Range Practices Act?

Hon. C. Hansen: The overall budget for the Ministry of Forests in the 2004-05 fiscal year was initially \$524 million. It is forecast to end the year at \$635 million because of the increased allocations that have been approved by the House or through statutory authorities. The budget for the coming year is going to be \$645 million. This interim supply bill will provide for approximately 50 percent of that, and that will go towards funding the increased FTEs and the other initiatives of the ministry.

[1035]

J. MacPhail: Well, has the Minister of Finance, in his capacity of being responsible for the economic well-

being of this province, taken into account in this six-month expenditure in '05-06 the extra moneys required to implement his government's Forest and Range Practices Act?

Here's why I ask the question, Mr. Chair. When I was in supplemental estimates earlier this session with the Minister of Forests, he admitted to this. He admitted that the reason why his government, the Liberal government, had to delay the Forest and Range Practices Act was because they didn't have enough resources to cope with the massive beetle-wood kill and the implementation of the Forest and Range Practices Act.

Then we got feedback immediately, saying: "Well, of course they don't, because they've cut the B.C. Forest Service so much to the bone that they can't cope with any crisis and still do the proper work of enforcement, regulation, compliance and growth of our forests."

So how much money in this new half-year is being spent to ensure a smooth transition that the Forests minister admitted was not there in previous years, up to and including the current fiscal year that we're in?

Hon. C. Hansen: I'm trying to see how much information I have at our disposal here to give her as concise an answer as possible, but I think some of the elements of the answer would have to come from the minister.

In terms of economic development initiatives that have been put before the House regarding beetle response specifically, there is \$12 million in '04-05. In the coming fiscal year, there's \$31 million allocated, and this interim supply bill would free up approximately 50 percent of that. In the subsequent year, there's \$7 million. In '07-08 there's \$51 million targeted, for a total of \$101 million.

I know that's not a complete answer to the member's question. The balance of the information would have to come from the minister.

J. MacPhail: Well, my questions arise from the information that the minister gave me just this session, but thank you for that information.

Well, that's interesting, because all of the questions that have flowed into our office have come subsequent to this minister introducing his '05-06 budget that, of course, won't be passed in this session. So all of these questions have arisen even given that information.

Now, let me actually talk about the *New Era* document commitment that was made in 2001. It said: "Cut the forestry regulatory burden by one-third within three years, without compromising environmental standards." That was the commitment made by the then B.C. Liberal Party.

Mr. Chair, I must say that given the government's record on this and this '05-06 budget, we have heard concerns from some very reputable people. The president of the Association of B.C. Forest Professionals recently wrote to the Premier this year to voice concerns that their association had over the lack of resources the government has set aside for forest research, inventory and forest health.

Let me quote Rick Sommer, president of the Association of B.C. Forest Professionals: "As your government enters the final months of its mandate and as you consider priorities for a possible second term, we urge you to carefully consider the concerns raised by the Sierra Club." That's the report that I read — the ten key findings that I read into the record a few moments ago.

[1040]

The president of the Association of B.C. Forest Professionals is the head of the body responsible for ensuring proper land use planning and sustainability and maximum economic benefit for the taxpayer out of our forests. He is urging the government to pay attention, to consider the concerns raised by the Sierra Club — ten of which I read into the record — to consider our concerns and to critically examine whether, in terms of its impact on forest stewardship, the level of resources is appropriate to continue to support good forest stewardship.

Perhaps the minister could tell us from those numbers how many FTEs and how much budget increase there has been specifically for forest stewardship.

Hon. C. Hansen: The appropriation for forest stewardship, specifically, goes from \$36.588 million in the fiscal year we're currently in and rises to \$64.078 million in the fiscal year to start April 1. This interim supply bill would allocate approximately 50 percent of that.

J. MacPhail: And how much of that is for increasing forest supply?

Hon. C. Hansen: Perhaps I'll ask the member for clarification.

J. MacPhail: Silviculture.

Hon. C. Hansen: Silviculture?

The Chair: Through the Chair, please.

J. MacPhail: Silviculture, Mr. Chair.

Hon. C. Hansen: I don't have that level of detail in the chamber with me. It is a question that could appropriately be put to the minister during estimates debates that will happen later in the year.

J. MacPhail: The reason why I ask that is because there is a huge backlog in silviculture in this province — a huge backlog. Millions and millions of hectares require planting. Silviculture is the technical term meant for tree-planting. There's a huge backlog which this amount will not in any way eliminate. Of course, if we're actually truly concerned about sustaining the economy for our children and our grandchildren, silviculture is the biggest key investment to achieving that. That's why I asked the question about whether, indeed, any of this goes in any way to eliminating the backlog of restoring forest supply through tree-planting or silviculture.

I want to ask a question, if I could, of the minister. I want to read a statement, actually, about compliance and enforcement. It's not just those people who are concerned about the sustainability of our forests for the public's use; it's also the forest industry itself that is concerned about sustainability of our forests in order to ensure a viable industry. How do we ensure that there is sustainability, proper use of the lands and that people are complying — that the industry and those using the land base are complying properly?

[1045]

Well, you do it through your B.C. forest technicians. Let me quote from one of those forest protection technicians. In December of 2004 a staff member of the B.C. Forest Service, a forest protection technician, said this publicly when he was asked to comment on the effectiveness of his ministry's existing compliance and enforcement programs. He said the following publicly: "It's like giving people the key to the grocery store and asking them to put money in the till when they're done."

Now, based on a simple reading of the '05-06 budget for the Ministry of Forests, it would seem that the government is turning a blind eye in that grocery store. There's not even a camera watching whether the person puts any money in the till.

While many other areas in the Ministry of Forests are experiencing an increase in funding, funding for compliance and enforcement programs in B.C. forests remains static at approximately \$25 million. That's why I asked the minister earlier on what extra moneys, if any, he has put for transition for this year in the compliance and enforcement budget as they use this year to move toward implementation of the new Forest and Range Practices Act.

That devastating statement was made about the circumstances prior to the government shifting the new system for implementation to this year's budget. So we didn't have enough money in the previous year's budget. The government is going to implement a whole new system — massive change in the area of compliance and enforcement — and the budget remains exactly the same as it was previously, which was not nearly enough.

Hon. C. Hansen: As I indicated earlier, I don't have all of the details that the member is looking for. But I can share with her this one piece of background with regard to compliance and enforcement. I'll just read this for the benefit of the member. It says:

"Government has a rigorous compliance and enforcement regime. We have over 270 staff who are dedicated full time to compliance and enforcement. They are conducting over 16,000 inspections a year to ensure forest practices meet the laws in place that conserve forest values from biodiversity to water. Hundreds of other ministry field staff also work to ensure licensees meet their contractual obligations. If there are problems, they are reported to compliance and enforcement staff."

J. MacPhail: Thank you for that information. I appreciate it. However, what is the plan? The minister still hasn't answered my question.

There's already a view out there — and it's a widely held view — industry and communities alike hold this view that there are not enough compliance and enforcement people. The forest industry wants to do the right thing. They are good citizens. They are good corporate citizens. The forest industry wants to be regulated and comply with those regulations in a way that sustains the industry. They want to make sure that when they get their permits, the rigorous review of the requirements to get those permits has been done. They want to get the permit.

They're not getting their permits these days because of lack of staff. But they want proper compliance and enforcement, and they're saying it's not. So is the minister suggesting, with the budget remaining static in compliance and enforcement in the forest sector from last year to this new budget, that the government is saying there won't be any new resources required for moving to the new forest and range practices system?

Hon. C. Hansen: Again, that is a level of detail that would have to be put to the Minister of Forests. I don't have that level of detail with me, other than I can tell the member that across government we are striving to condense the time for approvals and the time that the due diligence can be done so that sound decisions are made but are made in a very timely fashion.

If there are areas where that is still a challenge within this particular ministry, I'm sure the minister will be addressing those. But I cannot speak to the specific detail as to how that would be achieved. That is a question that would have to go to the minister himself.

[1050]

J. MacPhail: Mr. Chair, we're really relegated to asking only the very, very top layer of questions across ministries. My colleague is champing at the bit here to ask some questions from the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, but I have a couple of issues — just a couple of very specific economic issues affecting specific communities in this province around the area of forests.

One of them is Port Alice, which is a forest-dependent community. This goes specifically to the Minister of Finance's responsibility. In 2001 the *New Era* document said that the B.C. Liberals would "establish a working forest land base to provide greater stability for working families and to enhance long-term forestry management and planning."

On February 3, 2005, the media reported that Richard Bassett, a managing partner of Value Analytix, a U.K.-based firm specializing in restructuring, had suggested in a presentation to the B.C. Liberal cabinet and senior officials of government that the successful restructuring of the pulp mill in Port Alice would require, at the very least, \$40 million from the province.

Can the minister explain — in this budget, in this interim supply — how much, if any, of this new funding will go towards helping the people of Port Alice with local economic development?

Hon. C. Hansen: I know that the member for North Island has been working very diligently on this to try to see what opportunities could be there for this community. As a matter of policy of government, we will not provide subsidies to individual enterprises, as has been done in the past, but we are working with the community to see what economic development opportunities may be available. I know that those discussions will continue, and hopefully, we can find some market-based answers that will ensure that the community continues to be the vibrant, dynamic community we've known it to be in the past.

J. MacPhail: Well, if the mill is permanently shut down, are the minister and his government willing to pick up the bill for environmental cleanup costs, unpaid taxes and relocation assistance projected at anywhere from \$75 million to \$130 million?

Hon. C. Hansen: As a province, we will honour our obligations in circumstances like this. We will also ensure that those who have obligations to those former employees or to the province in terms of revenues that should flow to the province.... We will be following up on those as we would in any comparable circumstance in the province.

J. MacPhail: I'm not sure how much comfort the residents of Port Alice will take from that, but they'll certainly have an opportunity very soon to express their level of discomfort with that answer.

My last question in this area, because of time constraints.... As the minister can see, I have binders of information that I wish to explore, but we're really under the gun here on the last day of this sitting, by fiat.... I want to talk about the Brascan and Weyerhaeuser deal very briefly.

[1055]

The *New Era* document, which is the Liberals' pre-election document of 2001, said this on page 12: "Under the NDP, our forest industry has gone from the lowest-cost producer of fibre in North America to the highest-cost producer. We need to fix that to make our forest industry strong again and to ensure a bright future for forest workers."

Here's the reality check on that. The recent changes to the forest legislation under this government have allowed for greater flexibility in the sale and transfer of Crown cutting rights. There used to be a rigorous process that the government would go through before there could be the sale and transfer of Crown cutting rights. This government changed all of that. What effect does it have in not doing that rigorous pursuit before Crown land is transferred?

[H. Long in the chair.]

Well, here's what has happened in the \$1.4 billion sale of Weyerhaeuser sawmills and vast coastal timber holdings to Brascan. Here's what Norm Rivard, chair of the Steelworkers-IWA Council, a group the Minister of

Labour likes to embrace, had to say about the deal. Mr. Rivard represents the 2,000 Weyerhaeuser employees on the coast in British Columbia.

Here's what he said on February 18, 2005: "What does the Minister of Forests have to say about this deal? As a province, we shouldn't be concerned about what this deal means not only in terms of control of Crown assets but also in terms of jobs and community benefit provided from those assets." That's Mr. Rivard quoting the Minister of Forests.

Then Mr. Rivard goes on to comment on the government's view. He says: "The unfortunate reality is that the Campbell government has gutted the Forest Act and now has very little say over the future of our industry, even though it is public timber being sold."

To the Minister of Finance: can he tell me what part — how much expenditure — of this interim supply will go to assist those workers who will be thrown out of their jobs by the sale of Weyerhaeuser to Brascan? Brascan itself admits that as many as 12 of the coast's 34 mills will close over the next five years, while three or four mills will be built to handle smaller logs.

Hon. C. Hansen: As I think the member would know, that transaction is being reviewed by the federal competition bureau, and to the best of my knowledge, there has not been a determination put forward yet by that federal body. In terms of the coastal forest workers who are affected by the takeback that was initiated by the Minister of Forests, we have put in what was initially a \$75 million fund to assist those workers affected by the forest takeback.

Obviously, some of those would be Weyerhaeuser employees that would be affected by that, so they would continue to be eligible for compensation as a result of that forestry revitalization trust. We increased that allocation by \$50 million to a total of \$125 million that the trust will be administering in the months ahead.

If there are employees that are displaced because of other reasons, then they may not be eligible for that forestry revitalization trust, but I'm sure this is an issue that the Minister of Forests is working on with the workers' representatives and the industry.

[1100]

Hon. P. Bell: I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

Hon. P. Bell: I am not the member for Abbotsford-Mount Lehman, nor am I the Minister of Forests, although I do share a hairstyle similar to the hon. member's. I've been asked today to make an introduction from the member's riding, and it is of 57 grade 5 students from King Traditional Elementary School, along with their four teachers: Mr. Goulet, Ms. Rasti, Ms. Warnock and Ms. Reimer. Would the House please make them very welcome.

Debate Continued

J. MacPhail: Yes, the government has set up a transition fund for their 20 percent takeback — again, one might say, chaos of their own making. However, this Weyerhaeuser sale to Brascan has absolutely nothing to do with that. These mills will be closed because of rationalization in the industry because of this sale, not because of the 20 percent takeback. The minister's answer is irrelevant to the future of these workers, and I'm sure those workers will view that with great disappointment.

Of course, it used to be that not only did the federal government have to review a sale, but the provincial government, through its own legislation, had a major role to play to ensure the stability and continuity of forest-dependent communities when there was a sale or transfer of Crown timber. No longer is that required under this government.

I'm going to close the section, Mr. Chair, around our questions around the Ministry of Forests with a very, very interesting personal story from a former compliance and enforcement officer with the B.C. Forest Service. It will only take me a minute to read it.

"Elizabeth Williams was one of eight compliance and enforcement staff that used to work out of Invermere and one of six who was regularly sent into the field. She came to Invermere from Golden, where she had worked for years in silviculture. Williams described her work as one of active involvement in all aspects of forestry operations.

"What the compliance and enforcement technicians did was go out to all the logging on tree farm licences, timber supply areas and woodlots and administer the silviculture prescriptions," Williams said. "We made sure the logging was being done in accordance with the law. Each cutblock had a prescription: what was going to be logged, what was going to be left, how waterways were going to be protected, how it was going to be reforested. The technicians did the inspections on all the forest cutblocks in the end to make sure the ditches were clear, the slash piles were burned and the trees were replanted. We made sure that all of the company's obligations were met in the end.

"One of our primary areas of responsibility was the local tree farm licence lands of Tembec.' The area is now known as the Parson tree farm licence. Regular monitoring of the TFL showed it was the site of some of the better forest practices in the region. 'But while there were not a lot of problems in the Parson TFL,' Williams said, 'it was common for there to be problems elsewhere, and the problems ran the gamut from heavy equipment being taken where it shouldn't, which resulted in valuable topsoil being lost, mowing down of healthy young trees that were decades away from being of commercial value and failure to protect riparian forests and fish-bearing streams.'

"When Williams and 43 others lost their jobs in Invermere, it was quickly apparent in the new 'results-based' regime unveiled by the Liberal government, very few on-site inspections would take place. 'I'm really distressed with the way things are now,' Williams says. 'Government came up with this new, results-based regime, and that's how they justified cutting the Forest Service. Supposedly, the company's registered professional foresters would ensure that it's all done right, and we'll

do spot checks after the fact. If there's a problem with a salmon-bearing stream in another part of the province, let's say they'll be fined.

"This approach might stand a chance of working if there was actually hope of getting out on the ground to do the inspections,' Williams said. But in communities such as Invermere, no one is betting on that happening anytime soon. We used to have eight staff working on compliance and enforcement out of our district office. Today we have one person left, and he works out of a small satellite office,' Williams says.

"There's a huge gap between Invermere and Revelstoke on one side and Invermere and Cranbrook on the other. The distance is ridiculous. It's mind-boggling, and I don't imagine we'll see too much help from Cranbrook. They're a ways away, and they've got their own problems."

Mr. Chair, in the single most important industry to the economy of British Columbia — forests — that's what's happening under this government. It bodes ill for the future for those forest-dependent communities.

[1105]

J. Kwan: I'd like to ask some questions of the minister in the area of water, land and air protection. First of all, I would like to put a quote on the record. It's the mission statement from the ministry. The mission of the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection is to provide "leadership and support to British Columbians to help them limit the adverse effects of their individual and collective activities on the environment, while fostering economic development and providing recreational opportunities."

Well, I have to admit that sounds nice — doesn't it? It sounds like there's a lot of good news here and like the government is doing the right thing. Well, let's see how these words translate into action by way of the budget and the government policies to date.

Given that this is the interim supply bill, let's focus, first of all, on the area of budgeting. In the area of water, land and air protection, one of the critical issues is that the ministry must regulate and enforce the protection of our water, land and air.

Since this government took office, the following positions have been eliminated: biologists, 17; laboratory health science officers, one; licensed science officers, 26; park assistants, 21; scientific technical officers, 128; veterinarian, one; resource officers, three; planning officers, ten; office assistants, 15; information systems support, two; engineering aides, one; communications officers, four; conservation officers, 22; clerk stenographers, 21; clerks, 46; and administrative officers, two — for a total of 320. This group of people over the years.... What they did was go out and enforce and regulate the protection of our parks, our water streams, air quality and so on. It's a reduction of 320 to date.

Can the minister explain how he believes this ministry's mission can be accomplished with this kind of a reduction? That is a reduction of 23 percent of staffing since 2001-02. Even with this budget and the changes being proposed to add another 79 back to the roster, how does the minister expect that the work that needs

to be done would actually be done? How does the minister expect the ministry's mission statement would actually be fulfilled?

Hon. C. Hansen: Across all government ministries we have endeavoured over the last four years to move to a far more results-based regulatory regime and to eliminate some of the regulations that were not necessary in terms of protecting the public interest. In the case of the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, the regulation count has gone from 21,541 down to 12,410 as part of the government's initiative to reduce the regulatory burden by one-third.

[1110]

In the case of Water, Land and Air Protection, as is the case in other ministries, that has been done in a way to ensure that due diligence is still done and that oversight is still provided. But I don't think you can measure environmental protection by the quantity of regulations that are in place or the number of FTEs that are there to oversee those regulations.

I would point out to the member that in the budget we are presenting for the fiscal year coming, there is an increase in staffing levels for the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. In this current fiscal year there are 924 FTEs, and that will increase in the coming year to 993, which is an increase of 69 FTEs in the coming year.

J. Kwan: I'm so glad that I got what the minister just said on record.

First of all, let's examine the numbers the minister says have actually been increased — 69 in this budget book. That is correct. But you know what? That is in the context of a loss of 320 over the last four years. That is in that context. The number that is being put back does not even come close to the number of officers and staff who used to do that work when they were in place in 2001 — doesn't even come close.

The minister says that, well, we didn't need that staff, really. By inference, that's what he was saying — that we don't need all that staff because we have deregulated significantly in and around this area. Therefore, I suppose it would mean that we won't need all the staff to do that regulation. I will have more to say about that in a moment, and I will put forward arguments and evidence to show the contrary.

Let me put this question to the minister for the moment. He also stated in his answer that environmental protection does not rely necessarily on the quantity of the regulations or the number of staff. But it does, of course, rely on what the government's policies are around what kind of regulation measures would be in place and how the government would go about ensuring that protection is actually in place.

Could the minister please speak on the record of this government on openness and accountability in the area of water, land and air protection since this government came to power in 2001? Let me just begin, as well, by giving this information to the minister.

The government's new era of openness and accountability to date. West Coast Environmental Law, people who actually sit and observe and watch what the government is doing on this issue, has observed the following. There has been little or no consultation on some major environmental law changes. In some cases consultation has been one-sided. Industry has been heavily consulted while community and environmental groups have been shut out.

The government repealed new legislation that gave courts powers to protect citizens and organizations from lawsuits designed to stifle public debate. They repealed provisions that require service plans of all government agencies and major capital projects of government to be developed, assessed and audited against sustainability objectives. The government also eliminated the new commissioner for environment and sustainability.

The rewritten Environmental Assessment Act eliminates commitments to public participation in assessment and to an open, accountable and neutrally administered assessment process. It also reduces the level of public information the government and proponent are required to produce. The proposed results-based Forest Practices Code outlines a process where public involvement is only provided for at a general level, and companies are not required to provide even basic information such as the location of cutblocks and access roads.

[1115]

The government has repealed provisions of the Forest Land Reserve Act that allow for local government and public input when private forest land is proposed for urban development, which is a major issue in the Gulf Islands and southeastern Vancouver Island.

Budget cuts to the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection are forcing the government to abandon its permit system for medium-risk polluters, with the consequence that citizens will be unable to challenge permits to pollute that affect their community. Presently such challenges often lead to more stringent conditions being placed in the permit to better protect the environment.

This is part of the record of this deregulation that the minister says is good for the environment — that as a result, we don't need the staff in place to do the work to protect our environment. But based on experts in the field outside of government.... They argue the contrary.

I would like to ask the minister: how is the government open and accountable? In light of this kind of observation, how is it that the government is actually meeting its mandate, the mandate that I earlier provided — the mission statement of the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection? Given the budget cuts that this ministry has sustained over the last four years, can the minister say that the mandate of the ministry is actually being fulfilled and that he is confident that our environment is actually being protected?

Hon. C. Hansen: I think the best documents I can refer the member to, to respond to that inquiry are the service plans of the ministry that have been posted on

the website and are there for all to read. They set out the strategies and approaches that the ministry will take. They also set out the performance targets that the ministry will be held accountable for going forward.

I would also point out to the member and anyone following the debate that the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection will see an increase in their budget this year. The ministry operations will go from \$107.736 million.... That will be increased to \$116.216 million in the coming fiscal year.

J. Kwan: The minister didn't answer my question. It's a simple question from this point of view. If the government and this minister feel confident that their budget is actually protecting the environment, then say so on record. Otherwise, one could only assume the government is not confident that the environment is being protected and that what is in the budget and what the government's track record has been over the last four years has actually failed environmental protection in this province and, moreover, that it has actually not fulfilled its mandate and its mission statement.

The minister likes to cite: "Oh, but there's been an increase this year." Well, we've been down this road before, and the minister knows very well that it's an increase for this year's budget only. In the context of the last four years of this government's record, it means it is a major net reduction.

It is the same story in every major area and in programs that are to be delivered by government. It is the same story over and over again, and it is no different for the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection.

I just cited that yes, the government is putting back some 69 FTE positions into this ministry for the purposes of regulation and protection in the context of a cut of 320 over the last four years. You do the math, and figure it out to see if there was a real increase. A grade 4 student would be able to tell you that it's not a real increase, whereas this government could not and would not.

[1120]

Let me look a little bit closer and probe a little bit deeper into the area of protection of our environment. Let's just pick one area. Let's just use conservation officers. Here's what West Coast Environmental Law had to say about this government's cuts to the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection staff.

"Today there are only 115 conservation officers in all of British Columbia. In Alberta, a province with one million fewer residents and a land base two-thirds that of B.C., the comparable figure is almost double that at 221 full-time employees. Saskatchewan, a province with less than one-quarter of B.C.'s population, has 56 percent more staff devoted to enforcing environmental protection. More often than not, B.C.'s conservation officers now have no staff support, meaning any investigations they do must be done pretty much on their own and with little or any budget to sustain time away from their offices."

That's the reality today under this government with their cuts in conservation officers across the province.

Let me ask the minister: does the minister agree with these comparisons that show that cuts to the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection over the past four years have been too drastic and, to that end, that it is almost impossible for these conservation officers to do their jobs?

Hon. C. Hansen: The member asked early on for it to be on the record that we are providing the kind of support for the ministry to achieve its mission. I think that is on the record. It's set out in the service plan for everyone to read in a level of detail and transparency that we've never seen from previous governments.

In terms of conservation officers, to answer the member's specific question, there is a specific allocation in the budget. We increase the number of park rangers and conservation officers, as well as providing seasonal employment opportunities for youth and training for potential future employment opportunities in the field of environmental management through the new B.C. conservation corps. In the coming three years there is \$16 million allocated for that specific purpose.

J. Kwan: The minister says: "Oh, but the website says everything is fine." Well, you know what? It is this government and its policies that actually took away the public list that was there prior to 2001, prior to this election, which actually listed the worst polluters in the province. The government deleted that information. That is no longer public. How's that for transparency? How's that for telling British Columbians that somehow, to reassure them, our environment is actually being protected in the area of violations? Not so under this government.

I don't want to let the minister get away with that answer — in terms that somehow everything is so much better and that they've put more money back in. As we all know, the money they put back in doesn't even barely cover what was taken away.

Let's just ask the experts who actually did the work out in the field what they have to say and what they're saying now with the situations they're in. What work is being done, and what work is not being done?

Of the 320 job losses in the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection documented in this report, the largest number of cuts was to scientific technical officers. So 40 percent of the job losses documented in this report — this is the report from West Coast Environmental Law — occurred in job classifications that include people responsible for overseeing regulations pertaining to toxic and hazardous wastes, amongst other things.

Disputes over forest and fisheries management tend to dominate media accounts of environmental issues in the province. What often fails to be reported is just how much hazardous material is produced in this province; who handles that material; where it is sent; what rules pertain to its treatment and discharges; and how rigorously companies and individuals that produce, transport, treat and discharge hazardous wastes are inspected to ensure that they comply with laws and

do not put public health and safety at risk. These are the jobs of some of the staff that have been eliminated under this government.

[1125]

I mentioned earlier that a total of 128 scientific technical officers have been eliminated under this government. And that's what they do — what I just put on the record. To that end, let's see what the situation is now in terms of the reduction in the numbers of officers in this area.

I also want to say before I get into their work experiences.... I just want to put forward this information for the public and the minister so that we know the real truth of what is happening in this ministry. On the issue around budgeting, it is actually a drop, of course, if you account for the last four years of what the government has done, of 32.8 percent, as opposed to an actual increase, which this minister likes to continue to claim.

Here are the actual figures. According to concerns that have been raised in this report — and they've highlighted it in terms of provincial budgets — the ministry's overall budget declined from \$215.9 million to \$148.1 million between the current government's first budget in 2001 and the most recent provincial budget unveiled in February 2004. This is a report written prior to this budget that was tabled. It is the record of the last four years of what the government has done and has to be taken in the context of what the increase is now from its original state when the government took over office in 2001.

The 2004 budget also notes that funding for programs devoted to maintaining clean, healthy and safe water, land and air supplies through monitoring and enforcement of environmental laws will decline from \$23.3 million to \$15.7 million this fiscal year. That's a drop of 32.8 percent. As mentioned, from 2001 to 2004 the budget actually dropped from \$215.9 million to \$148.1 million. So even the amount that the minister says is being added in 2005 doesn't even come close to what was cut in the last four years.

Here's what they say the situation is now. Formerly, this is what they did. The officers did this work, and I quote from the report. It is a direct quote, actually, from the individual who performed the tasks. This is how they normally do the work: "We fill out inspection forms and inform permit holders that some work was needed in order to bring them into compliance. They basically signed the form, and then we sent in a follow-up letter."

Over the course of the two years in the office in which he served, he was responsible for overseeing monitoring and enforcement efforts pertaining to some 80 individual permits. His immediate supervisor oversaw a staff of five technicians and a portfolio of 400 or so permits. The individual has added that most of the 80 permits he was responsible for were out of compliance when he took the job. "I would say that maybe 15 percent of them were in compliance, and a lot of the inspections had not been done in some time. Obviously, there was a need for new people, myself included."

Then he went on to say that as a result of the cuts and over the period of the last four years.... He cites:

"To give you an example, at the height of it all a high-profile operation such as a pulp mill had at least four unannounced checks a year. The four checks was a minimum. If you found non-compliance, an additional inspection was usually required. The four was the minimum. That was your target. You showed up at the door and said: 'Here I am. I've got to look around.' Basically, what happens now is that the compliance is in the hands of the discharger. The regulation is there, and they're required to meet it. But there is not, or very seldom is there, an officer appearing at the site. Basically, you schedule your visit. You make it known when you're coming."

[1130]

That is in the context of.... Some 80 percent of the people that they formerly inspected would be not in compliance. Only 15 percent of them would be in compliance. Somehow the government says that we don't need to have the staff out there to do the work and to make sure that things are being properly monitored and looked after.

Here's the net result, from this officer, of the cuts. He says: "Most dischargers know that the government doesn't come around anymore, and if there is not someone keeping the playing field level, then there is no protection." This is Al Spidel, the former scientific technical officer from the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. That's what he said about the changes and their impacts on our environment.

As mentioned earlier, the government no longer publishes a list of polluters who are breaking the law by not complying with environmental protection standards set out in the permits and regulations. There used to be a list, but this government cancelled that list shortly after taking office. We all know the list was effective. It was an effective enforcement tool, because companies hated to see their names on that list. At least there was some sort of incentive to get people to comply, but not anymore.

That's just one area in the area of scientific technical officers. I do want to go back to conservation officers for a moment. The minister says: "Everything is great. We're doing a great job. Our service plan says we're protecting everything." Really? Let's just look into the situation of what is going on around the conservation officers.

I'll ask again if the minister will stand on record right now to say that the budget that he tabled and the dollars he is asking for, for this Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection will actually protect our environment. I'll challenge him to say that.

In the area of conservation officers that relates to park protection, here's what the government says. A recent provincial government report, *Economic Benefits of British Columbia's Provincial Parks*, notes several significant social and economic plusses to the province flowing from its world-renowned park system, including total expenditures related to park visitors of \$533 million in 1999, a return of \$10 on each dollar invested by the provincial government in its protected-areas system, economic activities associated with parks that

translate into 9,100 direct and indirect person-years of employment every year, a \$521 million annual contribution to the provincial gross domestic product and some \$219 million in tax revenues for the provincial and federal governments.

Given the obvious economic importance of the park system, the B.C. government's continued gutting of the park services raises, of course, interesting questions. Many of the provincial parks are renowned for their wild character and large size. That does draw visitors from across the globe to this place. But what is the government doing to protect our park area? What are they doing, exactly, in order to address these concerns? Well, the government actually went about cutting conservation officers. They cut conservation officers by some 22 FTEs when they took office. This is in spite of the fact that we actually have a huge area of park space that needs these conservation officers to be out there doing their work.

[1135]

Given the cuts that they have sustained, what are the officers and some of the ex-officers saying? "When it comes down to monitoring and enforcement, the logistics of getting out to each park, and within each park, are mind-boggling in terms of the time required, let alone what you do once you get there," says one park employee. "It's kind of hit-or-miss that somebody is doing something when you get out there. Trying to do enforcement in the winter, for example, with illegal snowmobile activity will require helicopter time, for which we have very little money. If you take the other route and say that we're not going to use machinery like helicopters, the obvious replacement would be people to go out there, and we have no people." Says another park employee: "To see a park ranger out there in a park these days, well, is kind of like trying to find an endangered species."

That's the track record of this government since they took office. Deregulation, the minister says, is good, so the violators of companies will no longer be listed, at least to put pressure on them to comply — gone. The people who actually work to enforce these individuals, to make sure they actually comply with some sort of regulations.... We know the historical pattern is such that some 80 percent of them don't comply. Yet we have a significant reduction of these people who do that work, to the tune of 128 reductions in the last four years. Somehow that's okay too, and deregulation is good. Lack of enforcement and regulation is good.

We know that the park system benefits us environmentally, economically and socially. To ensure the resource is there to protect the park so we can actually sustain those kinds of returns over time and throughout the years.... Well, that resource is also taken away.

That's the track record. In this budget, yeah, there is some measly 69-FTE increase. The minister says: "Oh, but that's wonderful, isn't it?" Is it? Does the minister think those 69 replacements towards the 320 staff losses would actually replace the work that needs to be done in the context of this budget?

Hon. C. Hansen: As I said earlier in the discussion, we have gone through a significant deregulation process looking at which regulations are necessary and eliminating ones that were redundant or were not actually achieving useful outcomes. The result of that is less pressure on the ministry for the kind of work that needed to be done in the past because of that significant overburdensome regulatory environment that was there.

I think it's important that we not measure the success of the ministry based on how many FTEs are in place but that we actually base it on how the oversight responsibilities and the responsibilities of the ministry are being met. As I indicated earlier, anybody who would like to get more detail on that can go to the website and find that in the service plan for the ministry.

J. Kwan: What the minister just said.... Let me just put this question to the minister. What this government is all about in the last four years, quite frankly, has been dirty tricks and broken promises.

The new-era commitment on ensuring mining and logging is not permitted in parks.... That is what the government said. That's what they campaigned on in 2001. The government then went about reducing the provincial South Chilcotin mountain park by 20 percent and then approved mining in the areas removed. Maybe this is what the government really means and what the Finance minister really means when he says: "Well, we actually need less regulation because of changes."

[1140]

Oh, what would those changes be? Could it be that you actually took out protected areas and then allowed mining and logging in those areas, which you promised that you would not in the *New Era* document? Is that why the Minister of Finance can now say that because of deregulation we no longer need the kinds of measures that were in place or the kinds of staffing levels that were in place?

If they can't mine in a park, they will simply remove the parkland and mine away. I guess that's the solution, and I guess that's the way they say: "Oh, but we really are protecting our environment. We're not doing any harm at all to our unprotected areas." Maybe that's the solution from this government.

Well, in fact, it is the answer from this government. This action was taken in a park that is internationally known by campers, hikers, skiers and other outdoor adventurers. The now Minister of Provincial Revenue, I think, went on record saying his government is "committed to a park system that is second to none." That's what he said.

Right. It's second to none other than mining interests and when it suits you, so that you can go on to claim you protected our unprotected areas. The thing to do, then, is take the parkland out and not call it a park anymore, then go ahead and mine it and allow for mining to take place within it, and then claim: "Hey, we're doing a great job in protecting our park space."

The government has actually ignored the Lillooet land and resource plan that protects all the areas identified within that plan — a plan that actually took many people and a lot of consultation for people to

come together to agree on. Can the minister explain why this government has decided to ignore the recommendations outlined in the Lillooet land and resource plan to protect all of the areas identified?

Hon. C. Hansen: To remind anybody that may be following these debates: this is a debate on the interim supply bill. It is customary for the Minister of Finance to attempt to answer as many questions as possible within his scope of responsibility — my scope as Finance minister — with information that we have available. I do not have that level of detail in the House, and it is a question I will bring to the attention of the minister responsible.

J. Kwan: No answer to my question, and yet the minister refuses to call ministry-by-ministry, line-by-line debate so we can put those questions to the minister responsible. This minister refused to do that. This government refused to allow for that debate to take place, because the government is going to shut down this House at 5:45 today so there will be no more questions put to them. The opposition will not be allowed the opportunity to attempt to hold the government to account and to scrutinize what they say they're doing.

The minister said earlier that I used one example in the South Chilcotin mountain provincial park as an illustration of how the government is trying to use weasel words, dirty tricks and broken promises to get around what they say they're doing in the area of protecting our environment. The minister says with confidence: "Everything is just fine, because the service plan says we're doing a great job."

I would like to ask the minister how much of this \$13 billion that he is seeking approval for from this Legislature today is being used to actually do any sort of assessment of harmful impacts this government has caused as a result of cuts to the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection over the last four years. Have there been any studies done to see what the real impacts are? How much is being allocated for these studies to be done? Are we just supposed to take the minister's or the government's word that they're doing a great job and they are protecting the environment?

[1145]

Hon. C. Hansen: Again, I refer the member to the service plan, which is on the website. It sets out the specific targets, goals and performance measures that the ministry will be held accountable to.

The member seems to gauge environmental protection by how much money is spent in a ministry. We are moving across government to measuring results and measuring outcomes, which I think is a far better indicator as to whether those dollars that are being allocated to a ministry are in fact achieving meaningful results. I think that if anybody wanted to take the time to read the service plan of the ministry, they would see exactly how the ministry is achieving those goals.

J. Kwan: The minister is fond of saying that you don't actually need the resources there to ensure that

protection is in place for environment. Interestingly, experts in the field who actually do the work differ in their points of view from this government and this minister. I just mentioned earlier some of the cuts and the impacts.

Let me ask this question. As I mentioned, there have been significant cuts in that ministry. In the past four years there were significant cuts, even in the clerical support staff, to the tune of 26 percent. Some 26 percent of all the jobs that were eliminated fell in the area of support staff. You know what the net impact is? Of course, I should clarify that support staff do the administrative part of the work — the paperwork, the reports and the filing and the writing up of the reports and so on.

Because of the cutback, the people who normally go out to the field to check on compliance were not able to do so. Why? Because they were stuck behind their desks to do paperwork, and it was all that they could do. The minister says: "Oh, but they measure outcomes. They measure outcomes because it's outcome-based, and they know somehow that the environment is being protected."

Then answer the questions. What assessments has the government done? What studies have they done? Are there any dollars coming from this \$13 billion that he is seeking approval for that would actually go into an independent assessment of the government's performance in the area of environmental protection?

Hon. C. Hansen: It is a very appropriate question for the member to put forward. The right context for that would be a question to the Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection during estimates debate, which will happen later in the year.

J. Kwan: In other words, no studies have been done, and none are going to be done. That's the answer that the minister doesn't want to say, but he knows that's the answer. That is why we're not engaging in ministry-by-ministry, line-by-line debate so that we can get to the bottom of what the government is doing. That's why the government and this minister want a blank cheque of \$13 billion to do whatever they want to do without any accountability or scrutiny.

Let's use another measure: endangered species, threatened species. That would be like the conservation officers out in the field now. On March 3, 2005, the Forest Practices Board announced that this government had completely failed to protect threatened species on provincial Crown lands. Their press release stated the following: "The Forest Practices Board has found that there is a systematic failure in government policy to protect threatened species such as marbled murrelet on Crown forest lands."

The reality of the so-called new-era Liberal... The government has broken their new-era promise. The quote in the new-era promise is: "Adopt a scientifically based, principled approach to environmental management that ensures sustainability, accountability and responsibility."

[1150]

Given the cuts to date — and the minister says resources have nothing to do with environmental protec-

tion — can the minister explain how much of the budget of 2005 will actually go toward protecting threatened species like the marbled murrelet on Crown provincial land — not on private land, but Crown provincial land? If no resources are needed to protect this endangered species, then how can the minister say that they are actually protecting the environment? More specifically, how could the minister say they are actually meeting their new-era commitment?

Hon. C. Hansen: There is allocation in the budget under environmental stewardship to address the kinds of issues that the member is raising. The budget for that particular area was \$36.246 million last year. In the coming fiscal year starting April 1, that will increase to \$38.520 million. I can also point the member to the contingencies. There was an expenditure from contingencies in the current fiscal year to provide money for species-at-risk programs.

J. Kwan: Here's the record, the real record of what the government has done on endangered species. The statement actually came not from the opposition but from Mark Hume, who wrote March 7, 2005, in the *Globe and Mail*: "Once officials have reached the 1 percent cap" — this is the 1 percent of old-growth cap — "they stop looking at marbled murrelets in a given region and have no idea whether the population is surviving with the habitat set aside."

They have no idea, and that's the truth of it. The minister will say: "Oh yeah, but we're throwing a few dollars in there to make sure that the work is being done." In reality, they have no idea why. They have done no studies around that, and where studies have been done, they ignore the recommendations.

The government's political platform promised science-based regulation, but use of science has been selective. The government ignored dozens of the recommendations made by the salmon aquaculture review panel, and in some cases it is making changes in the direct opposite direction to scientific recommendations.

The government accepted the opinion of the scientific panel that certain pulp mill effluent standards could be weakened, but it has no immediate plans to deal with other pollution problems identified by the panel. The proposed results-based code for the forest industry gives target levels for harvesting priority over what scientists recommend to protect the biodiversity and wildlife.

That's the track record of this government to date. I would like to ask the minister this question. He says that everything is great and that we are protecting the environment. Well, has the government conducted a multi-account of cost-benefit study of the financial repercussions of mining in an internationally known wilderness area, the South Chilcotin mountains provincial park? Has the government done any work in actually finding out the real science and its impacts behind that decision to take out a chunk of parkland and not name it as part of the park anymore and to allow mining to take place within it? I would like to

know how much of that \$13 billion will actually go towards conducting such a study.

Hon. C. Hansen: The member is seeking a level of detail that I as Minister of Finance do not have. It is a question that should properly be put to the minister responsible.

J. Kwan: The answer is easy. That's because the government has not done any of that work, nor do they intend to do any of that work. They already made the policy decision to allow for mining, already took a chunk of the park out of the South Chilcotin mountains provincial park without doing any of the scientific work that they said they would do.

[1155]

That's all that I ask: do the work that you said you were going to do. Fulfil the commitment that you made instead of breaking promise after promise and then using dirty tricks to get around the promises that you've made. That's all that I ask.

I wonder: can the minister identify what endangered species live in the region where the 20 percent has been approved for mining? Does he even know that? Is there even a record of that in the ministry anywhere?

Hon. C. Hansen: Again, just to point out to those who are following, this is a debate on the interim supply legislation, which is to provide temporary funding authority for the government at the start of the fiscal year on April 1. The member's question is entirely an appropriate question, but it's not something that I have a detailed level of knowledge on. The question should be put to the Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection during the estimates process, which will happen later in the year.

J. Kwan: The minister says that he doesn't know, but he won't allow for ministry-by-ministry, line-by-line debate for any of the ministries. But he wants to spend \$13 billion of taxpayers' hard-earned money to do whatever he wants. Then he wants to turn around and say: "Hey, trust us. Trust us. You can trust us." That's in spite of the fact they've broken promise after promise.

Let's just do a quick review of what the government has done in the area of cuts in programs and of reductions in the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. This is only a truncated list, because time is running out.

The program reductions include environmental compliance and monitoring, habitat protection, fish and wildlife management, camping and recreational services, and community outreach to park users. Disabled subsidies for park use are reduced.

Programs have been eliminated. The watershed rehabilitation program has been eliminated; the rebuilding of watersheds damaged by poor logging practices — gone; urban salmon habitat program, rebuilding the urban salmon runs — gone; youth e-teams, youth employment and environmental restoration — gone; green economy secretariat, which supports the

development of environmentally-friendly industries — gone; park services — gone; all services at the 45 sites that have closed — and I won't name all 45 sites — are now gone; park interpretive services — gone. That's their track record.

Let's just see some of the programs that this government is engaged in that are on their way out. Habitat and ecosystem protection, advice to the industry and local government on those kind of protection services, is being phased out. Responses to low-risk human-wildlife conflicts — that program is being phased out. Assessment and permitting of low- and medium-risk pollution sources — that program is being phased out under this government and under their direction.

Somehow they say: "Don't worry. Our environment is being protected. Everything is just fine. We don't need more resources in this area. We don't need more regulation in this area." Well, the solution from this government is to get rid of the monitoring, to get rid of the regulations.

You know what? When it suits them.... If a park is standing in the way of some policy that the government wants to proceed with: "Well, let's just stop naming it as a park. Let's just take it out and say that it is not parkland anymore." Then they can continue to say that somehow they're protecting the environment. But you know what? British Columbians know the truth and they know they difference. They don't trust this government. They know what this government has done, and they know what the track record of this government has been over the last four years.

The minister can try and gloss over and say that everything is just fine and that they are putting more money into the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. The reality is that British Columbians will also know that when you net out what the government has done over the last four years, it is a net reduction, and it is not doing the work that it's supposed to do — and that is to protect the environment.

Hon. C. Hansen: Noting the hour, I move that we rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 11:59 a.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

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

[1200]

Hon. P. Bell moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: The House is adjourned until 2 o'clock this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 12:01 p.m.