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LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR
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6TH SESSION, 37TH PARLIAMENT

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THURSDAY, MARCH 10, 2005

The House met at 2:04 p.m.

Introductions by Members

E. Brenzinger: Today I introduce to the Legislature Ian Bruce, the DRBC candidate for Saanich North and the Islands, who is here with his daughter Kim Bruce. Ian is a professional biologist and is executive coordinator for the Peninsula Streams Society. Ian provides ecological and fishery services to industry, governments and first nations through his consulting firm, Watershed Eco-Logical Services Ltd. He has recently served on the North Saanich council's environmental advisory commission. Please give Ian Bruce and Kim Bruce a warm welcome to the House.

Tributes

PHARMACY AWARENESS WEEK

Hon. S. Bond: There are two things today that I need to bring to the House's attention. Pharmacists have been a regulated health profession for over 100 years. Their knowledgeable advice and safe provision of over 35 million prescriptions annually in British Columbia are a benefit to all patients and make pharmacists an invaluable part of the health care team. The addition of pharmacists to the British Columbia NurseLine service has benefited hundreds of patients who have had questions about medications after their local pharmacy has closed. With this service, patients do not have to wait until morning to get answers but can speak with a trained pharmacist after hours.

[1405]

It is with this shared spirit of patient-centred care — a spirit shared by this province and its pharmacists — that I proclaim this week, March 7 to 13, 2005, inclusive, Pharmacy Awareness Week.

Secondly, I simply recognize a significant contribution by the member from Coquitlam-Maillardville, who yesterday made his 100th blood donation.

Introductions by Members

G. Hogg: Just when we thought the Minister of Family and Child Development was ageless, I'm informed by his staff that in fact he's not ageless and that he will be celebrating a momentous birthday tomorrow. His staff Sharon McKinnon, Forrest Parlee, Michelle Benham and Charmaine Wylie, along with all of us, wish him the very best on this birthday, which will entitle him to untold benefits in the future. Please extend best wishes to the Minister of Children and Family Development.

Hon. S. Brice: This afternoon I have the pleasure of introducing Shirley and Tony Blunt. They are constituents of the member for Victoria-Hillside. Shirley serves on the board of the Saanich Volunteer Services Society. Tony and Shirley are here to tour the Legislature and to

observe question period. I would ask the House to please make them welcome.

B. Kerr: I have two introductions to make. The first relates to the Women of Distinction Awards, which I will be speaking about in a few minutes. Seated in the public gallery are three representatives of the Women of Distinction Awards: Darlene Bailey, the Women of Distinction council chair; Brenda Parkinson, the program chair; and Maggie Kerr-Southin, the media and public relations chair. I ask that all members of the House recognize and welcome these women today.

Also, I would like to introduce three of my constituents. Gordon Stewart and two of his daughters, Charlotte and Lucy, are here. Gordon operates his own tree service business in greater Victoria. Both of his girls are members of the Girl Guides of Canada and are here wearing their uniforms today. I ask the House to please make them feel very welcome.

R. Stewart: It's my pleasure today to recognize some guests: M. Paul Deroy, representing La Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique; Denise Branter, president of La Société francophone de Victoria and president of the traditional dance troupe Les Cornouillers; Chantal Lefebvre, the director general of l'Association des écrivains francophones de la Colombie-Britannique — that's representing francophone writers; and Diane Tremblay, director general of La Société francophone de Victoria.

Each year we recognize Journée de la Francophonie on March 20. These folks have joined us today to recognize that our government has once again proclaimed March 20 as Journée de la Francophonie. That day will mark the culmination of the Victoria Francophone Festival, which starts on March 17. I invite all members to take part in the francophone celebrations here in Victoria. Would the House please make them welcome.

But even more important than those distinguished guests, it's also my pleasure today to introduce my daughter, Amanda Stewart, who has joined with her father for a day of roaming around the Legislature and trying to figure out what her father does. I'd like the House to please make her welcome.

H. Bloy: I would like to thank the member from Powell River for allowing me the opportunity to stand up and introduce someone today. I have two people from my riding and a guest. I have Chris Ferronato, who formerly worked in the House here, and his mother, Edith, along with their cousin, Cecilia Ferronato. She is visiting from Treviso, Italy, a region in Northern Italy just a few hours' drive from where the 2006 Winter Olympics will be held. She attends the University of Venice, where she's completing her studies in international business. She is in our great province for the first time on an international co-op program. Would the House please make them welcome.

[1410]

L. Mayencourt: It gives me great pleasure to introduce some legislative assistants that have been work-

ing for us for the last little while. First is my own legislative assistant, Nick Artemenkov, and Kevin Dixon, Laura O'Connor, Dustin Dunlop, Lisa Johnson and Marnie Llewellyn-Thomas. I also have the intern who is going to be following me for a little while, Graeme Hooper. I would ask that the House please make them all feel welcome.

I just have one more introduction, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce the member for Powell River-Sunshine Coast. [Laughter.]

G. Hogg: I'd like the House to join me in welcoming and thanking those paragons of intellect and wit known as the government caucus interns. They have hanging on their wall a list of the top ten things that interns love to hate. Number one on that list is working in the coolest building in town — in the basement.

Would you please welcome and thank the government caucus interns: Jake Ayers, Andrew Crabtree, Conor Donaldson, Graeme Hooper, Erin Rattan, Alayna van Leeuwen and Norah White.

Mr. Speaker: If there are no further.... Oh, the member for Powell River-Sunshine Coast. [Laughter.]

H. Long: Today in the House I have family members and friends. I've got to say that after four years of being in the House, it's the first time — I guess the second time — that I have had family here. I'm really pleased that they're here with me on the final day of this Legislature. It makes me proud to be their parent.

With us today I have my grandson, Kyle Tougas, who's from Powell River. I have my son, Craig Long, and his wonderful wife, Kim. She is now carrying and should be delivering in May my fifteenth grandchild. Also, I have with me my daughter, Brenda Birtig-Long. With her is her friend Trevor Cooper.

Believe me, the next person I will introduce has been one person that's been with me right through this whole ordeal in the Legislature. I've really enjoyed it, but she's enjoyed it here in Victoria as well. I want to recognize Mary-Lynn Hopkins, who's my friend and my love.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

THE GENUINE PROGRESS BOARD ACT, 2005

J. Kwan presented a bill intituled The Genuine Progress Board Act, 2005.

J. Kwan: I move the bill be introduced and read for a first time now.

Motion approved.

J. Kwan: This bill establishes the genuine progress board, which will give elected representatives and the public real information and advice on how best to

measure our economic achievements as well as efforts toward a clean and healthier environment and a better quality of life for all British Columbians. The board will look beyond traditional measures of progress that often don't account for how real people and communities are doing. It will give advice on how we move away from a boom-and-bust economic model to one that will sustain our communities in the long term.

The genuine progress board will be accountable to the Legislative Assembly rather than to the office of the Premier. Citizens from all regions of the province that represent the diversity of our province will be appointed by the assembly and not by the Premier or cabinet.

The genuine progress board will help us to make the right choices for the twenty-first century and will give us advice so we can best ensure that our economy meets the needs of the people in their communities and reflects the economic, social and environmental priorities of British Columbians.

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

[1415]

Bill M203 introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Statements (Standing Order 25B)

FAMILY CARE MODEL FOR SENIORS

J. Bray: Today I wish to raise an idea whose time I think has come — an idea that can assist with how we provide care to frail elderly living in our communities. We are all very aware of family care homes for children, also referred to as foster care. We have moved over the last two decades to community living for adults with developmental disabilities. In both examples, we moved away from purely institutional care to that more closely resembling a family home model.

I believe that in many cases family care homes can provide excellent care to frail elderly. In particular, when family caregivers, often an elderly spouse, need some respite care, a neighbourhood network of professionally supported family homes could offer this care. This is an idea that members of my community have brought to me, and I believe it is worth researching.

The care can be provided by health employees looking for alternative work models or by families already providing care for a senior family member and struggling to balance out-of-home work with their caregiving responsibilities. Providing care for another senior or three clients in a month in weekly instalments would allow that caregiver to be employed in the home while caring for their own family member.

As our population ages, the demand for residential care and respite services will outpace our ability to build and fund them. The family care model could ease

some of the pressure, provide more respite for families caring for a senior and improve the quality of life of both the senior and their family caregiver. As we embrace the concepts of aging in place and family helping family, we need creative solutions to support caregivers. Although a relatively new concept here and not one that would suit all seniors — nor one that all families might choose — I sense that there is a pool of care providers ready to open their homes to provide seniors care and families and seniors who would look to respite opportunities in a family setting as opposed to more institutional models.

IMPACT OF WIND FARMS ON WILDLIFE HABITAT

E. Brenzinger: A wildlife survey for the Knob Hill wind farm development has discovered a provincial treasure in a rare bottom bog: the only confirmed nesting sites of the blue-listed greater sandhill crane on Vancouver Island. Windmills kill birds. I am in a dilemma. I support alternative energy, but my heart is with the cranes. Can they survive 150 turbines?

The greater sandhill crane stands six feet tall. In flight, it is majestic. Its wingspan reaches two metres. Its call, a sound like no other, can carry a mile. There are only, at last count, 36 confirmed nesting sites for this species on the B.C. coast — 28 in the Queen Charlottes, four at Burns Bog, two at Pitt Polder and now two in northern Vancouver Island. Which do we choose — the windmills or the sandhill cranes?

Here's the irony. Sea Breeze Power Corp. has just received an environmental certificate for Knob Hill. It has invested nearly \$10 million in pursuing alternative energy in this province. At first it planned 50 turbines for Boundary Bay, but since that is a refuge for waterfowl, the North Island was recommended instead.

This government has disappointed the Tlatlasikwala and Quatsino. This government has failed to fully consult and accommodate their interests. When they sought accommodation, you told them it was against government policy. Why doesn't this government help our first nations? First nations are offended at this government.

The wind farm industry is also offended by this government. It should be insisting that B.C. Hydro let the producers into the grid. Instead, B.C. Hydro has brought us Duke Point. You should have species-at-risk legislation with effective inventories and clear habitat destinations to give certainty for developers and wildlife alike. This government should be resolving the issues of title. The wind industry has staked out nearly a million hectares. If you propose a major sell-off of B.C. lands, the people, especially first nations, deserve to know. Thank you very much for letting me share my dilemma.

WOMEN OF DISTINCTION AWARDS

B. Kerr: It gives me a great deal of pleasure to recognize the eleventh annual Victoria Women of Distinc-

tion Awards. Sponsored by and a fundraiser for the YM-YWCA of Greater Victoria, the event not only honours inspirational women of Vancouver Island but also supports women, children and families and their involvement in programs and services of the Y.

[1420]

Since the first awards night held in 1995, the Victoria Women of Distinction Awards has honoured 740 women as nominees and 103 as award recipients. More than 7,600 people have attended the event over the years, and more than \$390,000 has been raised for the YM-YWCA of Greater Victoria.

This year 56 women from all walks of life from Vancouver Island have been nominated in nine different categories. Individuals and organizations have nominated these women for their achievements, vision and inspiration of others.

On May 19, a gala awards night will be held at the Victoria Conference Centre, at which time the organizers will shine a light on these exceptional women, ten of whom will become recipients of the prestigious Women of Distinction Award.

Mr. Speaker: That concludes members' statements.

Oral Questions

INVESTIGATION OF CHILD DEATHS AND INDEPENDENCE OF CHILD AND YOUTH OFFICER

J. MacPhail: In the 14 years I have been in politics, one of the most difficult issues I have ever had to deal with was the death of Matthew Vaudreuil. Because of the Gove report, which our government implemented in the wake of the little boy's death, Matthew Vaudreuil did not die in vain. Does the Minister of Children and Family Development support the recommendations of the Gove report?

Hon. S. Hagen: Indeed, that was a tragedy. Every once in a while something like that happens. I can tell you that this government supports anything that will make life better for the children and families of British Columbia.

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

J. MacPhail: I have been surprised over the last few days at how singularly unprepared this minister is to embrace the work of the past decade around this matter. One of the Gove report's key recommendations was to establish independent officers to investigate and report on the deaths and injuries of children. With the full support of the Premier, the current Premier, the former government implemented that recommendation.

Here's what the current Premier told the House when he was opposition leader: "When a child dies, we should investigate. We should investigate independ-

ently." To the minister: why did the Premier say one thing in opposition and do the exact opposite once elected?

Hon. S. Hagen: I would like to quote from a letter today sent by Jane Morley, the child and youth officer for British Columbia, where she indeed talks about the Gove inquiry. She says:

"The problems that the Gove inquiry highlighted ten years ago have complex causes and are not susceptible to easy fixes. They require a transformation in the child welfare system. Transformations do not happen overnight. They only happen with leadership from those responsible and when those working in the system embrace the change."

The problem with the watchdog model...

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. S. Hagen: ...that was being proposed by the people that the member opposite is referring to is that the model that appears to underline the vision of these former officials who signed the letter... It also insinuates that they will not do their job properly and professionally, which in fact I believe they are doing.

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

J. MacPhail: When this bench was in opposition, they hammered the then government day after day after day to implement the Gove report recommendations, and that government did.

In the past the children's commissioner and the child and family youth advocate were free to investigate the deaths and injuries of children independently without having to seek permission from the Attorney General, which today Jane Morley does. She has to seek permission from the Attorney General to investigate. No political interference whatsoever existed in the past. That's real independence. That independence is gone now. This government says they've eliminated duplication of those offices. Fine, but can the minister tell British Columbians why they also eliminated the independence of those offices?

Hon. S. Hagen: Let me tell the truth. Here's what Jane Morley...

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Listen to the answer, please.

[1425]

Hon. S. Hagen: Here's what Jane Morley, who is the child and youth officer for British Columbia, has written today in answer to the accusations made really against her.

"It is simply untrue to say that I answer to the Attorney General, as one of the three authors stated on a CBC

interview. Nor do I answer to the Minister of Children and Family Development or to the Premier. I am free to say publicly what I think about government-funded services for children, youth and families — or about any other issue related to children and youth. I have not, in the two years I have held this position, felt threatened in this independence or been directed by the Attorney General in how to fulfill my statutory responsibilities."

J. Kwan: The minister says Jane Morley can do the job. Then yesterday the Solicitor General says the coroner's office can do the job. Well, in opposition the Premier said: "The coroner is no substitute for reviews." In Matthew Vaudreuil's case, the report was a one-page report from the coroner.

We know that Jane Morley's office does not have the independent authority that the previous watchdogs had. The government took that authority away. The reality is that Jane Morley does not have the authority to investigate deaths or critical injuries without the authorization of the Attorney General.

Can the minister explain why the government thinks that Jane Morley or the coroner, who actually do not have the independent authority to investigate deaths or critical injuries around children, are somehow a sufficient substitute for the independent child protection watchdog that used to be in place, which the government supported when they were in opposition?

Hon. S. Hagen: I'm really pleased to quote again from the letter from Jane Morley, the child and youth officer, where she says:

"Nor do I agree that I do not have the necessary tools to monitor the system effectively. If anything, I have wider authority than the previous 'watchdogs.' I have the right to any government information I deem necessary to do my job, and part of my job is to monitor government in relation to the legislative and policy standards it has set for itself.

"Furthermore...."

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The question was listened to with respect. Let's have the same courtesy for the answer, please.

Hon. S. Hagen: The letter to the Premier laments the end of a number of accountability mechanisms that previously resided with the organizations that the former officials had. Each one of the mechanisms listed remains within the authority of an independent statutory officer: the ombudsman, the chief coroner, and the child and youth officer. The public need not be concerned on that front.

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

J. Kwan: The minister and this government should know full well that Jane Morley, the current child and youth officer, does not have the independent authority

to investigate deaths or critical injuries of children in the province. That authority and that mandate have been taken away by this government after they took office. The statute does not allow her to have that authority.

The reality is that the government would only investigate deaths or critical injuries if the Attorney General authorizes it with a political lens. That is the reality and that is the law today.

Will the minister finally do the right thing and reinstate the authority of the child and youth officer — the independent authority that they used to have? Or is the minister saying that Joyce Preston, Cynthia Morton and Dulcie McCallum are wrong in their assessment of what the government has taken away in terms of that independent authority?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order.

Hon. S. Hagen: I'll tell you one thing this government will not do, and that's play politics with kids' lives.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

[1430]

Hon. S. Hagen: The real issue here is not whether the watchdog authority exists, because it does, but how it is being exercised.

Jane Morley goes on to say....

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. S. Hagen: Yes, I have met with her — twice, actually.

"With great respect for these former officials, all of whom were very dedicated to their work and have the best...."

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. S. Hagen: Mr. Speaker, I really wish they would listen to this. If they would listen to this, they would get it. Okay?

"With great respect for these former officials, all of whom were very dedicated to their work and have the best interests of children and youth at heart, the evidence does not support the proposition that the previous way of holding the government accountable was noticeably improving things for children and youth."

J. Brar: It is very interesting — Jane Morley. The question was asked by the opposition, and the answer

goes to the minister. That tells the story of how independent she is. Matthew Vaudreuil was not in care. He was left with his mother but was known to the ministry. It is why the Gove report led to the independent investigation of both children in care and children known to the ministry.

Can the Minister of Children and Family Development point to a single public and independent investigation carried out into the death or critical injury of a child known to the ministry and a single change in public policy this government has made as a result of an investigation into the death of a child?

Hon. S. Hagen: I would like to clarify something. Was the member opposite insinuating that the child and youth officer is not independent?

Interjections.

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

The member for Surrey-Panorama Ridge has a supplementary question.

J. Brar: I don't understand what the question is. Can the minister clarify the question?

Interjections.

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

CONSULTATION WITH FIRST NATIONS ON WIND POWER PROJECTS

E. Brenzinger: To the Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection. This government made a great show of its new measures for the protection of species at risk last year. We now see how hollow that promise was. Wildlife Canada's call for a full-year study of species at risk at Knob Hill was ignored before an environmental certificate was issued.

My question is: why have you signed off without consulting the elders of the Tlatasikwala about traditional use of the land, and how much of B.C. do you propose to sell off before you look at the real issues?

Hon. G. Abbott: I hope this is not indicative of the research capacity of DRBC when and if they ever actually elect a member to this House, because the member is entirely wrong. The EAO processes look exhaustively at the issues and interests that are raised by first nations in these processes. The member may not know it, but first nations are partners in a number of the wind power developments that are going to be coming on stream on Vancouver Island.

For her to suggest that we do not consult appropriately or accommodate appropriately is completely misguided, and she should go back and check with her research staff what the real story is.

IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT
POLICY CHANGES ON CHILD SAFETY

J. Brar: Let me clarify that. The current child and youth officer does not have the independent authority to investigate a death of a child and a serious injury issue, and I think the minister should know that.

[1435]

This government would like to talk about reducing the number of children in care. That is a sound public policy, as long as the family home is safe. But keeping children out of care also saves the government money. When a government has a drastic cost-cutting agenda like this one, the importance of independent oversight becomes even more crucial. This was one of the main points made by the child protection expert in the letter to the Premier.

Perhaps the minister can tell me this: since this government eliminated the independent watchdogs and cut the ministry budget by \$200 million, are children in B.C. more safe? Yes or no?

Hon. S. Hagen: The member opposite referred to the letter to the Premier. Again, I say that the letter to the Premier laments the end of a number of accountability mechanisms — which I think is what he's getting at — that previously resided with the organizations that the former officials led.

Here's what the child and youth officer says: "Each one of the mechanisms listed remains within the authority of an independent statutory officer: the ombudsman, the chief coroner and the child and youth officer."

I can say that in addition to that, this ministry has a record of being open and accountable during a child's death. For an example — and this was raised by the opposition yesterday — in the case of C.W., this ministry held a press conference to publicly release the results of our findings and recommendations. This has been and will continue to be our practice.

[End of question period.]

Tabling Documents

Mr. Speaker: Hon. members, I have the honour to present the annual report of the Legislative Assembly Management Committee, 2004-05.

Ministerial Statements

CLOSING OF THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT
AND RETIREMENT OF MLAS

Hon. G. Bruce: I rise today to make a ministerial statement in respect to the thirty-seventh parliament and the members that have sat in this House, both in this parliament and in parliaments before. Perhaps we can pause a moment and reflect on how wonderful it is that we can sit in this place and argue and shout and debate and that, when it is all said and done, nobody

gets hurt. Well, there have been a few times that my feelings have been hurt. There's been once or twice that that's happened. I've been hurt to the quick.

Often, in watching the debate that takes place here and not having the feel of what's taking place on the floor, people don't perhaps fully appreciate that this forum allows for us — in this country, in this province — the opportunity to explore new ways of doing things, to argue about past ways of having done things and to look to the future in whichever direction we think the future may be.

Today there are a fair number of members here that have spent time in this place. They have done their constituents proud. They have honoured the tradition of this House and what it means to be a member in this House. I will just mention a few.

I look across at my friend from Malahat-Juan de Fuca, who came newly elected, not having been in politics before, to this particular forum and found it different than running a grocery business. Having said that, he enjoyed himself — I know — thoroughly.

Beside him is the member for Esquimalt-Metchosin, who brought a whole different flavour to this House. He did just a super job and rallied hard — and us with him. We wish him well as we go forward.

To the member for Richmond Centre, who has a very statesmanlike appeal and approach himself and who has done his constituents and the government very, very well during his time on the front bench.

To the minister — not the minister; she was a minister.... To the member for Nanaimo-Parksville, who sits across there with this incredibly beaming smile. I'm not sure why she's smiling so much and some of us aren't. I know her constituents are very, very appreciative, certainly, of the job that she has done for Nanaimo-Parksville.

The member for West Vancouver-Garibaldi, who in his search and climb to make sure that we could bring the Olympics to Whistler and to this province did yeoman service, not only for that constituency but for British Columbia and Canada as well.

To the member for Kelowna-Lake Country, who has added that statesmanlike approach, sitting there in the chair from time to time — where did he go? There he is over there — and who stood in when it was necessary and added an element of calmness to this House when calmness was required.

[1440]

To the member for Delta North, who in his quiet careful way — where has he gone? There he is over there — has added quiet wisdom to this House and to our caucus as well.

The effervescent member for Port Moody-Westwood has quietly spent many times, many days, in this place and is one who we know will be spending many hours and days with her children.

Then my good friend from Powell River-Sunshine Coast, who came to this House in 1986 when I first came.... We had the character-building time of being elected and then being defeated. You know, there is

character-building in being defeated. I don't recommend it, but some people may.

Then, of course, our longstanding member for Vancouver-Langara, who has added quiet and serious comfort to us from time to time in our deliberations and our debate. We certainly have appreciated that very, very much through the years — right from 1991 through to now.

Then of course there is the ever-present Leader of the Opposition. You and I have....

J. MacPhail: You are the brains trust — honestly.

Hon. G. Bruce: Well, thank you. I'm still glowing over that, you know. We've done a fair number of nights together in this House. I have enjoyed the debate with you. It has always been a challenge to try and be out in front or at least running hard to catch up. I think that that has done us very, very well — the opportunity to have that type of debate.

It does concern me a little bit, though — and I know that we need to have this question answered — because there was a very glowing article that was written in the *Vancouver Sun* today where the member for Vancouver-Hastings said that she promised she won't ever return to politics. Quote: "I'm saying never." Does the Leader of the Opposition mean ever or never? Or never, ever? Or never, never? Or maybe? I think that in time that will become evident.

What also was concerning me.... I have watched members from the opposite side of the House — a few Premiers and others — fall into doing work for other political organizations. There was a particular quote, and it sort of stems off the aspect of the Leader of the Opposition's mention of perhaps moving into the entrepreneurial field — small business and so on. This quote — I don't think it's very old — said: "We are cutting red tape. We're cutting the cost of doing business. We're lowering taxes, and it's working. The economy is on the move." Is it true that you are advising the B.C. Liberal campaign team? There is no truth to that.

J. MacPhail: We'll talk. [Laughter.]

Hon. G. Bruce: We'll talk. There's always an opening.

I would like to wish all of the members that have served in this House and served this province and the people of their constituency good fortune. Godspeed to you all. Thank you on behalf of the people of British Columbia for doing the job that you have done and for coming and spending time in serving this province and this country.

[1445]

J. Kwan: I would like to respond to the minister's statement.

First of all, I would of course like to echo the sentiment of the Government House Leader. We, too, in the opposition caucus wish to thank every single member

who has served this House. They served this House in their own fashion. I'm going to choose my words cautiously. I might add that sometimes some members might be headed in the wrong direction. Nonetheless, people served in this House. I do believe that each and every one of us entered into politics because we want to make a difference in people's lives in a positive way. For that, the opposition caucus wishes to thank every single member who is in the class of '91 and beyond.

It is my understanding, in fact, that there will only be, perhaps, one returning member — perhaps two — from the class of '91 after May 17. So there are many people who will be exiting these hallways and this chamber most likely for the last time, although as they say, you never say never in politics.

I would also just like to add a few words. I actually have a script to assist me in not getting too emotional as I say my thanks to my colleague. First of all, I would like to say that sitting in the gallery today we have a group of very special people. They're here with us today to help send off the longstanding member for Vancouver-Hastings — the MLA for Vancouver-Hastings. They are her fiancé, the charming James Shavick, who treats my colleague, the member for Vancouver-Hastings, with love and respect — the way she should always be treated.

J. MacPhail: That's on *Hansard*. [Laughter.]

J. Kwan: I have no doubt that he will. I have no doubt in my mind that he will.

The leader of the B.C. New Democrats, Carole James, will carry on the torch in this chamber after May 17 — in a different capacity than the current Opposition House Leader's capacity — along with her husband, of course, Al Gerow.

Of course, all of our caucus staff and friends are also here today. I have to say — and I know that my colleague from Vancouver-Hastings shares these sentiments — our success as "the little caucus that could" is in no small measure due to the fact that we have this small group of dedicated and committed people behind the scenes working with us. On behalf of the NDP opposition caucus, we thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I know it is unparliamentary to refer to a member by name, but why stop here? I've been accused of being unparliamentary all of the time. So I'm going to ask the House to indulge me for, I hope, one last time — for a moment.

Joy, my good friend, all these friends are here today to send you off in style. You have been and you are an inspiration to all of us. I don't have to tell you how challenging it has been for the last four years. I don't have to tell you how incredibly rewarding it has been as well. I've been so proud to stand here, to sit here next to you in this House and to travel with you all over the province, to represent the countless British Columbians who have not been represented by this government.

For 14 years you celebrated your birthday in this building, and I've got to tell you: that is a personal sacrifice that few can actually say.... We know that MLAs travel away from their home and from their families to do the work on behalf of their constituents. People do not necessarily know the toll that comes with it. But we all do it, and we do it with pride, because it is a privilege to represent the people in our communities.

Today, Joy, you'll leave this House for the last time. We're all very happy for you, on a personal note. I know that on the government side, they're ecstatic. Question period will never be the same again without your unique blend of heckles. The halls of the Legislature will never be the same again without your infamous laughter. We will miss that. I will miss that.

[1450]

The work you have done both in government and over the last four years in opposition has been an inspiration to countless people across the province and the country. I cannot imagine sitting in this House without you, side by side, and I'll always treasure the memories of the past four years. I'll treasure our friendship, and I know that our friendship will continue as you move onto the next chapter of your career and your life.

I know that all members of this House and certainly everyone who has joined us in the gallery today will wish to join me in wishing you nothing but the very best and in thanking you for the 14 years of service, of incredible dedication and commitment to public service.

Finally, I want to say a big thank you to Jack Scott, her son, who's 17 today. For 14 years he's shared his mom with all of us. Thank you. [Applause.]

Mr. Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

J. MacPhail: Okay, Mr. Speaker, you're all invited to the wedding. [Laughter.]

Orders of the Day

Hon. G. Bruce: I call continuation of debate on committee stage of Bill 20.

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 2:53 p.m.

The Chair: Hon. members, the committee will come to order, and we will have a recess to the call of the Chair.

The House recessed from 2:54 p.m. to 3:02 p.m.

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

On section 1 (continued).

J. Kwan: This pre-election budget, of course, also deals with the issue around child care, on which I wish to canvass the minister at this point. We began some of that debate yesterday in and around issues with the Minister of Children and Family Development, and then we ran out of time. I'm going to take this opportunity to ask some questions around the child care services area. Let me first of all, though, put on record the lay of the land, if you will, around what the government has done to date in this sector.

As one of the first acts, the new B.C. Liberal government cancelled the Child Care B.C. program, which was the former government's, the NDP government's, universal child care initiative. At the end of the 2002 school year, the Liberal government eliminated the \$7-a-day before-and-after-school child care program. They eliminated that program.

Then the Liberal government cut subsidies for low-income parents, putting child care out of reach for thousands of B.C. families. They lowered income thresholds for the programs, so fewer people could qualify. Those who still did received a smaller subsidy, resulting in the pulling of thousands of B.C. children from quality licensed care and the closure of many day care programs.

The Liberal government chose to tie child care operating grants to enrolment. As a result of that, public funds are disproportionately supporting care for children from affluent families. The Liberal government also eliminated the requirement that operating funding be used to keep fees affordable and wages adequate. As a result, fees are on the increase, and wages are on the decline, hurting both affordability for parents and quality care for their children.

The Liberal government also funnelled federal dollars designated for child care into a whole range of provincial health programs, from pregnancy counselling to midwifery to immunizations.

[1505]

Don't get me wrong, Mr. Chair. It's not that I think those are not important programs. It's that I think those are programs that should be funded out of the health care budget and not the child care budget. The minister in this budget, putting in \$4 million in this pre-election budget.... They're allocating \$4 million to child care services, in addition to the budget that was tabled last year.

Does the minister think that \$4 million in this pre-election budget comes anywhere close to undoing the damage that his government has done to child care services, to children and families in the province of British Columbia?

Hon. C. Hansen: One of the things that is not reflected in Budget 2005 is the increased federal contribution to child care across Canada. As the member will know, they have committed \$5 billion over the next five years nationally. British Columbia's share of that,

we anticipate — although it's not certain yet — will be somewhere around 13 percent of that.

We are currently in discussions with the federal government, and the ministers responsible have met. The provincial and territorial ministers have met with the federal minister responsible, and once that agreement is finalized, we will have to come back to the House with a supplemental estimate to seek the authority for those dollars.

We are working with the federal government for the expenditure of those increased dollars. We have made a commitment that all of those additional dollars coming from the federal government will be dedicated to child care, just as we ensured that all of the increase of federal dollars for health was in fact reflected in the health expenditures. We don't know yet exactly what that time line will be, but I know the ministry is working as closely as we can to move that forward as fast as we can.

J. Kwan: That's the federal pot of money, which is not in this budget. I'd like to ask the minister about what is in this budget and is, therefore, part of the interim supply bill debate. The government's budget document does not show how much money will go to child care. Child care is lumped together with early childhood development and supports to children with special needs in the Ministry of Children and Family Development's budget.

I'd like to know how much money will go to child care out of the \$395.6 million budgeted for those various programs in the '05-06 budget. Could the minister please give me a breakdown of that? Will the minister also advise, out of this interim supply budget, how much of that \$13 billion will be going into child care?

Hon. C. Hansen: In the child care program that was originally with Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services and was transferred to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the base budget for that last year was \$173.155 million. That is being increased by \$4 million in the coming year's budget, so the amount that is being appropriated as a result of this interim supply would be approximately 50 percent of that to provide for the first six months of operations.

J. Kwan: Does the minister think this \$4 million would actually cover off what the government had cut in the last four years in this area?

Hon. C. Hansen: As I mentioned earlier, there is an opportunity to expand child care services further in the province. The details are yet to be worked out with the federal government in that regard, but the allocation that is here meets the objectives set out in the ministry's service plan.

[1510]

J. Kwan: Then the answer is no. It actually does not cover off what had been cut in the last four years from

the area of child care. Four million dollars does not do it.

Now, the minister mentions the federal dollars. In my calculation, it is over five years. Out of the \$5 billion from the federal government for the provinces and the territories, it is anticipated that British Columbia will receive something like \$650 million over five years. That's approximately \$130 million per year.

I'd like to ask the minister this question: is it this government's commitment to spend every single dollar from the federal government on child care — strictly on child care services?

Hon. C. Hansen: The short answer is yes, but I will just restate for clarity. Every dollar that the federal government has put into their child care program, which is the \$5 billion over five years — as I indicated, we anticipate about 13 percent of that will be earmarked for British Columbia, although that is not finalized yet.... Every dollar that is allocated for British Columbia as a result of that child care program will be spent on child care in this province.

J. Kwan: Could the minister please advise which child care programs these dollars would be dedicated for? And the \$4 million that's allocated in this budget.... Which child care programs will the \$4 million go towards?

Hon. C. Hansen: With regard to the last question, as far as the \$4 million lift in the budget, I don't have that detail as to where specifically that would get targeted. That would be a question for the Minister of Children and Family Development during an estimates discussion.

Regarding the first part of the question, as to where the federal dollars would be allocated, we don't know that yet. We are still in discussions with the federal government. I know there have been proposals back and forth that the Minister of Children and Family Development has been working on. The details are yet to be determined. As soon as we do get them finalized, we will seek the authority of the House at the earliest opportunity to move forward with that.

J. Kwan: Does the minister consider pregnancy counselling to be in child care programs?

Hon. C. Hansen: Again, that's a question that would be more appropriately put to the minister responsible. I will certainly make the question known to the minister.

J. Kwan: Well, no. The minister just earlier said that every single federal dollar the government receives would go into child care. That's what he said, and that's on record, but we know from past practices that when those dedicated dollars from the federal government were supposed to go into child care, they didn't, even though the government pretended that somehow they

did. They put dollars into things like pregnancy counselling, midwifery, and so on.

As I said, I'm not saying that those are not important programs. They are. But they're not child care programs. I'd like to get some clarity from the minister on what he considers to be child care programs so that there will be no mistakes when it comes to allocating those dollars.

The minister refuses to tell us how much will go into what program. Well then, let's find out. What is considered to be a child care program in the definition of this Minister of Finance and this government?

Hon. C. Hansen: The parameters of how the federal dollars could be spent will be determined through the agreements the provinces and territories sign with the federal government. We are committed to ensuring that all of those dollars flow for those intended purposes, and the actual definitions and scope are some things that would be included in the agreement.

J. Kwan: Come clean, and tell British Columbians what your intentions are. This Minister of Finance, just moments ago, on record, said that all of those federal dollars would go towards child care. He said that definitively. Let's find out what is considered to be child care from this minister's point of view and this government's point of view.

It's not a trick question. The opposition has already stated our point of view on what we consider to be child care and what is not. It's not a trick question. It doesn't need some federal-provincial negotiations to find out what is child care and what is not child care. One ought to know that.

[1515]

I'm going to give the minister another chance to answer that question, because child care advocates in the community are very concerned about whether or not the government will actually flow the child care dollars through from the federal government into the area of child care. Experiences in the last four years have demonstrated that they have not.

The government wants British Columbians and child care advocates to trust them and to believe them on their word to do what they say they will do, but their track record is poor on that front. Now is the minister's chance to make the commitment in this House that all of the federal dollars will actually go into child care, as he has said, and to let British Columbians know now what is deemed to be child care from the provincial Liberal government's point of view.

Hon. C. Hansen: With all due respect to the member, how she defines child care in this context is irrelevant. What is relevant is how the federal government, in their agreements with the provinces, define child care. It is their \$5 billion that they are flowing to the provinces, and they will do it with agreements in terms of how those dollars can or cannot be spent.

Those are the agreements that are being worked out now. We will adhere to those agreements and those

definitions as they're set out, and we will ensure that every dollar that is allocated to British Columbia is spent for those explicit purposes. It's not up to us to define what constitutes child care. It is up to the federal government and those agreements that are subsequently signed.

J. Kwan: Sorry, but the minister can't just get away with that. He's right from the point of view that the question is not about how I define child care. It isn't. It is about how child care advocates in our community define child care, and it is about how this Liberal government defines child care.

We know that in the last four years, their definition of child care is so huge that one could drive a truck through it. We know that health care programs that were formerly — under the previous administration — funded out of the health care budget somehow, under the Liberal government's mandate.... They took child care dollars to fund those health care programs, and then they claimed they are child care programs, when in reality, they are not. The federal government knows that. The provincial government should know that. British Columbians certainly know that.

The question at hand here is this: given that it's the provincial government that will be at the negotiating tables with the federal government, how and what is it that they're going to put forward at this table, and how are they going to define child care?

It's a simple question that I'm going to put. Let's just sort of go down a list to see what the minister considers to be child care or not. Pregnancy counselling: is that a child care service?

Hon. C. Hansen: Perhaps it will help the member if I outline for her what the principles are that will be guiding this agreement. To date, the provinces, territories and the federal government have agreed on four principles to guide the \$5 billion investment in a national vision of early learning and child care.

First of all, it's quality. High-quality early learning and child care services are grounded in leading practices with an appropriate complement of qualified staff. Secondly, it's universally inclusive. Universally inclusive means early learning and child care services are open to all preschool children, including children with special needs, aboriginal children and children with differing cultural and linguistic circumstances.

Thirdly, accessible. Early learning and child care services are broadly available and affordable. Fourthly, developmental. Developmental early learning and child care services promote healthy development and contribute to improved lifetime outcomes in the areas of social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.

[1520]

These are four principles that have been set out by the federal government and approved by the provinces and territories, and that's where they are at, so far, in their discussions. They have agreed on that so far.

There's still a lot of work to be done before those agreements can be finalized.

J. Kwan: I appreciate the minister reading the list of the federal requirements for the \$5 billion commitment to the provinces, but that's not my question. I already know the list that the federal government has put out.

The minister earlier said that every single dollar from the federal government will be put towards child care. He said it. It is in *Hansard*. Now I'm asking for clarification of what this minister considers to be child care. It's not complicated. Does the minister consider pregnancy counselling to be child care services?

The minister has already said on record moments ago that this government will commit all the federal dollars to child care. But what is child care, exactly, in the minds of this minister and this government? That's what the child care advocates want to know, and that's what I want to know. Is it such a difficult thing to understand, to decide whether or not pregnancy counselling is part of the child care service?

Let me ask another one. Is immunization considered to be child care services in the minds of this Minister of Finance and this government?

Hon. C. Hansen: I guess to come back to the point I made before, what my definitions are is not relevant, and what the member's definitions are is not relevant. What is relevant is what the language will be in the child care agreement with the federal government. It will set out the scope of how these dollars can be spent. We will adhere to that scope, and we will ensure that every dollar that flows from the federal government as a result of that agreement is spent on the intended purposes.

J. Kwan: What is relevant is the credibility of this minister and this government. They said they were going to put child care dollars into child care. Over the last four years, they did not. That's why they cancelled the universal child care program, because they took money away from child care services and put it elsewhere that they claim are child care services. That's why they cut subsidies to families and children who needed child care support. That's why they cut and stopped funding the wages for child care providers in and around the province.

That's why child care centres had to close. That's why this government caused the situation where child care centres across the province had to close, because they changed the policy around how child care centres would be funded. Those are huge ramifications for the families and children in British Columbia in the area of child care.

Dr. Clyde Hertzman, a renowned expert in early childhood development, has said time and time again, and there has been report after report after report that indicates this, that proper, quality child care is essential to early childhood development. Yet this government saw fit to actually take away resources in that sector. That's what the government did. As a consequence,

many families and many children have not been able to access quality child care.

[1525]

In fact, when I travelled the province a couple of years ago, I spoke with a woman who, when the government cut child care subsidies and changed those programs, lost her job as a result of that, because she could no longer afford child care services. She was a single mom. She lost her job because she had no reliable, quality child care she could depend on. As a result, she was put into a compromised position of having to accept employment that puts her and her child at risk. I'm not going to say who it is or even what community, for that matter. In small communities, people may well know who I'm referring to, and I want to protect the identity of this family.

The issue here is this: the government cut those programs. They took money away from child care programs, and families and children were left without. How could the minister back up his own words just moments ago when he answered my question definitively that all of the federal dollars would actually go into child care, when he knows very well that immunization cannot be counted as child care services and that pregnancy counselling is not a child care service?

It's not that complicated to know what's a child care service and what is not. The minister is only pretending to make it complicated so he could walk away with trying to fool British Columbians once again. That is the real agenda here — isn't it, Mr. Chair? The child care advocates know it, and British Columbians know it. It is time for this minister and this government to know that the gig is up. They can no longer try and fool British Columbians the way that they have in the last four years.

This is a pre-election campaign budget. The minister should come clean and tell British Columbians what it is they intend to fund, what funds they receive and where it is they intend to put those moneys. That's why we need line-by-line budget debate, ministry-by-ministry debate, instead of this sham where the government is asking for authority to spend \$13 billion and not telling British Columbians where they're going to put those dollars and how they're going to spend that money. They wouldn't even answer simple questions around how the government would define child care.

I'd like to move to another area, because time is of the essence. The government is going to shut down the Legislature at 5:45. They're going to shut down debate, and there will be no further opportunities before the election to put questions to the minister.

Interjection.

J. Kwan: The minister wants to respond? Great. I will listen to the minister to see what he has to say.

Hon. C. Hansen: I just want the member to reflect back on what happened. What she's talking about when she talks about universal child care is a program

that the NDP government brought in right at the end of their term, when they were going into an election. Based on a one-year spike in revenues to government....

Interjection.

The Chair: Member, member. Minister. Member. Please give us some respect here. Let's hear the minister.

Hon. C. Hansen: We had a one-year spike in energy revenues as a result of the energy crisis down in California and the increased sales of natural gas and electricity that resulted from that. What resulted from the one-year spike is that the previous government started ramping up program spending as if they were going to be able to count on those one-time dollars year after year.

When they rolled out a universal child care program, it was not with any kind of fiscal responsibility in terms of how that program would be funded, because they knew at the time that it was going to cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Yet they pushed that program out, knowing this province could not afford it based on the revenues to government that were being projected. That is not responsible.

What we are doing is making sure in our budget planning that we actually forecast our revenues in a very responsible way; that we know exactly how much money government can spend next year, the year after and the year after; and that we build our programs with that in sight, so that we never again go back into the kind of deficit spending we saw in the 1990s.

When we talk about a \$3.8 billion structural deficit that we inherited, the structural deficit was there because of the kinds of programs that government ramped up in assuming these one-time moneys would be there year after year, when they themselves knew that was not the case.

[1530]

J. Kwan: What nonsense. This government constructed the fiction about this structural deficit. That this government actually.... Day one in office, before they even looked at the books, they gave the biggest tax cuts to the biggest corporations and the wealthiest British Columbians. Then they proceeded to cut programs in an unprecedented way. Then they took away services, then they increased fees, and then they increased taxes all over the different areas in the services that the government provides to British Columbians.

The list is long in terms of the increased fees and increased taxes, whether it be property taxes or gas and fuel taxes. Even for a period of time the government increased the PST and increased fees and delisted services. The ministers know very well that the universal child care program was going to be funded in part by the loss of the tax revenues that this government had actually put in place on day one of them being elected, and by federal government dollars on an agreement that was negotiated with the previous government and committed to child care.

The government took away those dollars from child care and cut programs. That's what they did, and what we have now is a significantly watered-down child care provision in British Columbia. The new federal dollars that are supposed to be flow through later on.... On the one hand, this minister likes to say: "Oh yeah, we're going to commit every single one of those dollars to child care." But in a backhanded, sneaky kind of way...

The Chair: Member, member, member....

J. Kwan: ...he's going to break that promise and put the dollars elsewhere, not in child care.

The Chair: Member, take your seat, please. You're starting to get into some unparliamentary language here. I think the word "sneaky" is not a very respectful way to refer to the minister. Be a little more respectful here, please.

Carry on.

J. Kwan: The record shows what the government has done. This is what the government is going to do again, unless they say clearly and definitively what it is they intend to do. But this minister would not commit to that. He's going to find some loophole, a gigantic loophole that he'll want to drive through to say: "Hey, when I said that I'm going to commit all the federal dollars to child care, what I mean by child care is immunization programs, not child care services."

He's going to find a way to do that, Mr. Chair. That's my prediction. That's been their record, and that's what this government is going to do. They're going to fabricate some reason why they can't afford it. The real truth is this: they don't support child care. The current Minister of State for Women's Services was actually on record in her own community paper saying that she does not support child care. The former Minister of State for Long Term Care was on record saying that child care is for tennis moms.

Those are the real reasons why this government is not being an advocate for child care — because they don't believe in child care services. Never mind that Dr. Clyde Hertzman and others, experts in the field, have said that early childhood development includes access to quality child care.

I have to admit that I have an almost-two-year-old, and she started child care in a licensed day care environment about a month ago. Already, I have to tell you that I see the things that she has learned from this child care centre, the peer-to-peer relationships that she's developing and how she is working through some of the challenges that we know as parents of two-year-olds — what they call the terrible twos — learning how to share and to communicate with others and not just to say "mine, mine, mine" all the time.

[1535]

Those are the kinds of things.... Yes, parents absolutely play a role. Make no mistake about that. But we also know that in the child care environment, in the

qualified quality child care forum, those early years of development will pay dividends in the future lives of these children. I already see some of those benefits in the short period in which my daughter has been in a day care. I only wish the same access for every parent. That's what I'm asking for. I'm not even saying that every parent should put their children into day care. It's their choice.

What I'm saying is that every parent, every family should have the choice to do that and should have the opportunity to do that, if they wish to do so, and not face barriers, whether it be financial barriers or otherwise. That's the commitment that I'm looking for from this government when I'm asking him to define what access to child care is. Not immunization programs — those should be funded out of a health care budget.

Let me just move to another area of women's services. I'm going to be quick here, because I know that my colleague from Surrey–Panorama Ridge has questions around the transportation front. There are so many areas where we want to put questions to the minister, so I'm going to be very quick here.

Let me just do a quick review of what's happened in the area of women's services. Since 2002 the Liberal government has eliminated the Ministry of Women's Equality, breaking an election promise. They've repealed pay equity, removed the pay equity provision from the Human Rights Code and buried their own report on pay equity by the lawyer that the government had actually appointed specifically to do this review. They have buried those recommendations.

They have eliminated the employment equity within the public service. They have introduced a two-tier minimum wage, because the majority of B.C.'s minimum-wage earners are women over 19 and not youth. It especially hurts immigrant women. They've rolled back the wages of B.C.'s lowest-paid health care workers, the majority of whom are women and immigrants, in its imposed contract on the HEU.

They scrapped universal child care, as I mentioned; cut subsidies for low-income parents; put child care out of reach for thousands of B.C. families. They've slashed legal aid funding and laid off victim services workers, the people who help rape and domestic violence victims through tortuous criminal trials. They've eliminated funding for B.C.'s 37 women's centres. They've ended the zero-tolerance policy on domestic violence.

They've abolished the B.C. Human Rights Commission. British Columbia is now the only province in Canada without a commission. They have attempted to turn back the clock on equality rights on same-sex couples by voting to deny them the right to control the remains of deceased loved ones.

As a result of this government's regressive policies, B.C. has been singled out for criticism by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women — a first in the history of B.C. The UN committee stated its concern that the Liberal government's policies are having a disproportionately negative impact on women and children in areas such

as social assistance, legal aid, and support for those experiencing sexual and domestic violence.

In 2001 the Ministry of Women's Equality, as I mentioned, was eliminated despite the Premier's pre-election campaign to maintain it. It was replaced by a junior Minister of State for Women's Services. That minister of state was then eliminated by OIC on January 26, 2004, and then was replaced with the Minister of State for Women's and Seniors' Services.

Funding for women's and seniors' services in 2002-03 was \$54.4 million when it was only targeted for women's services. Then in '03-04 it became \$51.6 million for women's and seniors' services and in '04-05, \$37.2 million for women's and seniors' services. This year's budget and the estimates interim supply debate that we're dealing with deal with a budget of \$49.8 million for '05-06.

After three years of cuts, the Liberal government announces this increase of \$12.5 million. The government claims that the funding increase from \$33 million to \$45.5 million annually for transition houses somehow makes up for the difference for all of the cuts. We know that is not true.

[1540]

People from transition houses say:

"We find that the cuts to legal aid and cuts to certain health benefits are seriously impacting women and the volume of work at transition houses. Cuts to women's centres and other agencies serving women have only really had a ricochet effect on the transition house sector. Really, all these agencies should be seen as part of a continuum."

They go on to say:

"The cuts have been hard over the last three years. For instance, it cost the province \$1.37 million to run all the women's centres across the province. For us to get this money now feels a little like taking the funds out of our sisters' pockets."

This is what people in the sector are saying, even those in the transition house sector who had actually received a small lift. They go on to say:

"We turn away three times as many people as we can so that the demand eclipses our ability to serve. We're actually funded for 24-hour access, not for 24-hour staffing, but we do have 24-hour staffing as a security measure."

This is what's happening. Women's centres. The government cuts for the funding of the 38 women's centres across the province only saved the government \$1.7 million, but they didn't see the way to actually fund women's centres for the incredible work that they do.

Has the minister done an assessment of the cuts to women's centres and how these cuts are putting new demands on the transition house sector? Does the minister think the small increase in this area — in this year's budget and therefore out of the interim supply — would actually erase the damage that the government has done over the last four years?

Hon. C. Hansen: That was a long intervention, and I appreciated the member's remarks, but it covered a lot of ground. I did want to go back.

At the outset of her comments she was talking about taxes and fees that may have been increased in

the province. I just wanted to point out, for the information of the member and anyone else following these discussions, that if you look at the total taxes paid by British Columbians.... If you take the personal income tax and add in the sales tax, property tax, fuel tax, MSP premiums — take all of those taxes that individuals pay personally — every single British Columbian, regardless of their income or their family status, is paying less in terms of their total taxes today than they would have under the NDP government in 2001.

If you look at some specific examples.... You take a senior couple, for example, earning \$30,000 a year. They, in fact, would be paying \$930 a year less today in their taxes than they would have in 2001 under the NDP.

The member then came back to this whole issue of the original child care agreement that she was talking about, which was signed prior to us forming government. There are reporting requirements in that agreement, and there are conditions upon which those dollars can be spent. So I can assure the member that all of those dollars that are spent are spent in accordance with that original agreement. We report that to the federal government accordingly, and they have the opportunity to come back to us if they feel those dollars are not being spent in accordance with that original agreement.

The member then went on to talk about programs for women's centres and transition houses. I can tell the member — well, I know she knows this, but I'll remind her of it — that just last fall this government increased the funding for transition houses with the largest single increase ever for transition houses and programs for women and children facing violence and abuse. That went up by \$12.5 million a year to provide for enhancements of services around this province for women and children facing violence and abuse.

J. Kwan: Mr. Chair, give me a break. When the minister says that the income tax breaks for British Columbians somehow would actually cover some of these costs.... That's what he's implying in his answer to me.

[1545]

For the minister's information, I'll tell you. Without subsidies, for one child in child care today is somewhere around \$1,000 to \$1,200 per month per child. That's how much it costs; I know. Even if I grant the minister that the \$900-and-some that a family gets in terms of income tax rebate.... I'm not going to dispute that, because those families have actually lost support in the MSP area, and they have had to pay more for MSP premiums. They've had to pay more for Pharmacare services. They have to pay for eye exams, increased gas taxes, increased PST, and so on and so forth. I'm just going to leave all that aside for one moment. That tax rebate doesn't even cover one month's worth of child care support in terms of fees for child care services for a family for one child, let alone for the whole year.

So spare me when the minister is saying that they're doing a great job here. Women and families are saying they are having a tough time. Child care providers used to see children that came to their centres to get child care services. They are no longer coming. Why? It's because the government cut their subsidies, because they could not afford it. It's not because they don't want the children in those child care centres. It's because they can't afford it.

This Minister of State for Women's Services, to paraphrase the article in her own community, does not believe in the concept that it takes a village to raise a child. She believes in the concept that only the parent is responsible. Well, I take a different point of view than that, particularly for those single parents who are struggling out there, for those families that are struggling day in and day out.

I see this as not just a social issue. It is an economic issue, because if we invest upfront for these children and their families, it will pay dividends down the road economically for this province. Those children will grow up having opportunities and their potential maximized, because in those early years a foundation was laid for them.

We know that those early years are critical for the development of children into the future. That's what this investment is about, and this government is not committed to it. They have demonstrated that by their actions in the last four years. Right now this minister would not commit to saying how he would define child care for the federal dollars that are coming in the next few months.

[H. Long in the chair.]

I want to focus on women's services for just a moment here. We know that the ministry and the government have done no assessment of the cuts to women's centres. They wouldn't even actually meet with the women's centres coalition. After much pressure, when they finally did meet, they went and called the cops on them. That's what the government did with the women's coalition when they wanted to meet with the Minister of State for Women's Services. That's how the government treats women.

I'd like to know if the minister actually agrees with the executive director of the B.C.-Yukon Society of Transition Houses that it would be more valuable to consider transition houses and women's centres as a continuum of services and to fund both kinds of services. Will there be any dollars from this \$13 billion under the interim supply that would be going to these services?

[1550]

Hon. C. Hansen: Again, early on in the member's comments, some time ago at the outset of it, she made some comments that are not accurate, so I do wish to correct the member's understanding of it. She made the claim that the increases to MSP premiums and the changes to Pharmacare actually resulted in people being less off than the reduction in the tax cuts....

Mr. Chair, I want to be explicit that if every individual in British Columbia in terms of their income tax, their MSP premiums — all of those direct taxes.... They are paying less today than they did in 2001. We've seen income taxes come down. We've seen MSP premiums come down for the majority of seniors and low- and moderate-income British Columbians.

The comment that she made early on was not accurate, when she talked about Pharmacare. In fact, that drove costs down and gave more financial assistance for low- and middle-income seniors and low- and middle-income families.

She then went on to talk about child care, which I think we've been back and forth on a bit. She went on to talk about women's services. I can assure her that in this budget for this coming year, there is \$12.5 million of additional funding for transition houses and for other programs for women and children facing violence. That is part of this interim supply bill that we are asking for appropriation for today. Roughly 50 percent of those programs will be funded as a result of this interim supply bill.

J. Kwan: That wasn't the question that I asked. I asked how much money is going to women's centres, not this broad category of stopping violence. Let me actually go into the violence issue in a moment, Mr. Chair. But before I do that, I wish to dispute what the minister said.

This minister and this government brought in hikes in MSP premiums to the tune of \$400 million over the last four years. Then in this budget they gave back a measly \$40 million to British Columbians. They are still out of pocket \$360 million just on MSP alone.

Please, truth would be nice, Mr. Chair, in terms of the real state....

The Chair: I question the comment on truth.

J. Kwan: Well, factual information that is based on truth would be useful for British Columbians and for them to know what actually is taking place, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The minister on a point of order.

Point of Order

Hon. C. Hansen: Mr. Chair, I have an obligation to take offence to the member's comment, and I would ask her to withdraw it.

The Chair: Would the member please retract. Would the member please retract — unequivocally retract.

J. Kwan: Mr. Chair, I'll retract because those are the rules of the House. I will have to retract because I have no choice.

The Chair: Unequivocally, would the member retract her statement about truth.

J. Kwan: I said I will retract.
We all know what the lay of the land is.

The Chair: Member, please sit down. I asked for the member to unequivocally retract her statement without any more statements.

J. Kwan: Mr. Chair, I retract my statement.

The Chair: Thank you, member.

J. Kwan: Let me go on and tell you, Mr. Chair, what really is happening in British Columbia in the area of MSP alone. This government increased MSP premiums by \$400 million, impacting British Columbians over the last four years. This year's budget only gives back \$40 million. British Columbians are still out of pocket \$360 million on MSP premiums alone. You do the math, Mr. Chair, and tell me how British Columbians somehow actually got a better deal under this government on that front.

I'll use an example of seniors. By no means a couple, whose income is just under \$30,000 a year.... Before the changes to Pharmacare and before the changes to MSP, they actually paid a very small sum towards MSP. You know how much they have to pay now, thanks to this government? And they somehow claim that their benefits are so much better. Twelve hundred bucks for the couple.

They were just over the qualification of the threshold. Why? Because they worked all their lives to save some moneys in RRSPs, and that's considered to be part of their income and the interest that they earn. These are individuals who worked minimum-wage jobs throughout their adult lives in this province.

[1555]

The minister likes to say that somehow people are better off and seniors are better off. Well, tell it to people who actually believe them outside of this chamber. Certainly, the opposition does not believe them, and the vast majority of British Columbians don't believe this minister, because it is nonsense — absolute nonsense.

The government says they're somehow treating women in a way that protects them from violence. Let me just ask the minister this question. This government and this Premier ended the zero-tolerance policy on domestic violence. On July 31, 2002, the Attorney General released the proposed revisions to the province's spousal assault policy, which in effect directs Crown counsel to prosecute fewer cases of spousal assault.

The Vancouver police department claims that this will decriminalize violence when it takes place in the domestic private sphere. As of May 2, 2003, charges are no longer automatically laid in every alleged spousal abuse incident in British Columbia. Is this how you protect women against violence?

This is how this government is doing that work. They cancelled the funding for women's centres. They increased the pressure for transition houses. They took away policies that protect women who face violence in domestic abuse situations. They even stopped the policy change, long and hard fought for, of automatically

laying charges in spousal abuse incidents in British Columbia, thereby bringing us back to the days where the message is that domestic violence, spousal assault, is not necessarily a criminal matter.

When you assault someone, no matter who they are — rich or poor, women or men — it is an assault, and it is criminal in its nature. This government defines spousal assault differently now, and they treat women differently now. The message that they sent out is the wrong message. Shame. Shame on them. That's their legacy. That's their cross to bear. That's their record in the last four years.

Hon. C. Hansen: Just to respond to the last point the member was making.... As I mentioned earlier, there is the largest single increase ever for the budget for transition houses in British Columbia — an increase of \$12.5 million of additional money that will go into funding transition houses around the province and programs for women and children facing violence and abuse.

When the member talked about the impact of MSP on a senior couple earning just under \$30,000, she in fact is not correct. Let's actually go back and look at.... What I've got here is the budget report from 2001. It actually gives the example of a senior couple earning \$30,000 a year.

What it shows is that for health care premiums, MSP premiums, in 2001 under the NDP government, they would have paid \$768 a year. Under this new budget, Budget 2005, with the extra benefits that we've brought in for premium assistance for MSP, that would actually be down to \$230 a year for that same couple earning \$30,000 a year.

Now, the member said it wasn't actually \$30,000 a year. She said it was just under \$30,000 a year.

Interjection.

Hon. C. Hansen: In fact, I listened very closely to what the member said.

Interjection.

The Chair: Member, would you let the minister answer your question.

Hon. C. Hansen: In fact, when she said just under \$30,000 a year.... If it was \$29,000 a year, that same senior couple would be paying zero under the new MSP premiums that have been brought into place.

[1600]

The point I was making was that the total taxes that this couple would pay.... Let's say it was \$30,000 a year. Under the NDP government in 2001, it would have been a total provincial tax of \$3,391. Today under Budget 2005 that same couple would be paying total taxes, all of those combined, of only \$2,458.

J. Kwan: I see the members in this House thumping their desks. You know what? Tell it to the seniors who actually believe you.

What I said about the senior couple was this. They made just under \$30,000 a year and because they actually have some earned RRSPs.... Because of the interest on it and as a result of those two combined aspects, they were not actually qualified for MSP premiums and they had to pay \$1,200 per month. That is the reality. But had they been in a situation where....

Interjections.

The Chair: Order, members. The member has the floor.

J. Kwan: If they were only one person and not a couple, they would otherwise qualify. Under the previous administration they would have qualified, but not under this government. They have changed the rules that impact seniors. That must be why seniors are saying to us when we travel the province that they actually have to choose between buying medicine versus eating dog food. That is actually a true story that was told to me when I travelled the province.

Interjections.

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

J. Kwan: These members and this government should know what their record is and stand by it instead of making it up as they go along. We were just talking about women's services. On the violence question, on the zero-tolerance question, stand up and defend the policy. Say that it is the right thing to do to decriminalize spousal abuse. That is what the government has done, Mr. Chair. That's exactly what the government's done.

Interjections.

The Chair: Order, members. Order.

J. Kwan: Stand by your record, and say that you are proud to do that.

We just celebrated International Women's Day. Look at the record of what this government has done in the measly four years that they were in place. They've dismantled the advances that people worked so hard for — before me, Mr. Chair; I take no credit for the work that people have done before me. They made those changes, and they forced government to bring forth policies to address these concerns. This government, this minister and this Premier turned back the clock, just like that. That's how they show they really care about people. That's how they show it.

British Columbians know the difference, and they know they can't trust a government that has broken promise after promise after promise. They know the difference. They know the difference when the government will not even commit to being held to account — when they say they want open and accountable

government, but in fact, they will do anything but be open and accountable.

We see that with the government shutting down debate. By 5:45 today there will be no more questions to the government on anything. They want to spend \$13 billion of taxpayers' money. They want a blank cheque to just go and do whatever they want, with no scrutiny. That's the truth of the matter.

J. Brar: We certainly have a lot of questions, but the time is, of course, running out. We will not get the opportunity to ask questions we want to ask. But let me say this to you. Yesterday I stood up and talked about and asked questions about one very important issue the people of Surrey face. That is the situation at the Surrey Memorial Hospital. We didn't get any straight answers on whether the people of Surrey have any hope out of this budget or not.

[1605]

Another important issue I want to talk about today and ask questions on is the Port Mann Bridge and transportation. During the by-election this government said time and again to the people of Surrey that the most important issue for the people of Surrey is the twinning of the Port Mann Bridge, and that it was the number one priority for this government. They said that to people almost every day during the 28-day election campaign.

That promise was no different from the list of promises we saw in the *New Era* document. We know that lots of promises after that were made but not kept. A few of the examples: B.C. Rail — the government said they were not going to sell it, but in fact, they sold it; gambling — the government made a promise to the people of British Columbia that they were not going to expand gambling, but in fact, they did the opposite. The government also promised in the *New Era* that they were going to build 5,000 new long-term care beds, but they didn't deliver on that either.

The twinning of the Port Mann Bridge was a very similar promise, which came out during the by-election. After it came to this House, I found out a lot of things about the bridge and about the total plan of the government when it comes to the transportation issues. What I see here is that this government has laid out an ambitious infrastructure investment plan: \$6 billion over ten years. Passing this interim supply bill will presumably provide funding for some of these projects.

Not all of these projects are without their faults. The Sea to Sky Highway, RAV line and Port Mann Bridge are all questionable from a financial perspective at this point in time. The Port Mann is a very, very blatant example of a megaproject with no study on its feasibility. This is an example of a project that has been dictated and justified on political grounds. It is chosen based not on how it will benefit the province but on how attractive it is to voters in the minister's own constituency.

We are talking about billions of dollars here — \$13 billion of taxpayer's hard-earned money. The govern-

ment wants a blank cheque without going through any estimate debates line by line, ministry by ministry.

Now, the Port Mann Bridge. The minister has not done any consultation with the large number of stakeholders with which he should do the consultation.

The minister told us only a few days ago that he has actually consulted — has done consultation. When we asked with whom, this is the list we know: Trucking Association and B.C. Automobile Association. These are the members which have an obvious special interest in an expanded highway system.

[1610]

When we asked the minister to expand on the list of stakeholders who are part of this bridge, the minister fumbled on that and said: "We are going to consult with all other stakeholders." But let me tell you: there are many people out there who have lots of questions about the feasibility of Port Mann Bridge. Without consulting those people, it is very, very challenging to proceed with this project.

Now, one of the key stakeholders is the municipalities of British Columbia. The minister tells us that he hasn't done anything on that one. I don't understand why. The minister has been talking about it for the last six months as a key project or priority for the people of British Columbia and hasn't done anything.

Then, also, there are a lot of environmental groups who want to know what the impacts on the environment will be on this one. No consultation has been done. No consultation has been done with the transit users, the cyclists and the lone-car users. I don't understand why the minister is reluctant to do this consultation. I don't know. But I have a question: why? This is a megaproject, and this is a very open, transparent government which likes to consult the people of British Columbia. But that consultation didn't take place.

We asked him a question during the supplementary debate about the environmental impact of the bridge. Here is the response of the minister: "Having traffic sitting for hours and hours every single day is possibly the worst environmental outcome you could appreciate." This is his response. This is his study. Where is the evidence? Where is the study which tells us that there will be no environmental impact by building the bridge?

The minister also admitted very clearly that day that he has not completed one study on the feasibility of the Port Mann Bridge as well as the Highway 1 expansion. He did mention the preliminary studies, but he didn't want to show them to anyone, because they're confidential. But what we are doing here today is debating the budget, which includes the budget that is dedicated, as I understand, to these projects.

Let me say this. The member has been asking questions from this side.... I'm not here to stand in the House and support something which is shallow, which has no basis, which has no study, which has no business plan. I have been saying this for the last six months, and I will continue to say this until I see something very concrete. All I'm saying is that there are se-

rious reasons to be concerned about passing the budget on this item without having full study on this project.

[1615]

How does this government know that this is the best way to improve transportation and open up our port to trade and commerce without studying the impact of the bridge on the region and province? How can this government be certain the benefits will outweigh the costs?

What are the alternatives available? Do we know that? We don't know about that. So what we are asking here is to give us the blank cheque. We'll go and do the work. But we can't tell you whether there will be an environmental impact. We can't tell you what the business plan is. We can't tell you what the exact budget of this project is. We can't tell you whether the federal government is going to support this project at the end of the day or not.

Everything is in process. We can't tell you anything past the budget. So my first question to the minister is: will the Minister of Finance please tell us how much of this interim supply bill will go towards funding this project and other projects like that, which have not been studied, which have not been examined?

Hon. C. Hansen: Maybe this demonstrates for those that are following the debate the difference between our approach on this side of the House and what the NDP members offer British Columbians. We have a Transportation minister in this province who actually has a vision for how to solve some of our transportation bottlenecks around the province and to meet some of our transportation infrastructure challenges. He's not afraid to go out and talk about them and to advocate for them and to do the studies that are necessary to make sure they're done on an environmentally sound basis.

We have that in terms of the proposal for the Port Mann Bridge in that there are the kinds of studies and due diligence that will be done. It all starts with a vision, and that's something we have not seen from the opposition members in this House or the political party they're representing. We have seen absolutely nothing in terms of a transportation plan.

We know that the member for Surrey-Panorama Ridge is opposed to the twinning of the Port Mann Bridge. He might as well just stand up and admit that. We on this side of the House are actually trying to create some solutions for our transportation challenges in British Columbia. In this budget we actually have a significant increase for spending on transportation infrastructure around the province going forward.

There are a variety of projects, including rehabilitation of roads, something sadly neglected in the previous decade. We've got funding for airports and port infrastructure, border crossing infrastructure, Okanagan valley corridor and Okanagan Lake Bridge. There's the Kicking Horse Canyon project. There are gateway initiatives. The Sea to Sky Highway is well underway. There are highway corridors. There's the

Richmond-Airport-Vancouver rapid transit project. All are provided for in funding in this budget.

In addition to all of the projects that are now well advanced in their planning and the studies and the environmental reviews that must be done, there are other projects such as the ones that are part of the vision that the Minister of Transportation has set out. Within the ministry's main budget they will be doing the due diligence to ensure that these proposals are firmed up so we can ensure that the proper studies and environmental reviews are done and the other due diligence that is necessary. So a portion of this interim supply that we are talking about today would, in fact, go to the Ministry of Finance for their ongoing work to make sure that the vision for a new transportation system in British Columbia can be realized.

J. Brar: It's very easy to stand up and blame the opposition for asking questions, because the government does not have answers. That's what I hear. Again, there's no answer. There is no straight answer.

Let me ask you a very simple question on this one. In this budget, in the interim supply bill, how much money are you asking for the gateway project? Is there any money for that?

[1620]

Hon. C. Hansen: For the provincial share of the gateway initiatives there is a budget in '05-06 of \$50 million; therefore, in the interim supply bill there would be an allocation of approximately $\frac{6}{12}$ of that.

J. Brar: I couldn't clearly understand the breakdown of the budget. Can the minister please clarify again the breakdown for the gateway project?

Hon. C. Hansen: What I'm referring to is not any great mystery. It's in the budget fiscal plan. I know the member has a copy, and it's on the website. It's on page 58.

It shows that for those gateway initiatives there is \$50 million in the coming year. Approximately half of that would be provided for, because as we've discussed earlier in these debates, the overall allocation under interim supply is 50 percent of the '05-06 budget. That then doesn't get precisely allocated at 50 percent to every single initiative and line item, but the government is obligated to stay within that 50 percent allocation until such time as there is further authority from this Legislature.

J. Brar: Now I hear this is not a mystery. Everything is crystal clear — simple. Then why are we not prepared to debate the budget? Why are we shutting down the House almost a month before the writ is dropped? Why? What is in this budget? Why are you afraid of debating the budget? Is there anything to hide in this budget? Why are you running away from debating this budget, if it's a very clear scenario? Why? Tell the people of British Columbia what's in this budget.

Let the people listen to the debate. Why are you afraid of them, if it's so simple?

The minister told us in the supplementary debate that the cost for building the Port Mann Bridge alone is \$800 million. Is there any money — even a single dollar — in this budget which is dedicated for the construction of the bridge?

Hon. C. Hansen: As I indicated earlier, there is an appropriation for the Ministry of Transportation. It is \$804.455 million for the coming fiscal year. Half of that, approximately, would be approved as a result of this interim supply bill that is before us.

When it comes to the Port Mann Bridge, which the member had specifically asked about.... A part of the work that is done internally, within the ministry, I'm sure, is working towards the kind of studies and analysis that the member is talking about.

[1625]

J. Brar: So we are not sure whether there is any money in this budget, in this interim supply bill dedicated towards the building of the bridge. The cost of the bridge is \$800 million. What we are asking here is only \$25 million for the next six months and \$50 million for the next 12 months.

Where is that promise? It was so urgent during the by-election that the government wanted to start it very quickly. Now what we see in this budget is that we don't know whether there's any money for the construction of the bridge. Is there any commitment for the construction of the bridge for this government? There's not a single dollar committed for the construction of the Port Mann Bridge. That's all I can assume, after the minister responds to my question.

It's very strange. It's another promise — a very recent one — made to the people of Surrey and broken after just six months. It's very clear that there's no money for the construction of the bridge. There is no plan for the Port Mann Bridge.

Now I would like to ask the minister: had you seen any comprehensive plan for the Port Mann Bridge before allocating this \$25 million of hard-earned taxpayer dollars? Had you seen any business plan before you made that decision?

Hon. C. Hansen: It would be wonderful if we could actually turn the clock back to the last decade and have some planning for the kind of traffic congestion that we see in parts of the lower mainland so that some of these projects could be under construction today or perhaps even completed today. It would not be responsible for a government to decide on a project, such as the twinning of the Port Mann Bridge, and have any expectation there's going to be construction underway six months later.

I'm a little bit confused as to where the member is coming from on this. On the one hand he said: "How can you proceed with a project when you haven't got the studies done and the environmental analysis done?" On the other hand he's saying: "Where's the

money in this budget" — and we're talking about the next six months — "to actually construct the bridge?"

The point that I tried to make earlier is that there is planning that has to be done. There is assessment that has to be done. The environmental issues have to be addressed. But at least we're moving forward with a vision in terms of how to address some of the transportation issues in the province.

J. Brar: Now, finally, I see the minister admitting very clearly that no planning has been done at this point in time and that the planning has yet to be done. This money, I think it's fair to assume, is only for planning. There's nothing concrete — no concrete commitment for the building of the bridge.

That's how I see it. The construction of the bridge is going to cost \$800 million as per today's estimates. What we see in the budget is only \$25 million for the next six months and \$50 million for the year. I think, maybe, for the next few years we won't see that \$800 million in this budget.

One more thing I would like to ask the minister on the twinning of the bridges. Is there any time line? There's a commitment; we are committing \$25 million. Is there any time line as far as the planning to be done or the environmental study to be done or any other feasibility to be done? Is there any time line that the minister has seen before committing this money for this project?

[1630]

Hon. C. Hansen: The exact detail around the time line for the twinning of the Port Mann Bridge is a question that.... I don't have that kind of detailed information with me. This is an interim supply debate, and as I think I indicated earlier, it's the tradition in this House that the Minister of Finance will respond to whatever questions to the best of his ability and with the information we have available. That is a level of detail he would have to direct to the Minister of Transportation, and the appropriate time would be during estimates debate. I will make sure that the Minister of Transportation is aware of his interest.

J. MacPhail: I'd like to move an amendment to Bill 20, if I may. I'll give the copy to the Table. Here is a copy for the minister as well.

[Section 1 by:

(a) striking out "\$13 139 500 000" and substituting "\$8 760 000 000" and,

(b) by striking out " $\frac{1}{12}$ " and substituting " $\frac{1}{12}$ "]

Section 1 of Bill 20 will be amended to read:

"Voted expenses appropriation

1 From and out of the consolidated revenue fund there may be paid and applied in the manner and at the times the government may determine the sum of \$8 760 000 000 towards defraying the charges and expenses of the public service of the Province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, and being substantially $\frac{1}{12}$ of the total amount of the votes of the main Estimates for the fiscal year ending

March 31, 2006, as laid before the Legislative Assembly at the present session."

On the amendment.

J. MacPhail: We're here today to debate interim supply. As the Minister of Finance noted yesterday, this is the normal practice in this House and, indeed, throughout the Commonwealth. Again, as the minister noted yesterday, interim supply is traditionally introduced prior to the end of the fiscal year in order to carry out the operations of the government through the first three months of the coming fiscal year. This is done in order for the main estimates to receive full and complete scrutiny by the parliament. Indeed, in our national parliament there is an exact date upon which the estimates must be passed by the assembly and supply allocated for the fiscal year.

There is nothing untoward about this. In fact, that is why interim supply is generally not debated at all but passed with unanimous consent of the House in one day. That's the point the minister has been trying to rely upon in saying that the tradition is that interim supply is passed without all of these questions. He is right, given that what I have just outlined is the common practice. Then members get on with their constitutional responsibility of scrutinizing the spending plans of the government. That is, they get on with the very basis of our democratic system — not a dime is to be collected through taxation or spent through appropriation without the approval of the Legislature. It's not a difficult concept to grasp, but apparently it's one that this minister and the Premier just can't get their minds around.

Yesterday the Minister of Finance tried to do so. He tried to explain this departure from the very essence of our democracy as being somehow better than what happened before. He cites the 1996 election, when there was no debate on the budget, but he glosses over the fact that there was approval of interim supply, which his colleagues sitting with him on that side of the House then voted for. He fails to mention that this chamber was in session throughout that summer of 1996, passing full supply and debating all of the main estimates. The minister says previous governments used special warrants, but he glosses over the fact that approval was always sought, debated fully and received by vote for those expenditures.

This is a really interesting one. He claims that the NDP government in 1991 failed to pass its own budget and ran on special warrants for an entire year. Here's the truth of the matter, Mr. Chair. The NDP government was formed in November of 1991. By that time interim supply had expired and the fiscal year of the province was seven months old. He glosses over the fact that in November of 1991 that new NDP government inherited a budget that had never received approval of the Legislature.

[1635]

Perhaps the minister would like to ask the current member for Kamloops, who was Social Credit Government House Leader in that disastrous government,

how he used the rules of the House to stifle debate on the estimates in the summer of 1991. Perhaps he would like to ask the current minister responsible for children in care in this province why he voted in the summer of 1991, as a Social Credit member, to cut a cheque for himself and then run in the summer of 1991, just like he is doing now. Or perhaps he would like to ask the current Minister of Labour, the current Government House Leader, why he voted in the summer of 1991, when he was a Social Credit member, to run from any scrutiny in this vain attempt to hold on to his job back then — a charade the voters of our province saw through for all three of these members and sent each one of them packing for their arrogance and abuse of the chamber.

That's the legacy of these three members. No debate, no budget. Unfortunately....

The Chair: Member, I think your comments are at this time commenting on existing members of a House from the past, and it's unparliamentary.

J. MacPhail: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I accept what you are saying, but I'm unaware of what's unparliamentary. I will try to moderate my language.

The Chair: Thank you, member.

J. MacPhail: Mr. Chair, I am recounting the legacy of those three members. They are current members, and their legacy is well known in this province. Their legacy is no debate, no budget. Unfortunately, that Social Credit way of 1991 has now come back, reinvented as this Liberal government. Why? Because this government introduced a set election date. Not only that, they set the date for the middle of the first supply period. What were they thinking?

In his rush and bolstered by his arrogance, the Premier has created the same problem the last Social Credit government left the NDP: a budget that may not be passed until well into the third quarter of the fiscal year. You might almost think it was by strategy — a strategy they learned and gleaned from their current Liberal cabinet members, former Social Credit members.

The minister is asking for six months of supply, supply that will take the business of this province to the end of September. He says he is doing so because the next government will need that much time to redesign the budget. The minister's problem is this: the election will be held on May 17. The election writ will not be returned until June 8, so the earliest a new executive council can be appointed is June 9.

Here is what section 6 of the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act says. I'm reading from section 6. It's entitled "When estimates are to be presented."

"(1) Subject to subsection (2), the minister must present the main estimates for a fiscal year to the Legislative Assembly with the budget for that fiscal year, on the third Tuesday in February in the immediately preceding fiscal year.

"(2) If a general election is underway on the third Tuesday in February or as of that date has been recently completed, or there has been a general election in a fiscal year before passage by the Legislative Assembly of the final Supply Act for that fiscal year, the main estimates referred to in subsection (1) must be presented to the Legislative Assembly no later than 90 days after the post-election appointment of the Executive Council."

Here's what this Minister of Finance is asking for. He's asking for approval from this House to spend public moneys and to collect taxes until the end of September because he anticipates that the House will not be recalled until September 7. He's assuming that he will exercise his full right under section 6, which says only that the main estimates must be presented to the Legislature within 90 days. They don't have to be passed by the Legislature. This Minister of Finance is going to use that allowance to say: "Well, I'll present the estimates by September 7."

[1640]

One of the reasons given for this bill before us today is that in the opinion of this Minister of Finance and the government, the estimates and thereby final supply could not be passed before dissolution on April 19. I'll skip over the two offers I made to the minister to ensure that if the government called the estimates, we on this side of the House in the New Democrat opposition would pass them by April 18.

Indeed, I improved upon that offer yesterday. I said that if the estimates were called, we would pass them by the end of this fiscal year — March 31 — thereby eliminating the need for interim supply completely. Both offers were turned down.

Back to trying to follow the logic of the Minister of Finance and his prediction that passage of the estimates will take a couple of months. Given that, the people of British Columbia will not see the 2005-06 budget finally passed until the beginning of November of this year. You combine his two predictions — his prediction that he will merely present the estimates within 90 days after the writ is returned and his prediction that it takes at least a couple of months to get the estimates through, and that's why we can't do it now — and he is saying to the people of British Columbia: "You ain't gonna get to debate the budget through your MLAs until November of 2005."

That is his logic — again, a full seven months into the fiscal year, just like the Social Credit government of 1991 left the province in that year. Of course, just as an aside, this logic is completely based on the arrogant assumption that this minister and his Liberal colleagues will return as the majority in this House.

The only conclusion the public can reach is that this Minister of Finance is trying to have all of his budget and spend it too. In doing so, he is returning us to a time when the budget process was ad hoc, secretive and abusive to parliamentary practice and tradition.

There are a number of options still open to the government and minister to remedy this abuse, and I have just introduced an amendment for one of them. But there's also the Constitution Act of British Columbia.

The Constitution Act of B.C. is an ordinary statute readily available to amendment by this Legislature. This government could have easily brought in an amendment to remedy their error of setting the fixed election day in the first quarter of supply of any fiscal year.

Why not? If indeed it is the set election date that caused the minister to come before this House with the unprecedented request for six months of interim supply, why not simply bring in an amendment to the Constitution Act — that just requires a simple majority — to have the election in June, well after final supply has been passed?

We have, after all, a set legislative calendar so we know when that will happen. The Minister of Finance is also being a little bit disingenuous when he says that to pass the estimates would, in effect, bind the next government. Again, that logic simply does not hold. Just as what happened in July of 2001, any new government this summer has every opportunity to reintroduce a budget and have the estimates debate or to reintroduce another interim supply bill, pending the introduction of a full budget. Both these options would benefit from the wisdom of the newly elected members of the thirty-eighth parliament.

It is this Premier's intransigence and arrogance that has placed this House in the unenviable position of breaking with constitutional convention, and he is doing so solely for partisan purposes. But I have presented the solution in my amendment. It is a solution that reduces expenditures and, therefore, is in order. It is a solution that is going to help the Minister of Finance out of the mire of the Premier's making.

[1645]

The amendment says that instead of giving this government $\frac{6}{12}$ of spending without examination of the main estimates, it will give the government $\frac{4}{12}$ of that expenditure, and they can, after the election — immediately upon the return of writ and the appointment of executive council — reconvene the Legislature and pass the main estimates.

Hon. C. Hansen: I enjoyed the member's history lesson. I'm familiar with it, and I have studied it. I think she left out some of the important details. For example, in 1991.... She's right, the government was elected in November, I guess took office in November of 1991, that first time that she became a member in this House. That government chose not to meet the Legislature until the following spring, so there was no final supply ever granted for that year.

Interjection.

The Chair: Order, member. The minister has the floor.

Hon. C. Hansen: I found it interesting when she talked about the use of special warrants and tried to defend the special warrants. She started out by saying

that it's essential that the House approve expenditures before they are spent. That is not the case in special warrants. That is a case where the cabinet actually decides to spend money over and above what is appropriated by this House, and then they come back to the House after the fact to get those approvals. I know that the member used that tool when she was a Minister of Finance but....

Interjection.

The Chair: Will the member please come to order. The minister has the floor. You were not interrupted previously. Thank you.

Hon. C. Hansen: We have made a commitment not to use special warrants. We will come to the House and seek the approval of the House for spending beforehand. That is exactly what is before us today.

The member is right when she talks about the time line following the election. Executive council will get sworn in sometime in early June. Then the estimates have to be tabled in the House not later than 90 days afterwards.

By asking for $\frac{1}{12}$, and again.... Maybe just for the benefit of those trying to follow this debate, we often talk about the $\frac{1}{12}$ or $\frac{1}{12}$, and I know some people are wondering why we don't just talk about it being half. There is a reason for it. It's that interim supply is always broken down in terms of twelfths, so it's either $\frac{1}{12}$, $\frac{2}{12}$, $\frac{3}{12}$, $\frac{4}{12}$, $\frac{5}{12}$, etc.

The estimates have to be tabled before the House in early September as a result of that time line. I indicated in the discussions yesterday that under the new rules, the new wording of the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act, it is not simply a budget update or an economic update, as my predecessor brought in, in 2001. But it will, in fact, constitute three-year spending plans and three-year service plans for all of the ministries.

It is going to be a considerable amount of work. One of the reasons we are asking for $\frac{1}{12}$ instead of the usual $\frac{1}{2}$ is to allow for the time necessary to put that detailed work together.

The Chair: Shall the amendment pass? Division has been called.

Members, according to the Clerk, under the time allocation rule it is on division, not division.

J. MacPhail: I accept that. Everybody, just relax. I accept that, but let me.... On division, I just want to make it clear that the New Democrat opposition — the three of us, the member for Vancouver–Mount Pleasant, the member for Vancouver–Hastings and the member for Surrey–Panorama Ridge — would be voting in favour of that amendment. Any other government member that would like to stand up and put that on record, too, feel free to do so.

[1650]

Amendment negated on division.

On the main motion.

J. Kwan: I would like to close debate on section 1 with putting this on the record.

The government — at this moment, in less than an hour — is trying to push through the spending authority of \$13 billion of taxpayers' hard-earned money. They want to do this without debate, ministry by ministry, and they want to do this without debate, line by line. They want no accountability whatsoever. The government and the Minister of Finance will make up whatever excuse in order to shirk their responsibility of accountability. That's what we've seen just now.

My colleague from Vancouver–Hastings actually gave the minister an out with the amendment earlier, which the government members voted against.

Earlier, we were talking about cuts to women's services. I haven't even started to talk about the impact of legal aid on women. We talked about the situation in the policy changes on the zero-tolerance policy on domestic violence and spousal violence. That, of course, needs to be taken into consideration with the cuts in legal aid as well.

As we know, in the area around legal aid, women disproportionately also get hammered with the cuts from this government. Many women need legal aid representation to deal with a spousal abuse matter. In fact, I know of a case right now. She fled her home in the middle of an assault and was only able to bring her daughter with her at the time, went to a family friend's home and then called the police. She left in her home, I should add, two other children, because she was not able to flee with all of them at the time.

Then she called the police, and the police came. She was able to get interim legal aid support to deal with the interim order. But because of the change in rules of this government around legal aid, after the interim order was issued, the money that supported the lawyer to do that work for the final order ran out. She now has no legal representation.

In her best efforts, she went to seek out advocates to help. English is not her first language. This is not a constituent of mine. Advocates tried to help her. They showed up in court for part of the hearing on the final order. She could barely verbalize what she needed to say to plead her case with the judge around custody issues, access issues, asset issues and so on. She could barely utter her words, and she was clearly, visibly, distressed and frightened. She was not able to present her case to the judge, and the judge understood.

[1655]

The judge has stood down that hearing and said to her: "Get yourself legal representation." She was sent packing from the courts. Then, a second date was set. She tried and went back to legal aid, appealed and sought support. Legal aid said no and turned down her appeal. She had to go back to court. She was unable to do so, because the judge told her to get a lawyer. She couldn't. She couldn't afford one. So then she didn't show up on her court day. She sent in a letter and said: "I am so sorry. Please reschedule. I cannot come, for I do not have legal representation."

Then the government had the gumption to charge this woman and send her a bill for the translation services she would have required for that court day. The court date has been postponed to later on in March. As of today she still has no legal representation.

This is what this government has done. Violence is an issue in this court matter, in this case. Custody is an issue in this matter. Access is an issue in this matter. She went to legal aid several times and did not get representation.

Her court date is coming up, and she does not know what she's going to do. She came to see me. While I'm not her MLA, I told her that I'd try my very best and raise the matter in this House, in this Legislature, and bring it to the attention of the Attorney General to see if we could get her some help.

I want to ask the Minister of Finance this question. Those are the facts before the minister, and I have information to substantiate the case. I'm refraining from putting the woman's name on the record, or even saying what community she's from, for her own protection. She does fear for her safety and that of her family, so I do not want to jeopardize her in any way, shape or form.

I'm asking this Minister of Finance to do the right thing for a change, before the session closes. Will he commit today to ensure that out of this \$13 billion, this woman will actually get legal aid representation?

Hon. C. Hansen: I can confirm for the member that there is an increase of funding for legal aid services in the province as it's set out in Budget 2005. I also indicated earlier that there is \$12.5 million of additional money, on top of the previously budgeted moneys for transition houses and programs for women and children facing violence and abuse.

I cannot speak to the specific details of the case the member has brought forward, but I'm sure that if she was to forward that information and the letter to the respective ministers, they would try to get back to her as soon as possible.

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

J. Kwan: The government cut legal aid substantially, to the tune of some 38 percent. The dollars this minister is putting into the budget don't even touch a fraction of what was taken away. This woman in the case I outlined is not able to get legal aid because of the changes this government brought about in the area of legal aid.

You know what? Her future and the future of her children depend on her ability to get legal representation, and there is urgency to this case. She has already missed one court date. She has already shown up in another court date trying to represent herself, without being able to do so. The judge told her to go and get legal representation.

Violence is an issue. Children and custody are involved. She's been turned down, and the appeal documentation says: "I am sorry. You're not qualified."

That's why she was turned down. The dollars that the government said they've added to legal aid do not replace what was taken away.

I'm even going to set that aside for one moment, because I want to plead this case for this woman. I want to hear a commitment from this Minister of Finance — before the day ends, before this government shuts down debate — to give some reassurance to me and, therefore, to this woman that she will get legal representation. Commit today that she will get legal representation.

[1700]

The criteria around legal representation, the Attorney General claims, are around custody and violence. Both of those matters are at the core of this issue for this woman. If that's the criteria for qualification, then commit today that on the basis of the facts that I put before the minister — if they happen to be true — then she will qualify. It's not that complicated. She has no money, and violence is an issue. So are children.

I'd like to hear a commitment from the minister. Please don't get up and tell me what a great job they're doing and that they're putting more money in this budget. They are not. They are not going to deal with the damages that they have inflicted in this area, and the dollars that they put in do not cover the 38 percent cut in the area of legal aid.

I'm going to set that argument aside, and I only want a commitment from this Minister of Finance. Find it somewhere — in your heart, in your mind, anywhere. Find the courage and say: "Yes, we will provide this woman with legal representation for her court appearance later on in March this year."

Hon. C. Hansen: What we are debating here today is the interim supply bill, which is to provide legislative authority for the continuation of government operations on April 1.

I appreciate the member's passion. There is a budget for legal aid. Actually, it falls under the area of justice services. The budget last year for that area was \$84.593 million. That budget will increase in the fiscal year starting April 1 to \$91.181 million.

I know there are criteria for people to qualify for legal aid. Not knowing the details of the particular case and it not being my ministerial responsibility, it's not something that I can speak to in this context. It is a question that she could put to the Attorney General during estimates debate. The alternative to that is that she could provide the background and the information that she has to the Attorney General's office, and I'm sure his staff will do their best to follow up.

J. Kwan: It will be too late by the time we go to line-by-line estimates debate. The court date is this month, not in September. The minister says: "Send the information to the office." The information has been sent to the office. I'm asking the minister for a commitment on this. I'll even reduce my request if custody and violence are at issue, which is the cornerstone of providing legal aid to women in this province.

Will the minister commit that they will make sure that women who are faced with violence, custody issues and access issues have legal aid representation — yes or no?

Hon. C. Hansen: I will commit to the fact that under the budget, the appropriation for justice services is the provision of \$91.181 million for the coming fiscal year. The interim supply bill is asking for approval for approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ of that amount.

J. Kwan: I hope the Minister of Finance can go home and sleep well tonight, based on his answer today and his lack of commitment to women and children who face violence and access and custody issues in the battle in the courts and who need legal aid. I hope he feels good about what this government's record is. I'll tell you, women and children are suffering. There is no justice for some of them, because they cannot get access to justice and could not get legal representation.

[1705]

That's the reality, and that's the track record of this government. Maybe the Minister of Finance thinks he can hide behind his lines — the script that he's been given — and somehow think: "Hey, I don't need to sweat it — not my ministry, not my problem.

Every single government bench MLA participated in this dismal record of this government. Every single MLA participated. Every single government MLA participated in ensuring that women and children who face spousal abuse and violence in their homes, where custody and access are issues, now do not get legal representation. They participated and allowed this to happen.

There is an opportunity, before the day is over, for the government and for this minister to make one small difference in the lives of women and children — for one family — and he says no. Shame on him. Shame on this Premier. Shame on this Attorney General, and shame on every single cabinet minister and every single government bench MLA.

I will pursue this case. I will continue to pursue this case to the best of my abilities with the Attorney General. But something tells me in a very haunting kind of way that I will not be successful. I don't know how I will be able to communicate that to this woman and her child and the advocates who do not have legal experience and the knowledge base to best represent her. I don't know how I'm going to do that.

The Minister of Finance could have made a difference right now, and he refused to do so.

I won't go on some more about legal aid — I do have a binder full of questions for the minister around legal aid and what they haven't done — because we're running out of time. I just want to turn for one moment to another area of urgency in our community. Let me just review for a moment the immigration and multicultural services area.

Upon election, the B.C. Liberals disbanded the Ministry of Multiculturalism and Immigration and only created a ministry of state in January 2004 — what was supposed to be this Liberal government's, this Premier's, election campaign. The immigrant language funding total in British Columbia — provincial settlement in ESL service funding trends — has consistently declined year over year. In 2001-02, \$24.2 million; 2002-03, \$23.5 million; 2003-04, \$23.3 million; 2004-05, \$22.1 million.

Immigrant settlement services funding: 2002-03, \$14.3 million; 2003-04, \$9.75 million; 2004-05, \$7.8 million. In the 2005-06 budget, there's no category for multiculturalism in immigration services. There is, however, a category for skilled immigrant accreditation, whose funding is \$5 million.

In April 2003 the government cut ESL at Vancouver Community College by one-third. A report card on immigrant services released by Simon Fraser University in February 2005 gave this Liberal government and this Premier the lowest mark in the country for immigrant language services. B.C. has the third-highest number of immigrants landing — 35,240 in 2003 — but spends less per capita than any other province on language instruction. B.C. is also the only province that stops providing fully funded ESL — English as a second language — classes once students achieve rudimentary English skills.

[1710]

B.C. spends only \$476 per immigrant. This is the least amount across Canada in a province-to-province comparison. The Yukon spends \$1,784 per immigrant, while the average is about \$1,000. That is what is going on in this area from a province-to-province comparison point of view.

When the government took office, they cut immigrant services programs. They made changes to the province's employment standards in such areas as farm labour, which negatively affect B.C.'s immigrant families. They brought in two-tier minimum wages, breaking an election promise. This move supposedly targeted young workers, even though the greatest number of minimum-wage earners in B.C. is immigrant women. It's proven to be entirely ineffective as an employment strategy, serving only to reduce the wages of the lowest-paid workers in the province.

They broke contracts and rolled back the wages for our health sector's lowest-paid workers, many of whom are immigrants — immigrant women, for that matter. They reduced the number of ESL teachers. They reduced, as I mentioned, legal aid for immigrants, for women, for refugees. Of course, they continue to ensure that there is insufficient funding in this area. They push immigrant groups to launch a class action suit in order to fight an inflexible new policy of pursuing sponsorship debts. Notices of default have been sent out to hundreds of immigrant families and liens put on their homes indiscriminately, without any review of individual circumstances or the reasons they default on sponsorship.

This government has been widely criticized for the fact that the cabinet has not reflected B.C.'s multicultural diversity. Intended to appease this in time for the election in the most recent cabinet shuffle.

Dithered and delayed in setting up the Indo-Canadian task force, despite repeated pleas from the community to assist in dealing with a rash of violence and deaths among young Indo-Canadians. Indo-Canadian communities have been particularly critical of this government's unwillingness to include or consult them on policy.

The attack on the HEU is cited as an example of the disconnect between the Liberal government's policies and the impact on immigrant communities.

The latest round of unbelievable actions from this government centred around the immigrant services procurement process — in short, what's commonly known as the RFP, the request for proposal process, for immigrant settlement services. In that process the government cut funding to an award-winning buddy program for immigrant youth which has prevented youth from falling into gangs, crime and drugs — \$280,000 cut from 1,000 affected kids at five different centres. These cuts were not communicated to the centres beforehand.

The Minister of State for Immigration defended this government's decision by saying that that's the best use of taxpayers' dollars. That's a direct quote, Mr. Chair. Agencies providing immigrant services had to compete for government contracts through the B.C. Bid process. Awards weren't awarded for September, and as a result, many immigrant service providers lost their contracts. Many are faced with having to lay off staff, redirecting clients after 25 years of service.

[1715]

The service providers for the combined area of Vancouver, Burnaby and New Westminster districts are located in Vancouver. They have made services inaccessible for many throughout the region. The government should know that. If they don't, shame on them.

Funding was also funnelled into the GVRD from out of the rest of the province. Cuts of 14 percent in the Fraser Valley and cuts of 11 percent up north have followed the new tendering process. Many people believe — and the government would have you believe — that there were no cuts in immigrant settlement services. This is false.

This directly contradicts the government's policy to distribute immigrants throughout the province. They want to attract immigrants from elsewhere to British Columbia, but they take away resources where it is necessary to ensure that those immigrants who come become successful and participate fully in our society economically, socially and culturally.

This government thinks and says that they are doing the right thing — that they're serving taxpayers. They have taken away 25 years of capacity-building in the community in the settlement services area. We all know that the non-profit sector provides these services in a way that they actually could not ever have enough

government funding to do the job they need to do, but they do the best they can. They strengthen the work that they're providing by building and adding capacity from volunteer staff and from their own resources.

Instead of recognizing that, the government came in with an RFP process that dismantled the capacity that was built over 25 years. They took away services in communities where immigrants actually are showing huge increases. This is somehow good management. How's that for change?

I'd like to know, from the minister, how much of this \$13 billion that he wants authority to spend today — with no accountability — will actually go into immigrant settlement services and, more specifically, in the non-profit sector. And how many of the federal dollars that are actually targeted towards immigrant settlement services that have not gone into the non-profit sector...? If the minister could outline for me where those dollars have gone, what they are funding and how much is being provided in those other areas.

Hon. C. Hansen: I don't have all the specific answers that the member is seeking today. I'm sure the minister responsible will be able to provide those in due course. I can advise the member that in the budget for the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, there is a specific line item for multiculturalism and immigration services. The budget for that last year was \$7.687 million. The budget for the coming fiscal year, starting April 1, is \$13.577 million. In this interim supply bill that we are discussing today, there would be approval for approximately one-half of that amount.

J. Kwan: The federal government gives this province some \$34 million for immigrant settlement services. This government, by its own admission, by the Minister of Finance's own admission, doesn't even put a fraction of those dollars into immigrant settlement services — even if you take the higher number. And I don't believe that the \$13 million that the minister just said in the budget line actually all goes to the non-profit sector for settlement services.

There's a whole bunch of money coming from the federal government that's supposed to be for immigrant settlement services, which has disappeared — poof, gone. It's not going to the non-profit sector and not going to immigrant settlement services. I don't know where it's gone. The minister wouldn't tell us where it has gone. How's that for accountability?

[1720]

Interjection.

J. Kwan: No, actually — not true.

Mr. Chair, the member for Vancouver-Kingsway is heckling me. From a member who actually tells his constituents by e-mail.... When they write and send him their opinions and concerns about matters, he writes his constituents back and tells them to get a life. That's a direct quote, Mr. Chair. I have that e-mail

downstairs from that constituent, who's appalled with the behaviour of this MLA.

How's that for accountability and representation? You want to go and talk to your MLA, and this MLA for Vancouver-Kingsway, for one, says to his constituents: "Go and get a life." There's respect.

Interjection.

J. Kwan: No, I'm saying this inside the House and outside of the House. It is actually the truth.

Interjection.

The Chair: Order, please. Order. Let's keep the debate confined to the minister and the member.

J. Kwan: Yeah, I'd like to challenge the member for Vancouver-Kingsway to get up to say that what I'm saying is, in fact, false. I'd like for him to respond to his constituent, who actually said that this member told him to get a life when they asked him to respond to their issues. So, please....

Interjection.

J. Kwan: The member for Vancouver-Kingsway says we've got two months before the election and that he wants to go and campaign. By that very statement, he is admitting that he's now going to campaign on the taxpayers' dime the minute that the House rises. On the taxpayers' dime — that's what this government is going to do, and that's what this member for Vancouver-Kingsway is going to do.

Shame on him. Instead of doing the work he's supposed to do in this House and debating estimates line by line....

Interjections.

The Chair: Hon. member, order, please. Let's get back to the debate. We're debating Bill 20, interim supply.

J. Kwan: Instead of engaging in line-by-line, ministry-by-ministry debate and instead of talking about and telling British Columbians how this government intends to spend their hard-earned tax dollars and be held accountable to it, the member for Vancouver-Kingsway wants to get the heck out of here and be paid on the taxpayers' dime to campaign. Shame on him.

Interjections.

The Chair: Members.

Member, please. Let's keep the debate between the member who has the floor....

Interjections.

J. Kwan: Well, news flash for the member from Kingsway.... He's gone.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to know from the minister.... Please break down the immigrant settlement services dollars. How much is going where, and where have the dollars from the federal government gone, mysteriously?

Hon. C. Hansen: The \$13.577 million number that I mentioned earlier, which is the appropriation for the coming fiscal year for immigration and multicultural services, is actually a number that is net of recoveries. So the actual total expenditure in that is about \$33.5 million. There is about \$20 million of revenues from external sources. That is primarily, if not exclusively, federal government.

It's defined here in recoveries as: "The recoveries are received from the federal government pursuant to federal-provincial agreements and from other external parties for ministry services provided in this subvote."

I know that of the moneys that are transferred from the federal government for immigrant services and settlements, some of that would be included in the \$20 million. I know there are other ministries that have responsibilities for other aspects of those expenditures.

[1725]

J. Kwan: Well, then break down where the dollars go so that we can actually add it up.

You know what? I don't trust this minister in what he says. I know that the federal government has actually transferred \$34 million. Even if we add it all up.... Even as the minister claims that most of those dollars are actually there, the reality is that it won't add up. If the minister stands by his word, then tell us program by program where those dollars go so we can add it up and see for ourselves for it to be true.

Tell us how much goes to what programs. Break down the \$33 million in immigration dollars in this budget. Don't tell me, Mr. Chair.... Please, minister — through you, Mr. Chair, to the Minister of Finance — don't get up and tell me: "We'll answer that question six months later, after the election."

His credibility is on the line now, and the government's credibility is on the line now. British Columbians want to know that information prior to them writing this minister and this government a blank cheque for a \$13 billion spending spree.

Hon. C. Hansen: In terms of the line item in the budget that I mentioned earlier, the \$33.5 million, which is \$13.577 million net of recoveries....

I know the member would have been provided with a supplement to the estimates. In that document, on page 24, there is a complete breakdown in terms of all of the expenditure areas that break down all of those numbers. I could go through all of them, but I know it would run out the clock if I did that, because it would be a fairly time-consuming process. In the interest of time, I'll refer the member to page 24 of that document.

J. Brar: There's one question related to that one. I would like clarification from the minister on this one. How much money will we in fact see from the federal

government under the transfer payments for this settlement funding?

Hon. C. Hansen: I don't have that level of detail with me for this discussion today. I know that we could certainly try to obtain it for the member. If he would like to send me an e-mail specifically on that, I would endeavour to try to get that number for him.

I can provide for him today what the total federal government transfers would be, but the specific number he's looking for would be a subset of that.

J. Brar: I just want to make sure. Are we spending the money we are receiving from the federal government for settlement purposes under the transfer payments for settlement purposes in this province? Are we spending the full — 100 percent — money received from the federal government for that purpose?

Hon. C. Hansen: With all of these federal-provincial agreements and the transfers of moneys from the federal government to the province, there are agreements in place in terms of how those get spent. If we were not spending it according to the terms that have been set out by the federal government, I'm sure the federal government would be the first one to raise that issue.

J. Kwan: The answer is no. The minister and this government are not spending all of the federal dollars on settlement services. That's the real answer. People in the sector know it. In fact, I have a document here that adds up the amount of dollars — where the government's money is being allocated and what programs are being funded. They don't add up to the \$34 million — not even close. The document that the minister referred to does not highlight program by program how those settlement dollars have been distributed and where they have gone.

The minister and this government claim that they're accountable. As we've demonstrated in the course of today's and yesterday's debate — and, for that matter, for the last four years — this government has been anything but open, accountable and forthright with British Columbians.

[1730]

They cannot be trusted with this budget. They will not pass this budget, before they go on the campaign trail, to demonstrate to British Columbians that they will actually put the dollars where they say they will. Without legalizing the budget in that form, how is one to trust this government based on their track record to date? They've only broken every single other promise over and over and over again. Now they just want British Columbians to trust them? British Columbians, I suspect, are too smart for that.

Section 1 approved on division.

On section 2.

J. Kwan: Let us be clear and it be on record that the member for Vancouver–Mount Pleasant and the mem-

ber for Surrey–Panorama Ridge oppose section 1 and the spending authority this government seeks under this interim supply bill.

On section 2 — on to seismic funding. Section 2 of this bill gives over \$956 million towards the disbursement of various capital expenditures. Subsection (a) refers to schedule C in the main estimates. Turning to the schedule, we see \$170.3 million for "capital costs of new buildings, renovations and improvements to schools and other school district buildings...."

This week the Minister of Education reannounced the government's plan to spend \$1.5 billion over 15 years for seismic upgrading to schools. The Minister of Education pledges \$254 million over the next three years. With this bill, how much of that is included?

Hon. C. Hansen: I apologize to the member that I don't have the precise breakdown for the seismic portion of that, but the prepaid capital advances that would go out to school districts around the province in this coming fiscal year would be \$170.3 million. What the interim supply would provide for is two-thirds of that.

[1735]

If I can just anticipate, perhaps, another question that might come up is: why two-thirds, when in the other areas we are looking for $\frac{1}{2}$? As it is explained to me on the capital side, in interim supply there's always a longer period of time because of the seasonal nature of construction. Much of it, potentially, could be front-loaded in the fiscal year.

J. Kwan: Once again the minister didn't answer my question. I suspect that the minister wouldn't be able to answer the rest of the questions I have in this area either.

I'd be interested in knowing when parents and school boards can expect to see the money and construction begin. I'd be interested in knowing: does the Minister of Finance have a plan for how he's going to fund the 15-year promise? Is it basically \$100 million each year for the next 15 years? How does the \$254 million, three-year promise work out over the next three years starting with this interim supply? The minister hasn't been able to give any answer whatsoever, and he's asking for a blank cheque in this instance of \$1.5 billion. How about that?

If you own your own home, would you actually write a cheque to somebody — never mind for \$1.5 billion, even for a million dollars — and say: "Hey, here's a million bucks"? But you don't know what they're going to do to renovate your house with that money. You have no idea. This is what this government is asking British Columbians to do.

Would you do that in your own household, Mr. Chair? I think not. Somehow this government, this Minister of Finance and this Premier think it's okay to ask British Columbians to do exactly that.

I'd like to actually ask some questions, because time is in fact running out.

Health facilities. Schedule C of the main estimates also sets out \$280 million for disbursements by the Ministry of Health Services for "capital costs of new buildings, renovations and improvements for health facilities and agencies, and diagnostic and medical equipment." Can the minister break down the \$280 million? How much is federal money from the federal diagnostic and medical equipment fund? Is this the only money available to health authorities for new buildings and renovations? And how does the issue of long-term care bed shortages fit into this?

Hon. C. Hansen: The short answer to the member is that I don't have that breakdown. I don't have that type of detail here for this debate on interim supply.

There is \$280 million allocated for prepaid capital advances that would go to health facilities in the province. The federal equipment fund would be part of that. We have committed that all of those dollars that do come from the federal government will in fact be allocated for that specific purpose, and we will be reporting to the federal government in accordance with that, as we have been required to do in the years to date.

J. Kwan: It took the minister quite a few minutes to get up and say that he actually doesn't know the answer. There's another record.

Another question on the health care area. Mr. Chair, you'll remember that on April 23, 2002, the interior health authority announced that the St. Bartholomew's Hospital in Lytton will be closed once the new health and healing centre will be built. You'll recall that my colleague from Vancouver-Hastings actually raised the question in question period around the health facility there, the hospital there.

[1740]

What the government did was install a phone outside of the facility for off-hour emergency contact with the nursing hotline. People in that community, when they face a health emergency, are supposed to pick up the phone and dial 911. Unfortunately, there was no way to actually phone 911 from the hospital site, when you were outside the door because of the cutbacks of this government, because the phone wasn't even working. Then the government says: "Oh, well, we'll fix that problem." They said they were going to build a new health facility.

Well, it's just come out in the news, on March 10, 2005, that the interior health authority is going to scrap the plans for the new health care facility in Lytton. There will be no new health care facility, and I guess people there just better hope that somebody's phone works for after-hours emergency services.

That is the state of health care under this Liberal government, on the notion of health care when you need it and where you need it — false promise after false promise, broken promise after broken promise. If you're in need of emergency care outside of the hospital, there will be no new facility, and the phone outside the hospital facility actually doesn't work. I guess the

only hope is for you to hope that you don't need emergency health care in that community.

Hon. C. Hansen: I know that the member is very anxious about the time. I'm not going to eat up the time other than to say that what the member just said is not accurate.

J. Brar: I think the minister must be happy the time is running out. He has gone almost full circle without answering any of the questions we have been asking for the last couple of days. Well, you may be able to do that here in this House because of a large majority, but the people of British Columbia, of course, have been listening to the questions and to the answers as well. The people of British Columbia will ask you more when you go out of this House, and that's where you can't run away from the people. You can run away from them here, but not outside this House.

We have tons of questions. You're not prepared to answer those questions. There's no debate — nothing — in this House. That's what your answer is. I have this question.

C. Clark: Let's go to the people, then.

J. Brar: We went to the people just six months ago in the by-election. I went myself. The whole cabinet went to that by-election. The Premier went to that — just a recent example. We went there.

An Hon. Member: Feel good about that?

J. Brar: Yeah, everybody was happy about that.

We have been informed that the Learning Disabilities Association responsible for the cities of Vancouver, Richmond and Burnaby only received \$10,000 of the \$70,000 that they requested. Other groups.... For example, the Richmond Rapids Swim Club received \$40,000. My question is: can the minister please tell me why the Learning Disabilities Association received only \$10,000 this year from gaming while other organizations received much more?

Hon. C. Hansen: This is an interim supply debate that we've been going through for these last two days. As is the tradition in this House, the Minister of Finance endeavours to answer questions of members of the House within the scope of his responsibilities and with the information that is available. I will make sure that the minister responsible for the area that the member just asked about is aware of the member's question.

With that, Mr. Chair, I note the time.

The Chair: Members, pursuant to the schedule adopted on March 7, I'm now going to pose the questions.

Sections 2 and 3 approved on division.

Preamble approved.

Title approved.

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

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 5:45 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

Report and Third Reading of Bills

Bill 20, Supply Act (No. 1), 2005, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed on division.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. members, I am advised that Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor is in the precinct, so I'd ask everyone to please remain in their seats. Thank you.

Royal Assent to Bills

Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor entered the chamber and took her place in the chair.

[1750]

Law Clerk:

Ministerial Accountability Bases, 2004-2005, Amendment Act, 2005

University of Victoria Foundation Act

Pacific Bible College Amendment Act, 2005

British Columbia Wharf Operators' Association (Corporate Restoration) Act, 2005

Westco Insurance Company Act, 1966 Repeal Act, 2005

The John Hussey Foundation (Corporate Restoration) Act, 2005

In Her Majesty's name, Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor doth assent to these acts.

Supply Act (No. 1), 2005

In Her Majesty's name, Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor doth thank Her Majesty's loyal subjects, accept their benevolence and assent to this act.

Hon. I. Campagnolo (Lieutenant-Governor): Good luck to you all till we meet again.

Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor retired from the chamber.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Hon. G. Bruce: Before we adjourn, the members of this side have asked me to ask the Leader of the Opposition: in respect to the invitation to the wedding, will we all be receiving appropriate notices, or are we just to arrive?

J. MacPhail: It came as quite a shock to James Shavick when I made that announcement, but he has embraced it with vigour and exuberance and has asked me to convey — starting with you, Mr. Speaker, and to everyone in this chamber — that you are all absolutely invited to the July 3 wedding. It's going to be a rock 'em, sock 'em Hollywood wedding. What a surprise. And you're all welcome.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this wonderful time.

Hon. G. Bruce: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House at its rising do stand adjourned until it appears to the satisfaction of the Speaker, after consultation with the government, that the public interest requires that the House shall meet or until the Speaker may be advised by the government that it is desired to prorogue the sixth session of the thirty-seventh parliament of the province of British Columbia. The Speaker may give notice that he is so satisfied or has been so advised, and thereupon the House shall meet at the time stated in such notice and, as the case may be, may transact its business as if it had been duly adjourned to that time and date. In the event of the Speaker being unable to act owing to illness or other cause, the Deputy Speaker shall act in his stead for the purpose of this order.

Hon. G. Bruce moved adjournment of the House.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Just before I put the question, I would like to add my thanks to everyone who has served so well the last four years — nearly four years — in this House and to all the staff that have served us so well in this House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: The House is adjourned until the call of the Chair.

All of you have a great summer, and we'll see you all soon.

The House adjourned at 5:55 p.m.