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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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

THIRD SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 2007

The House met at 1:32 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

Introductions by Members

Hon. S. Bond: It's always a wonderful opportunity when we have visitors from the Robson Valley, a beautiful part of British Columbia. I'm delighted today that in the precinct we have Duke Peterson, who is a leader in the whole area of independent power production.

We also have the mayor of McBride, Mayor Mike Frazier. I know that all of my colleagues here in the House would want to make both of them very welcome.

D. Chudnovsky: I had a wonderful opportunity today to have a great lunch in the dining room with friends from Mississauga, Ontario. I'm very pleased today to welcome Ronit Minchom, Dr. Colin Minchom and their sons Jack and Dan. I'd ask the House to make them welcome, please.

H. Bloy: It's a privilege to introduce the mayor of that great city of Coquitlam, Maxine Wilson, who is in the House today along with Warren Jones, the city manager. If the House could please make them welcome.

I would also like to make a second introduction. We have 14 students from Coquitlam College here, along with their teacher Mr. David White. If the House would please join with me in making them welcome.

C. Trevena: Would the House help me make welcome Ken Stone, who is in the gallery today. Ken is a very good friend of mine from Campbell River. I had the pleasure of having lunch with him and other colleagues in the dining room today. If the House would make him welcome.

Hon. I. Chong: Today I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate Lambrick Park high school, which is in my riding, for an amazing performance at the recent provincial double-A Basketball Championships in Kamloops. Both the men's and women's teams advanced to the final games. Both of those games went into overtime. The men's team lost a heartbreaker to Ladysmith. However, the women's team won the provincial championship.

[1335]

I would ask the House to join me in congratulating all of the players on both teams, and special congratulations to the women's coach Rocky Vitale, who not only coaches basketball but runs Victoria's very successful baseball academy. I ask the House to join me in congratulating everyone.

J. Yap: In the gallery today is a good friend and constituent, Dr. Stephen Brady, and his colleague Ms. Frances Lasser. Would the House please make them welcome.

R. Lee: Mr. Speaker, 30 grades 6 and 7 students with their teacher Ms. Pritchard are visiting today from Westridge Elementary School in Burnaby. Would the House please join me in giving the students, parents and teacher a very warm welcome.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS ACT AMENDMENT ACT, 2007

C. Puchmayr presented a bill intituled Employment Standards Act Amendment Act, 2007.

C. Puchmayr: I move introduction of the Employment Standards Act Amendment Act for first reading.

Motion approved.

C. Puchmayr: I'm pleased to introduce the Employment Standards Act Amendment Act. This bill will return some basic rights to farm labourers that they no longer enjoy. This act is a first step in implementing provisions that will begin to restore the dignity in the lives of those who toil so hard in our fields.

The record since 2001, however, has been one of reduced rights, which has created second-class workers in British Columbia. This bill is in the spirit of the wage increases that were incurred under the previous New Democrat administration, which between 1995 and 2001 increased the minimum wage three times and the farm labour rate four times.

Foreign workers are guaranteed a minimum wage when they work in our fields, but British Columbians are not. This is unjust, and the Employment Standards Act Amendment Act will address this and other issues.

First, the bill will right recent historic wrongs by ensuring that farmworkers are paid either piece rate or a minimum-wage rate, whichever is greater. This progressive change would give B.C. a chance to once again be a real leader in Canada in terms of guaranteeing workers' rights.

Second, the bill would restore protections for children in the workforce, which were stripped by this government. Third, this bill will restore overtime wage protections to farmworkers, who now spend unpaid work time as contractors transport them from farm to farm during the work day.

Finally, this bill will reinstate statutory holiday rights for farmworkers and hand-harvest workers in this province.

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

Bill M205, Employment Standards Act Amendment Act, 2007, 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)**

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN NEWTON
REMEMBRANCE DAY CEREMONIES

H. Bains: This past Remembrance Day at Newton cenotaph we watched some of our youngest Canadians remember our soldiers who have fought and continue to fight for our freedom across the world. Children from Pioneer district Girl Guides and Scouts Canada from all over Surrey and North Delta stood alongside many parents and seniors to pay their respect with the wreath- and poppy-laying.

It was touching to see so many young people care about and honour those who have sacrificed so much for our country. I was honoured to have been asked to participate in these celebrations on November 11 and to stand with the young people of our community to honour our war heroes.

Although the wars of the past are far from their experience, they still watch the impact of the war as our Canadian soldiers take off for countries that need their help. These young people show that they respect and care about our veterans of all battles. We could see the pride and sincerity on their faces as they walked up to lay their handmade wreaths and poppies at the cenotaph.

It's important for all of us to honour those who lost their lives for our freedom, and it's our duty as citizens to educate our young people on the importance of the sacrifices that these soldiers made.

[1340]

I would like to thank Christy Goy and Pioneer district Pathfinders for the tremendous effort they put into organizing their Remembrance Day at the Newton Centre Park in Surrey. Their efforts help us to educate our future generation so that we will never forget the valiant bravery of our fallen soldiers.

B.C. OUTDOOR CAUCUS

B. Bennett: I came here about six years ago to represent my constituents in the East Kootenay and to represent all British Columbians. I think we all do that. But I also came here six years ago specifically to represent the interests of rural British Columbians, because that's where I come from, and that's where I've lived most of my life.

Our issues in rural B.C. are different than the issues in the lower mainland. Not always, but often they are. We care a little bit more about off-road vehicle licensing and management than we do about TransLink. It's just the way we are. Our issues are different, and we're proud of that. We care about things like wildlife allocation, and we hope that file is resolved in a way that is fair and generous to the residents of British Columbia.

I'm pleased to announce today that I'm going to be forming a B.C. outdoor caucus to work in conjunction with the federal outdoor caucus and some provincial outdoor caucuses across the country. The B.C. Wildlife Federation, Ducks Unlimited and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation will be happy about this. They've asked me

to do this. The B.C. outdoor caucus will be non-partisan, so I say to all members that I hope you join the caucus. But if you want to do politics, don't bother joining because this is not about politics. This is about the outdoors.

This caucus will support the heritage activities of hunting, fishing, trapping, and outdoor activities like ATV and snowmobile trail riding. I'll be in touch with members in the very near future to give you a formal invitation into this caucus. Even if you don't hunt or fish or trap, I hope you'll accept the invitation and join this caucus to represent the tens of thousands of rural British Columbians who do those kinds of activities.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

N. Simons: I'm pleased to be able to stand here today to register my strong support for public schools that serve all British Columbia children regardless of their level of developmental ability. I speak in support of rural schools, suburban schools, inner-city schools, public elementary schools, middle schools and high schools, where students have the broadest spectrum and variety of needs.

I stand with parents, educators and community living advocates, people with developmental disabilities and everyone else, who know that schools don't just teach us basic foundation skills like math, science and history but are also where we become socialized into the mores and the folkways of our society.

Schools are where we hone social skills and where we learn to interact with each other. We meet people from different cultures and ethnic groups, and this teaches us tolerance and acceptance. We gain a better understanding of other cultures and their way of life. We meet people from different socioeconomic status. Maybe we learn about inequality, and maybe we learn about compassion — and maybe some political activism.

We also meet people with different degrees of ability. Learning alongside people with developmental disabilities teaches us all how to look out for our brothers and sisters. My grandmother Winnie Wood-Whittier and my mother Winnifred Whittier-Simons were both teachers specializing in teaching students with disabilities. My mother still teaches children with multiple challenges, who are integrated into the school system. She's been doing so for over 40 years.

The values of acceptance and inclusion supersede practicality, simplicity and crass efficiency. Schools are where we are first exposed to the tapestry that is our society. Inclusive education is not just important but essential for every child's development. All students have the right to be welcomed and supported in our neighbourhood schools.

Rural communities like Sechelt and Powell River seem to understand this well, partly because we all know our neighbours. Our society has evolved from the 1950s when people thought that students with disabilities should be separated out of the public school system.

CHELSIE MITCHELL

D. MacKay: Have you ever wondered how a person gets to be a poster child — you know, the person who is front and centre on those posters that are designed to sell a product or an event? I'd like to take a couple of moments and tell you about a young poster child from my part of the province.

[1345]

This young lady was selected by VANOC to help sell the 2010 Olympic Games and promote aboriginal participation in those games. The young lady is Chelsie Mitchell, who at the age of 12 was involved in ski racing after having started skiing at the age of four. Chelsie grew up on an Indian reserve west of Smithers, a place called Moricetown. Her parents wanted her to be active, wanted to keep her out of trouble and wanted her have the opportunity to meet other kids.

So her parents Colleen and Duane took her skiing. She progressed to a stage where she wanted to try snowboarding, and the rest is history. Her natural ability to excel on the board saw her competing against others at the national level.

Today she lives in Whistler and trains six days a week. She's also a member of the B.C. snowboard team. Because of the commitment of this young lady, who was leading by example, she was selected by VANOC to be one of three aboriginal people to be highlighted in the new posters that will help sell British Columbia to the world leading up to 2010.

On a personal note, my daughter teaches at that school in Moricetown, and she's told me what a great role model Chelsie has become to the children that my daughter teaches. So on behalf of Chelsie and all the kids at Moricetown, I would ask this House to wish Chelsie all the luck in the future and thanks for being such a great role model.

SMALL POTATOES URBAN DELIVERY

M. Karagianis: I'm sure that members of this House are quite familiar with the 100-Mile Challenge. This is the challenge to only eat food that's grown within 100 miles of your own home.

Today I want to talk about a local success story in my own community that is actually a great resource for taking on the 100-Mile Challenge. It's a company called SPUD.ca. SPUD delivers fresh organic produce and groceries directly to your home every week — no delivery fees. You shop on line, and presto — once a week your groceries arrive at your doorstep. The perfect answer for the lifestyle of an MLA, I think.

They also have a 100-percent satisfaction guarantee to go with it. Wherever possible, the food is locally grown — hence the 100-mile challenge. While retail store produce can sit on a shelf for days under bright lights, most of SPUD's produce is brought in fresh every day and delivered within 24 hours. The fresh-baked bread products, fresh flowers and prepared meals are often delivered in even less time than that.

Buying organic products from SPUD helps protect our soil and water. By making fewer trips to the store,

you also cut down on air pollution and traffic congestion.

In addition to produce, SPUD sells a broad range of eco-friendly products, from recycled toilet paper to phosphate-free cleaners. They also sell a wide range of fair-trade products, ensuring that workers receive fair wages and adequate working conditions. Their service is available throughout the lower mainland and much of Vancouver Island. Their goal is to change the world one grocery order at a time, and I sincerely hope that members of this House will give them a try.

BOMBING OF AIR INDIA FLIGHT

D. Hayer: We often think of terrorism as occurring only outside of our borders or the horror of 9/11 and the loss of so many lives in the World Trade Center. We also think of our brave young Canadian soldiers currently in Afghanistan fighting to bring sense to a world by putting their lives on the line to end terrorism. Yet the reality is that terrorism has its roots in this province too.

The worst terrorism act in the history of this nation, the bombing of Air India flight 182 on June 23, 1985, and its accompanying act of terror that took the lives of two baggage handlers in the airport in Narita, Japan, began right here in British Columbia. More than 20 years later we are still trying to look into these terrible events, still trying to bring closure and solace to the great many British Columbia and Canadian families who lost their loved ones among the 329 who died when flight 182 fell in flames into the Irish Sea. Those victims included 80 children under the age of ten; 280 of those on the flight were Canadian citizens, and 22 were American.

[1350]

Despite the seemingly endless investigations, court cases and inquiries into this tragic but very international event, the British Columbia families still don't have all the answers. Last year our government created a permanent memorial in Stanley Park's Ceperely playground to the memory of all those lives lost on the Air India flight 182 as a permanent reminder to all those who see it that terrorism can never be accepted, that terrorism should not be accepted and that terrorism must always be fought against.

Hence, as legislators and lawmakers we should ensure that the silenced voices of the victims and their families should be remembered as we work for justice to prevail.

Oral Questions

TRANSITION PLAN FOR
RURAL COMMUNITIES

C. Wyse: The census data was released yesterday, and it confirms that the B.C. Liberal policies are making it harder for our rural communities to survive. The government brought in the heartlands strategy in 2003. It turns out that it was nothing but a fad. The B.C. Liberals have made it worse.

We have seen school closures. We've seen no child care spaces, hospital closures, long-term care homes shut down, courthouses closed. Road maintenance has deteriorated.

This government is doing nothing to encourage families to stay in our communities or settle there in the first place. In fact...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

C. Wyse: ...they're making it worse. British Columbians can't trust this government to support their families and their communities.

In the community service plan it states: "The Ministry of Community Services provides support to communities in transition on a case-by-case basis." To the Minister of Community Services: how many of these communities have a community transition plan?

Hon. C. Hansen: I challenge that member to actually look at some of the stats that are coming out of the census. What it shows is that Canadians are moving back to British Columbia after the mass exodus of....

In 1998 we saw a net outflow of Canadians to other parts of Canada from British Columbia of 17,000. The year after there was a net outflow of 12,400, and the year after a net outflow of 15,000.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. C. Hansen: What we are seeing today, in the last number of years, is that those young families that left British Columbia under the NDP government are moving back, and they're building their futures in this province once again.

Mr. Speaker: Member has a supplemental.

C. Wyse: In actual fact, I do have some information here from rural British Columbia, from the same report that's been referred to: Ashcroft, an 8.3-percent drop; Quesnel, a 7.1-percent decrease; Terrace, 6.5 percent; Prince Rupert, 14.5 percent; Vanderhoof, 7.4 percent; Houston, 11.6 percent. The list goes on and on from rural British Columbia.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

C. Wyse: Now, the community service plan states that the ministry assists communities to develop their capacity in a variety of levels. It responds to issues related to the economic change for small rural communities.

The heartlands strategy closed schools, it closed hospital beds, and it closed senior care facilities. The

heartlands strategy changed the rules where logs are milled, allowing jobs to also leave their areas, affecting ordinary working-class families. All of this contributed to difficulty in the heartlands.

Once more to the Minister of Community Services: how many communities have a transition plan in place?

Hon. C. Hansen: The transition plan that we see in place is that we see communities in every corner of British Columbia that once again feel optimistic about the future of this province.

What we saw during the 1990s was economic growth in Canada where British Columbia was the absolute lowest in economic growth. Today we're either number one or number two in every corner of British Columbia.

[1355]

As this member gets around the province, I have no doubt that he talks to one type of person, and it's the NDP — negative, dismal and pessimistic. They should talk to the real British Columbians, who are optimistic about this province for the first time in many, many years.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members, we're not going to continue until there's silence. Member has a further supplemental.

C. Wyse: I listen to all people from Cariboo South, regardless of what party they belong to. That is my job, and it's the job everybody else....

Now back to the business at hand — looking after the interests of all people in rural British Columbia. In May 2005, shortly after the last election, the *Rebuilding the Heartlands* booklets were found in the recycling bin in the Legislature. My question to the Minister of Community Services: was this act the end of the Liberal strategy that turned the heartlands into the "hurtlands"?

Hon. C. Hansen: As you go around this province, community after community, you see that housing prices are up because of optimism, and you see that building permits are being issued for the first time in many years in many communities. Mr. Speaker, you see the unemployment rate in British Columbia that is the lowest that has ever been recorded.

If you look at the region that the member represents in the Cariboo, the Cariboo region in 1998 had an unemployment rate of 14.5 percent. You know what it is today, Mr. Speaker? It is down to 5.3 percent.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

HARVEST OF BEETLE-DAMAGED TREES

B. Simpson: In 2003 this government's flavour of the year was the heartlands strategy. In 2003 this government also deliberately undermined rural British

Columbia. They withdrew thousands of public sector jobs from rural communities. They've regionalized public services. They undermined our infrastructure and downloaded to local governments, and they gutted the Forest Act in a way that broke the social contract that this province has always enjoyed.

These are the actions that changed the heartlands into the "hurtlands," and right now in the interior of B.C. we have such a high degree of uncertainty because of the mountain pine beetle that that hurt is deepening every day.

My question is to the Minister of Forests and Range. Will he address that uncertainty today and tell this House when the mountain pine beetle allowable cut will drop and when we will start to see the dramatic job losses that everybody in those communities expects will occur when that happens?

Hon. R. Coleman: I know that it's the member's policy in the Quesnel area to be negative about everything in forestry and in his community, which is up to him. But frankly, I think the interior of British Columbia has got a strong future. We're managing the pine beetle. There are lots of jobs out there in the forests. We now have a bioenergy plan that'll go forward.

Quite frankly, we're going to work with the communities for long-term success in British Columbia, and we're not going to do it from being the glass half empty. We're going to do it because the glass is half full, and we're going to build a great future in B.C.

Mr. Speaker: Member has a supplemental.

B. Simpson: This is exactly why the mountain-pine-beetle-impacted communities don't know what their future holds — because this minister prefers rhetoric over substance. He's a poster child for how this government likes to do public policy, which is just boosterism instead of substance.

[1400]

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members.

B. Simpson: In my community of Quesnel, the annual allowable cut right now is 5.3 million cubic metres. The Council of Forest Industries, because this minister doesn't have the data as to when the cut is going to come down or how deep, says it may go down as low as less than 500,000 cubic metres — less than a million.

One large mill in my community needs 1.8 million cubic metres per annum to run. We have five sawmills, two panel board plants, two pulp mills and a whole host of other small mills. That's why we need to know when the cut is going to come down.

My question again to this minister is: are we going to run magic wood through these mills? When will the cut level come down? When will we see those job losses, and what is this minister doing to help our community through that transition?

Hon. R. Coleman: First, I hope the offer of the poster child comes with some liposuction and plastic surgery, because I would need some help in that particular area.

We do annual assessments of the pine beetle and its impact. We work with the chief forester with regards to this. We've committed in the hundreds of millions of dollars to the region of British Columbia that's affected by this — \$161 million to Forests for Tomorrow; \$90 million to rehabilitate highways; \$20.7 million to maintain and upgrade Forest Service roads as we go forward. We contributed \$13.7 million last winter just to the pine beetle spread along the Alberta border and transferred \$8.4 million to first nations that put money into community action plans to build economic futures within the beetle action area, as we're working with all of the communities.

I would actually like to invite this member to, for once, rather than being negative, go sit down with your community action coalition with regards to pine beetle. Instead of being a negative influence at the table, be a positive influence at the table.

TRANSITION PLAN FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

R. Austin: I notice that the Minister of Community Services is quietly spending her afternoon laughing, probably relieved that the Minister of Economic Development is answering her questions.

Let me explain to her what the heartland strategy has meant for my home community of Terrace: a funding formula in the school system that has led to a four-day school week; health care decisions now made in Prince George so that more of my constituents have to travel to get their health care; Ministry of Forests jobs gone; Ministry of Transportation jobs gone. All valuable jobs that we needed at the most.... Liberal cuts to eligibility for welfare, making it almost impossible for the most vulnerable people to survive.

That's the record of this B.C. Liberal government trying to help my rural community. Will the Minister of Community Services admit that she has failed my community and has done nothing to assist in any transition?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members.

Hon. C. Hansen: I find it very interesting. I think it underscores the difference between that side of the House and this side of the House that this member and the member for Cariboo North think that the way you create jobs in British Columbia is to create only public sector jobs.

We believe in building a strong private sector economy, and we are doing that across British Columbia. We have now put...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

[1405]

Hon. C. Hansen: ...\$185 million into the Northern Development Initiative Trust to empower northern communities.

I cannot resist the temptation to quote, once again, from a letter that Chief Wilson of the Haisla band in Kitimat sent to the Terrace newspaper. He says that we "are fixing the past, and at least we are intent on being inclusive, unlike...." He includes the NDP in their past record.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

R. Austin: In Kitimat the heartlands strategy has included changing 50 years of legal precedent, where the public resource of water that flows through the Kemano generating plant is no longer considered a public resource but is now the property of Alcan to do with it as it wishes. The Premier's decision that Alcan is no longer an aluminum manufacturer but a power company has resulted in Kitimat losing 12.6 percent of its population.

Can the Minister of Energy tell this House how the Liberal sweetheart deal that they concocted between B.C. Hydro and Alcan and its resultant loss of 500 jobs is going to help Kitimat recover?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. C. Hansen: I'll read some more from this particular letter from Chief Wilson. It says: "Today the rest of us are working to fix the problems that the NDP left behind, and now for the first time the company and the province are being inclusive."

Mr. Speaker, we're working with the private sector, we're working with communities, and we're working with first nations. We are looking to solve the problems and build a secure long-term future for communities right across the north, including Kitimat.

CLOSING OF GROUP HOMES

M. Karagianis: Last Thursday in this House I asked the Minister of Children and Family Development about group home closures in Salmon Arm. The minister responded with these words: "The opposition critic's suggestion that group homes are being closed down in this province is absolutely false."

Well, in fact, I actually have a document here from Community Living B.C. This was sent out in October of 2006, and it says very clearly on page 2: "...the residential options project is trying to create the conditions that will allow agencies to close group homes...."

So I would like to ask: is the minister ignorant of the facts, has he been misinformed, or is he trying to mislead us in this House?

Mr. Speaker: Member, those comments are unparliamentary.

M. Karagianis: Then I will ask if the minister is simply....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Member, do you withdraw those comments?

M. Karagianis: I will withdraw those comments and restate the question.

Is the minister simply unaware of the facts of this story, and in fact will he give us the truth?

Hon. T. Christensen: The member opposite suggested last week that group homes were closing across the province. In response, I said that was patently false. Group homes are not closing across the province. Group homes remain a critical element of the services available....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. T. Christensen: Group homes remain a critical option for the developmentally disabled across the province, but they do not present the only option. The residential options project has been undertaken by CLBC, an organization that is governed by a board — the majority of whom are self-advocates and family members of the developmentally disabled — to look at what options should be available and can be pursued to best meet the needs of developmentally disabled adults.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

[1410]

M. Karagianis: I understood that to mean: "I was wrong. I admit it. I do not know the file." We have families living in anxiety all across this province, wondering what will be the future for the members of their family who live with developmental disabilities. In fact, I have here a proposal that was sent to the employers association, and it stipulates very clearly on page 2 that no more than 100 group homes will be closed or converted to another service delivery model.

I would say right now to the Minister of Children and Family Development: will he explain to the families in British Columbia why 100 group homes are being closed here, and will he please give the facts to those families so they can have some assurance of their future?

Hon. T. Christensen: The opposition doesn't get this. This is about choices for the developmentally disabled. The number of...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. T. Christensen: ...group homes that will be available in the province will depend precisely on the

number of developmentally disabled adults who choose that that's the best option for them.

What we have seen as CLBC has undertaken the residential options project is that people are being presented with options. Some people are choosing to stay in group homes. Others are choosing to pursue a different residential option. This is about choice. It's about nothing but choice.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

A. Dix: Well, I'll leave it to others to discuss what the minister did last week when he said — and I quote; it's in *Hansard*: "The opposition critic's suggestion that group homes are being closed down is absolutely false." In fact, it's the government policy to close group homes.

What about the choice of those people on waiting lists for group homes, when there are vacancies in group homes, who aren't allowed to take up those vacancies? I say to the minister: what about their choice? What about the fact that the minister is narrowing the choices for those who need that kind of care?

Will the minister acknowledge that he was wrong last week, that he didn't understand what was going on in his ministry last week? And will he reverse this policy, which is denying choice to families that need those choices?

Hon. T. Christensen: I understand the opposition's desire to fearmonger and to suggest that people should be afraid that group homes are closing. The reality is that CLBC is working with developmentally disabled individuals and families around the province to look at what options those individuals and their families support for their residential care. That is what the residential options project is about.

It is not the government's policy to be closing group homes. As late as yesterday I spoke with the chair of the board of CLBC and was assured that in every single case, what they are doing is working with families and developmentally disabled individuals to best identify the option that that person and family wish to pursue.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

A. Dix: Well, the minister's deny, deny, deny is cold comfort to those adults with developmental disabilities who need group home services, who should be getting group home services and are not being allowed to fill vacancies today. It's not expanding the choice for people in the community living sector to deny access to group homes. It's closing down choice. I say to the minister: it's completely unacceptable.

Hon. Speaker, his predecessor acknowledged last year that they were going to be closing group homes. He now today — a new revelation from him — is acknowledging that they're going to be closing group homes. My question to the minister is very simple: how many?

Hon. T. Christensen: It may have been the approach of the opposition when they were in government to say: "Let's set a target of things we're going to close and then dictate to people where they should live." The policy of CLBC is to work with the families, to look at what options are available and to assist those families in pursuing those options.

Let me enlighten the opposition just a little bit more on this. The reality is this. If a person chooses to relocate from a group home into a different option, that space is left vacant for a period of time to enable that person to change their mind and return if they wish to do that, because these are vulnerable adults. They may make a choice, but we want to ensure that that choice doesn't close a door.

POLICY ON SENIOR COUPLES IN LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES

K. Conroy: It's been over a year since Fanny Albo died, and at that time the Minister of Health said: "We need to ensure that the appropriate resources are in place so what happened to Mrs. Albo does not happen again."

On February 24, 92-year-old Fred Kreklau died. Last September he was separated from his wife of 64 years. For six months the family pleaded with the minister and Interior Health to have their parents taken care of in the same facility. There were no beds, no facilities.

It's been a year, and seniors are still suffering from this government's cuts. Promises made; promises broken. To the minister: will he stand up for seniors and commit today to change the policies that keep seniors like the Kreklaus from spending their final months together?

Hon. G. Abbott: Let me begin by expressing my condolences to Mrs. Kreklau and the Kreklau family on the death of Mr. Kreklau. I think the Kreklau case does underline the challenge of elderly couples with very different care needs. In the case of Mr. Kreklau, his injury and his illness required 24-7 complex care in a residential care facility. That was not the case for Mrs. Kreklau, and that was a challenge for the Interior Health Authority — to try to find a place where they might be together.

I must say that IHA worked very hard to ensure that the Kreklaus at all times, including Christmas, had the opportunity to spend as much time together as they possibly could. Interior Health bent over backwards to try to ensure that that was the case.

I can speak from some experience in my own family. My own parents were separated by a medical adversity. It does happen among the frail elderly, and I know IHA works tirelessly to try to ensure that the separation is minimized.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

K. Conroy: I'd like to point out that it was in fact the family who paid for the services so that Mr. and Mrs. Kreklau could spend Christmas together.

It was a year ago that the Ballem report was released, completed following the death of Fanny Albo, and in the report it said that the region needed a robust

palliative care program. Fred Kreklau's family had a choice. They got either the four-bed ward he was in with curtains pinned together for privacy or a TV room with no windows, oxygen or comforts needed for a patient in a palliative condition. The family chose the privacy of the TV room and then had to stop residents from coming in to watch TV as they comforted their father in his last hours.

To the minister: does this qualify as a robust palliative care system — a public TV room with no appropriate supports?

Hon. G. Abbott: The member's comments are entirely unfair and inappropriate to the caregivers at Interior Health, who work tirelessly to try....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. G. Abbott: It is entirely unfair and inappropriate for the members to make those comments about caregivers at Interior Health, who work tirelessly to try to ensure that the Kreklaus were able to spend as much time together as possible.

[1420]

In terms of the final hours that Mr. Kreklau spent, I am advised by Interior Health that in fact the room in which the final events took place was one that is set aside in that facility for palliative care and for privacy for families when they are in that most difficult moment of their lives — when they're saying goodbye to a loved one.

I think it is most inappropriate and unfair to characterize as anything other than compassionate what IHA tried to do for the couple.

HOSPITAL DISCHARGE POLICY FOR RURAL PATIENTS

G. Coons: I also have a question for the Minister of Health. David Yasko was recently medevacked from Queen Charlotte on Haida Gwaii to Prince Rupert and then ambulated another two hours to Kitimat for emergency treatment.

Later Mr. Yasko was discharged with no money, no coat and no assistance on how to get back home. Mr. Yasko told me that he feels that those on the islands are forgotten. He had no idea that they just release you, and you fend for yourself.

The minister must agree that there is something dreadfully wrong with this picture of a patient just released from a hospital and left to find their way home unassisted. A journey like that for some can take days to make. My question is simple. Why does your government insist on not helping patients like Mr. Yasko?

Hon. G. Abbott: Again, I think it is unfortunate that what we hear from the opposition is one-sided and frequently misleading accounts of what took place.

The policy that has been in place for at least three governments.... We didn't create the policy. The NDP

didn't create the policy, but they didn't change it either. The policy has been around....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. G. Abbott: The policy has been around for decades that what we do through B.C. air ambulance, what we do through B.C. ambulance on the ground, is try to ensure that whatever the care needs are for the patient — whether they're primary or tertiary — they get the very best of care from the very best of facilities in this province.

Once their course of care is completed, the hospitals work with the patient to ensure that they can find a way home from that. But we cannot occupy the use of air ambulance for non-emergency cases.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, when you were speaking, you used the word "misleading." I'd ask you to retract that.

Hon. G. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I aimed the word at the account as opposed to the individual, but I'm glad to withdraw that if it brings offence to the member.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: The member withdrew the statement.

[End of question period.]

Petitions

C. Trevena: Mr. Speaker, I have another petition with about 350 names calling for the restoration of provincial funding for our provincial child care service.

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. de Jong: I call in this chamber second reading debate on Bill 10, Tobacco Sales (Banning Tobacco and Smoking in Public Places and Schools) Amendment Act, 2007. In Committee A, Committee of Supply and, for the information of members, continued estimates debate on the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance and, thereafter, the Ministry of Transportation.

[1425]

Second Reading of Bills

TOBACCO SALES (BANNING TOBACCO AND SMOKING IN PUBLIC PLACES AND SCHOOLS) AMENDMENT ACT, 2007

Hon. G. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to rise and move second reading of the Tobacco Sales (Banning Tobacco and Smoking in Public Places and

Schools) Amendment Act, 2007. Our government is committed to reducing tobacco use and the impact of tobacco on the health system. Tobacco kills over 6,000 British Columbians each year and costs the B.C. economy \$2.3 billion each and every year.

I know that in some of the newspaper and other accounts of the introduction of Bill 10, some said: "Actually, tobacco is a source of revenue to the province." Yes, that's true. It is. But that revenue is small in comparison to the cost that the diseases that are pursuant to tobacco use impose. In relation to the human cost — the cost in terms of human suffering that is produced by tobacco — the revenues are insignificant.

I'm sure the Finance Minister and I hope every member of this House would be delighted if we never had another cent in tax revenue from tobacco again in our lives. That would mean that tobacco usage was at zero, which I think would be a wonderful thing in this province.

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

This legislation, Bill 10, makes important additions to the Tobacco Sales Act that will protect the public and workers from secondhand tobacco smoke and will protect our children from being constantly bombarded by tobacco promotion and display.

The amendment will limit the promotion and sale of tobacco products in British Columbia. It sets out broad parameters, and once passed, details will be spelled out in regulations as to exactly how the legislative provisions will work.

Last year the Premier said: "We want to find a cure for cancer, but we need to take steps to prevent it in all parts of the province. That means we have to do more to reduce tobacco use and secondhand smoke."

Today we are doing what he said we would do. We're going to act now to phase out smoking in all indoor public spaces by 2008 and in schools and school grounds this fall. I know my friend and colleague the Minister of Education will have more to say with respect to that important matter in this second reading debate.

While the amendment will ban smoking in all indoor places and on school grounds, this legislation does not apply to parks, parking lots, sidewalks, outdoor workplaces, outdoor workplace grounds, patios or other open areas. But this smoke-free amendment does apply to private clubs and to legions and service clubs. Prohibiting smoking in such places provides a level playing field with other hospitality establishments and protects people, both smokers and non-smokers, from the hazards of secondhand smoke.

[1430]

The Premier has said that the act will not cover people's homes, and indeed it does not. You can still smoke in your own home, your vehicle or hotel room — if that host facility and of course your families or companions are in agreement.

The amendments may allow for some exemption. For example, they could by regulation allow residents in long-term care facilities to smoke in a designated

smoking room. But staff and visitors may not be able to smoke in such a room.

The act also protects indoor air quality by giving a buffer to outdoor smoking. Smoking will not be allowed in doorways or near windows or air intakes — again, it goes without saying, but perhaps best with saying — so that those of us who are non-smokers, that 85 percent of British Columbians who are non-smokers, do not have to endure or put up with or breathe in the smoke from smokers. Precise distances will be set out by regulation, based on consultations with all British Columbians and on the national and international experience in respect of regulated setbacks from doorways and air intakes.

Some municipalities in this province have already passed bylaws restricting smoking. This act sets a minimum standard respecting smoking in enclosed public places and indoor workplaces that will apply across the province. Municipalities will continue to be able to enact bylaws which are more severe or restrictive or more extensive in their application should they choose to do so.

One of the very important features of this bill is around tobacco signs and display ads and the banning of those things. Conspicuous displays of tobacco products and branded accessories in the form of what are termed power walls, countertop displays and other forms of promotion are common in most convenience stores, grocery stores, supermarkets and gas stations. These displays reach young people and send an inconsistent message that smoking is socially acceptable. They reduce the impact of the message that tobacco products are harmful to health.

This amendment will allow by regulation the curtailment of overt promotion of tobacco to our children. Regulation will also ban the display of tobacco products in all places where tobacco is sold that are accessible to youth under 19. This will mean youth will not be confronted with tobacco marketing every time they go to the corner store.

This, I think, is an extremely important part of this bill. The world has changed considerably since I was a teenager, and some would note that a considerable length of time has passed as well. When I was a teenager and in my early 20s, it was very commonplace. Smoking rates were much higher in my youth than they are today. I recall university classes where not only the students were smoking, but the professors were smoking as well. Obviously, we've come a long, long distance from that.

I hope what we have also come a long, long distance from is how those kinds of influences can influence whether we decide to take up smoking in our youth. I took up smoking in my youth. I'm happy to say that none of my three children have taken up smoking in their youth, and that's a wonderful thing.

But in relation to the bill, the critical point is this. We know that if young people don't take up smoking by the time they reach 19 years of age, there is a very, very slim chance that they will take up smoking for the rest of their lives. That is what has got to be key for the government, for the opposition, for every member of this House, for all British Columbians trying to ensure that fewer and fewer young people in British Columbia

take up smoking. That is why we are taking the important steps we are today in relation to tobacco marketing in this province.

[1435]

A ban on sales of tobacco will apply to hospitals and other health facilities. It will apply to recreational facilities, post-secondary campuses and provincial government buildings. We are going to be taking leadership on this question in respect of where tobacco is sold. It is fundamentally important that publicly funded facilities support the message that tobacco is no longer socially acceptable and is a very unhealthy lifestyle choice.

Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of disease and death in British Columbia. That is entirely clear. It is not just lung cancer. A very, very high proportion of lung cancers in this province are directly related to smoking. Other major killers like heart disease are often linked to smoking. Emphysema and a range of cancers beyond lung cancers are related to smoking as well.

It's a fact, as well, that smoking kills more people in British Columbia than all other drugs, motor vehicle collisions, murder, suicide and HIV/AIDS combined. Take all of those things, and it still doesn't come anywhere near the number of people who are killed on an annual basis by the incidence of smoking.

The B.C. tobacco strategy includes a comprehensive range of efforts to reduce tobacco use — including school-based programming, public education, protection from secondhand smoke, support for cessation, legislation and legal action — on, I think, both sides of the House. We can be proud that our governments have been forceful in terms of pushing forward on both the legal and the legislative side to ensure that we are leaders in this nation in respect of preventing and ceasing tobacco use.

The Ministry of Health currently funds a number of non-smoking programs or quit-smoking programs such as quitnow.ca and QuitNow by phone that are available 24-7 to all British Columbians, with translation services now available in 130 languages. As well, another program that's enjoyed considerable success is Kick the Nic, a program specifically for youth smokers also available throughout B.C.

It's part of our government's goal to reduce tobacco use by another 10 percent by 2010. An ambitious goal, but I believe with the work we are doing and with this legislation, we will push ever closer to that goal.

In closing, the Tobacco Sales (Banning Tobacco and Smoking in Public Places and Schools) Amendment Act, 2007, reflects our ongoing commitment to improve the health of British Columbians by supporting healthy lifestyle choices. There is no more important choice that a young person, a middle-aged person or an older person can make in their lives and their health outcomes. Tomorrow, two years from now, five years from now, ten years from now or 20 years from now, there is no decision that you can make about your lifestyle that is more important than giving up tobacco.

Madam Speaker, thank you to the members for their interest in this matter, and I look forward to the

comments of other members on both sides of the House and to debating this bill at committee stage.

A. Dix: It's with great pleasure that I rise to speak on Bill 10, Tobacco Sales (Banning Tobacco and Smoking in Public Places and Schools) Amendment Act, 2007. I'd say to the Minister of Health that it's the first bill tabled by him since I became critic, and it perhaps shows the synergy that has developed between the Minister of Health and myself that I'm rising in support of this legislation.

[1440]

I think this is indeed a very important bill. The minister has talked about the human cost of tobacco smoking in British Columbia — the thousands of people who die not just of smoking tobacco but from the impact of secondhand smoke. I think we all know this because we all in our lives.... About 16 percent of British Columbians smoke. All of us know smokers.

I don't know very many smokers who don't want to quit smoking. These include people of enormous will and success in their lives, and they find it very difficult to do so. Nicotine is an extraordinarily addictive product. I think any steps that we can take as legislators and as people in British Columbia to stop people from taking up smoking have to be brought forward and have to be brought forward with vigour.

In fact, smoking and nicotine are what's called a reinforcing drug. Smokers want it in spite of its damaging effects. Again, we all know this from our lives, from people we meet in our lives who smoke and who are plagued with the addiction of smoking and can't get past it even though they know of its impacts on them, even though they know of its impacts on their families.

I think it's important to keep those things in context when we're having this discussion about smoking, about its impact on the lives of individuals — young people, but people across British Columbia. There's a second group of people, which is in a sense the rest of us, who are also frequently affected in spite of recent changes in the law by the impact of secondhand smoke. It's estimated that hundreds of people in British Columbia die every year because of the effect of secondhand smoke in our province.

There's a list here, and it's quite extraordinary because what secondhand smoke is, as people have said, is essentially a combination of poisonous gases. A person who breathes secondhand smoke — it's breathed in — has to suffer through and deal with the impact of and the exposure to 4,000 different chemicals, 50 of which cause cancer.

When we talk about this issue of secondhand smoke and its importance.... I know that part of this bill deals with that issue — the part of the bill that in fact will ban smoking from all indoor public places, including smoking rooms in restaurants, pubs and bars as well as schools and bus shelters. What that's a reflection of isn't just the desire to get people to stop smoking but to protect other people — workers and patrons in those restaurants and bars.

The minister will know this because there's lots of talk about smoking rooms, and the evidence is un-

equivocal. You can't seal them off. There's no ventilation system in the world that will protect people. In addition, people who are not smokers have to go in those smoking rooms to serve other people.

I support the ban on smoking from all indoor public places. We support the ban on smoking near doorways, windows and air intakes of buildings. We support the provisions brought forward in the legislation.

On the secondhand smoke question we simply have to be vigilant, because it is one thing to say that people have rights to engage in practices, that things are legal. It's another thing to say that other people who are not smokers have to be exposed to those consequences as well.

I think the minister has said it quite well with respect to young people, and that's why we strongly support, as well, the regulations affecting schools. We probably have to do more than that. We have to probably provide some assistance to support school boards in implementing these measures, and sometimes support neighbourhoods around schools in dealing with the consequences of these measures.

It's something that I know the Minister of Education is concerned with because she, like me, meets with parents a lot. Some of the issues around smoking in schools aren't on grounds. They tend to be around grounds and so on — not just by students, but by people working there and others. That element of the question is something that we have to work together to address in communities.

I want to encourage the government to continue on that and on the smoking issue as well. I think it is an excellent step to provide access to smoking cessation programs for people on income assistance, but I believe we have to go further.

[1445]

We've heard stories. One of the interesting stories.... There's a writer for the *Globe and Mail* named Jan Wong, who did a series of stories on maid services last year and talked about women who work in those services for very little money. It's a very challenging and difficult job that the reporter had a very difficult time, in fact, keeping up with.

A number of people in that story — and I recommend it to the minister — who were working in those services struggled to be able to pay for the costs of smoking cessation programs with what meagre income they had. We also know in terms of smoking cessation the value of having support, either from community health centres or doctors, in success rates of smoking cessation programs.

Those are areas that we've got to go further on. I do think — and I think the minister would be disappointed if I didn't point this out — that the current government has been slow to respond on this question, particularly on the question of secondhand smoke.

The minister first of all referred to the tobacco lawsuit that was initiated under the NDP. I would make the point that when that lawsuit was initiated by the NDP, it was ridiculed by the Liberal opposition. Happily, the member for Kamloops was there....

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Order, Member, please. Can we listen to the speaker.

A. Dix: The member for Kamloops will remember because he was there. I don't recall from the *Hansard* whether he was one of the people doing the ridiculing, but I think what it shows is the evolution over time on these issues.

The government was slow on this issue. The B.C. Liberal Party was slow to respond to the need. The minister talked about the costs to the economy and cost to health care of smoking in British Columbia, and clearly the government was slow to respond to that. Happily, after 2001, they acknowledged that the NDP government had been right and they had been wrong on that question.

It's important to reflect on that because, at the time, the critic for the Liberal Party called the bill appalling — referred to it as just having been instituted for political purposes and not for the purpose of helping people. So change happens, and we have to applaud that change. We have to applaud the evolution that happens. But I must say that evolution happened about five years too late and five years beyond everyone else.

This brings me to another significant part of this legislation, which is the decision to ban smoking from all indoor public places. Here we're talking about not a high point of the government's time in office. We all remember the WCB fulfilling its mandate to protect workers.

Remember, this isn't me saying that secondhand smoke is a risk to workers and to citizens. It's the government's own website that says it's a risk. The government's own website says that no exposure — there's no minimum — to secondhand smoke is without risk. That's what the government's website said. That's what studies have shown again and again — not recent studies, but studies over the last 25 years.

In 2001 the WCB was about to bring in regulations to protect workers in the hospitality industry, and we all know what happened. The election happened, and political intervention happened on the part of the government to deny, in fact, the WCB the right to bring those measures into place.

Directives came from the government. We had a Minister of Labour who is not with us anymore in this House. He's with us, of course, on Vancouver Island, but he's not with us in the House — Graham Bruce. He said that eight months won't give anyone cancer. That was the level of debate at the time and the level of decision-making on this fundamental health question. Anybody who's known anyone who has suffered the effects of smoking knows how ridiculous and unacceptable those statements are. But eight months — it won't make a problem.

That's when they delayed it the first time. Immediately after the election in July, there were reports that backbench Liberal MLAs were intervening in this process and demanding that the changes wouldn't go through. The paint wasn't even dry. They weren't even

here for a month before they were undermining the WCB on this question in 2001.

[1450]

Then the WCB said no. The chair of the WCB said: "No, we are not going to be intimidated. We are not going to be overruled. We are not going to wait for the Liberal back bench to delay this legislation for six months."

The member for Vancouver-Burrard was here. He knows what happened. He knows that those backbenchers intervened in that way. He knows the government intervened in that way. The government intervened. So the Liberal backbench came in, and the Liberal cabinet came in and ordered the WCB not to protect workers in this way. They delayed the implementation of the smoking ban.

Then after six months, they imposed on the WCB the designated smoking-room policy. They did it. This is a government that on its website — not recently, but for a long time — said that secondhand smoke is dangerous at any level. They knew it, and for five years people have had to deal with the effects of secondhand smoke because they intervened politically to overrule an independent body.

This is part of the history. I know we're celebrating today, after five years, the recognition of that political interference on behalf, in part, of some people who I must say contributed considerably to campaigns. That political interference caused that delay, and you can't be equivocal about it. There was no excuse for it.

Instead we had the Minister of Labour talking about the fact that, yes, people may get cancer, but other people had to run businesses. That's why I think that for those workers, these changes are long overdue. We can actually put a date on how long this government's intervention has delayed that protection for workers.

But we can't put an end date on it, because even though, again, the government has acknowledged that the secondhand smoke in the workplace environment is dangerous for workers, the ban is going to be brought in.... It was announced by the Premier some time ago. It was instituted in this legislation, but it's going to come into place in 2008.

So we've gone from 2001 to 2008. This is serious business. A government that intervened politically and irresponsibly in this way should not be further delaying the implementation of basic workplace protections to workers in the hospitality industry. I'd suggest this goes to show what happens when a lobby overwhelms common sense. That's happened here. A lobby overwhelmed common sense.

Everybody has suffered. Those workers suffered. People in this province suffered. Some people in this province will suffer for decades the long-term effects of that government decision to overrule the WCB. They'll suffer and suffer and suffer.

Even the businesses suffered. There are businesses around British Columbia that spent \$10,000, \$20,000, \$30,000, \$40,000 or \$50,000 to bring themselves into compliance. Now this government twists and turns and twists and turns, because the decision was wrong.

This didn't happen because they made a tough call. They knew it was wrong. They knew the WCB was right. They knew the evidence on smoking. They intervened politically to make the changes, and everybody paid the price. It is an object lesson that this government gets again and again and again.

The question is: when will justice come? When will protection come for those workers? The government says 2008, and they do a victory lap in announcing this legislation. Well, why not now?

Interjections.

A. Dix: Well, hon. Speaker....

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, Members, please. Can we listen to the speaker.

[1455]

A. Dix: The Minister of Health is agitated. I understand his agitation, because he was part of that cabinet that overruled the WCB. He was there. He was part of that cabinet.

Interjections.

A. Dix: I think that was wrong. To join the non-partisan spirit that the minister is heckling me in, I don't think it would be that bad if the minister acknowledged he was wrong today. Maybe that....

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, please.
Continue, Member.

A. Dix: Here we have a situation, a specific measure. You know, it's real people that paid the price for this. The Minister of Health can talk and yell and heckle. It's real people that paid for that decision in 2001 to overrule the WCB — real people working in the hospitality industry.

They have the same right to protections as other workers in British Columbia, and they were singled out. It was done politically. It was done by MLAs and not by those who brought forward the regulation at the WCB level. They intervened politically. They overturned that decision, and everybody paid the consequence for that.

I think we have to recognize that, when we talk about a piece of legislation that doesn't actually set a date for bringing this into force. What is the rationale to continue the delay? That's the question we're going to engage in tomorrow. The reason I'm bringing this issue to the minister's attention is that I think that's an important question.

When in 2008 will these workers finally get the protections that they should have got at the end of August of 2001 and would have got if the government hadn't

intervened? When in 2008 are they going to get those protections?

That's the question we have first of all. That's the first set of questions we have about the legislation. It seems to me that it's not good enough for the government just to pass over the fact that people have had to go through this period as a result of their actions — actions that were indefensible at the time, actions that continue to be indefensible. Those protections which ought to have been in place at that time are still not in place today.

I'd like to talk about a couple of things that aren't in the legislation and that we're naturally hopeful to convince the Minister of Health, in our constant effort to improve public policy in British Columbia, to consider. I want to acknowledge, in doing that, the excellent work of my colleague from Saanich South, who's been a leader and an advocate on issues, not just — and he's going to talk about some of these issues in this debate at length — as a legislator but as a leader in his community. It is an obligation on all of us to bring a sense of leadership and a sense of support for initiatives to help people stop smoking, to stop people from starting smoking and to protect people from the consequences of secondhand smoke.

One of those issues — and the member for Saanich South will talk about it at greater length — is of course the decision by the government not to include a ban on tobacco sales in pharmacies. I put it in the context of what's happened before. Tobacco lawsuit — B.C. Liberals opposed, then in favour. WCB ban and protections for workers against secondhand smoke — B.C. Liberals opposed, and five years later in favour. This gives us hope that they will see reason on the issue of selling tobacco in pharmacies.

When you think about the role pharmacies play in terms of public health, in terms of the effective management of public health issues.... We've seen it recently in terms of the role that pharmacies and pharmacists play in protecting people from taking the wrong drugs at times, being wrongly prescribed at times. I think pharmacists play a remarkable role, and the College of Pharmacists supports a ban on tobacco sales in pharmacies. The College of Pharmacists supports it.

There's such a ban in place in Ontario. When was the ban in place in Ontario? Well, it comes from the 1990s. The minister will no doubt have comments to make about that. It's been in place for 12 years in Ontario. The roof hasn't fallen in. It's been in place for ten years in New Brunswick. The roof hasn't fallen in. It's been in place for nine years in the province of Quebec. The roof hasn't fallen in. It's been in place in Nova Scotia for six years. The roof hasn't fallen in. It's been in place in Newfoundland for two years. The roof hasn't fallen in.

[1500]

In terms of the next step that's required.... One of the next steps that's required to protect people from the impacts of cigarette smoke is to make pharmacies, which are a place of health, come forward into the 21st century and not allow the sale of cigarettes in pharmacies.

The member for Saanich South brought forward a very good bill at this time last year. Unfortunately, in spite of the support that the member for Saanich South has received from that bill — and, I think, the thoughtful presentation he brought forward — the government has not yet chosen to act.

Given, as I say, the government's delay in other areas of this bill and their change of heart, we're hopeful — we're filled with optimism — that the minister will consider the arguments of the member for Saanich South, will consider the arguments of the B.C. College of Pharmacists, will consider what's happened in other jurisdictions and bring forward legislation himself enacting such a ban in the near future.

We, of course, will have questions at committee stage on this legislation. But I want to say that I think fighting tobacco addiction is a high priority for health care. The minister knows that it doesn't just.... There is the issue, and there's always the debate that people have — the minister referred to it — about the fact that we take in tax revenue that I don't think anywhere near matches the cost of smoking in our society.

There's that whole debate, but I think we have to do what we can do. We are number one in Canada. We have fewer smokers per capita here in Canada than any other jurisdiction, but I think all members of this House would agree that hundreds of thousands of people — between 500,000 and 600,000 — smoke in British Columbia, and that is quite a bit too many. That has huge implications for costs, but it has even greater implications on human lives.

We support this legislation. We support the effort to stop, in particular, young people from smoking. We support the protections for workers in the hospitality industry — five years too late but nonetheless coming into place. I ask all members on all sides of the House to support this legislation.

C. Puchmayr: I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

C. Puchmayr: I would like to introduce Cathern Scroggins from Peterborough, Ontario, who is in the gallery today, and Norine Hider from Burlington, Ontario, whose daughter has just purchased in this area. They're out visiting. Please make them feel welcome.

Debate Continued

Hon. S. Bond: I'm delighted to stand in support of the bill that's being discussed in the House at second reading stage today. I started out very optimistically and very pleased, in fact, that the member opposite previously suggested that he was certainly in support of this bill. I was a bit confused by that later on throughout some of his comments, but I can tell you this: this bill is significant and addresses significant problems that are facing British Columbians today.

I want to begin by, first of all, making reference to some comments that have been made by the B.C. Healthy Living Alliance in relation to this bill. Let me quote:

"The B.C. Healthy Living Alliance congratulates this government on its recent move to reduce tobacco use. Banning smoking in public places and school grounds and limiting the promotion and sales of tobacco products are important steps in the fight against tobacco and secondhand smoke.

"The B.C. Healthy Living Alliance is impressed that this government has taken a strong position to ban the marketing of tobacco products in all places accessible to youth. This will make a tremendous difference in reducing the number of youth that start smoking and are ensnared in a lifelong struggle with tobacco addiction. Adults will also benefit from this legislation, which provides this province with a brighter outlook for a healthier future."

In particular, we're pleased that we are going to take a very aggressive position with banning smoking on school property, school grounds. It's an important step. I should say, though, that I have also been impressed.... As a former school trustee, I can assure you that many boards across this province had already begun to address this critical issue.

[1505]

One of the challenges we found was that the policies were not consistent across British Columbia. It's true that all school districts except one currently have a no-smoking policy. However, as I've mentioned, the policies were inconsistent across the province.

Only about half of the districts banned smoking in school buildings, on school grounds and in school district vehicles. About 40 percent of school districts permitted smoking in school vehicles, and about a quarter of the districts permitted smoking on school grounds. Only about a quarter of the districts had an enforcement policy in place.

As we work with school boards over the next number of months, we intend to erase the inconsistency that exists across the province. There has been a very positive reaction to the bill. We know that there is work to do.

As the member opposite pointed out, there are challenges when you deal with the issue of smoking on school grounds. There are obviously issues that occur related to the property that's nearby and for neighbours and a number of other issues. But I can assure you that school boards across this province will be in compliance with this bill when it passes, and we will work with them. This is absolutely essential to the health and well-being of students in British Columbia.

We also know that banning smoking is not the only issue. We have to deal with education and how we actually provide support and other programs for students across the province.

In addition to our new tobacco-free schools legislation, we have put in place policies and programs over the last number of years that would help educate children and youth about the dangers of using tobacco and other substances. We are continuing to place emphasis on resources that prevent youth and young adults from ever beginning to smoke.

The Ministry of Health partnered with our ministry, the Ministry of Education, to consult with leaders and health experts across the province to create a tobacco prevention resource for teachers in grades 4 through 12. It's called bc.tobaccofacts. We now have this excellent resource.

It has again been a partnership between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, with great advice from experts across the province. This resource is based on best classroom practices and the latest research on tobacco prevention and cessation. This is a groundbreaking resource. It's unique in the world.

Today we are not only dealing with a bill that actually is an aggressive and wide-ranging bill; we also are leading the world with some of the resources being created to deal with this on a number of levels. The resource that we have is grade-specific, and it is also completely integrated into the curriculum. It's an incredible piece of work, and I am so pleased and proud of the team that has put that information together. I know it's going to benefit students in our province.

There's also a program called HeartSmart Kids K-3, in partnership once again with another fabulous organization, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of B.C. and the Yukon. The province developed HeartSmart Kids K-3 bc.tobaccofacts for kindergarten through grade 3, once again, providing important teacher resources to address tobacco and other health-related issues with students, beginning as early as kindergarten and helping them through grade 3. We know that we need to provide information and education to be able to help our children make great decisions.

We have a program called Buddy Power — Think Smart, Don't Start. Buddy Power is a resource designed to actually involve students in learning about the dangers of tobacco use. There are three resource components. An activity book for primary students working in a buddy situation.... Anyone who does classroom visits has the wonderful opportunity often to see buddy programs where we have older students working with younger students. Buddy Power takes advantage of that situation, so we have primary students working in a buddy situation.

There's a booklet for intermediate student leaders. So we're talking about teaching students about leadership, the ability to actually teach another child. They work in that buddy situation. We also provide a pamphlet for teacher sponsors.

Doing those activities with that older buddy, our elementary kids not only learn about tobacco facts, but they share together that knowledge with a friend. It's an incredible program, lots of fun.

[1510]

We also have several courses in our curriculum which address the concerns and the dangers of tobacco and substance abuse, and those are included in the health and career education program, K through 7 — and also in planning 10, I should mention. These courses, again, address the dangers of tobacco through several themes like healthy living and substance use and abuse.

We know that this legislation will help improve the health of our students by banning tobacco use both in public and independent schools. The legislation will ban the use of any form of tobacco in schools, in any buildings used by schools, in vehicles leased or owned by boards, on school grounds and in boards of education offices that are used for educational purposes.

Districts and school administrators will be responsible for ensuring that their schools abide by this ban. Health officers will monitor the compliance and enforce the legislation. Tobacco enforcement officers from health authorities will continue to enforce the sales provision of the act and will also enforce the display restrictions.

Why is the legislation so important? Smoking continues to be the leading cause of preventable death, disability and premature death in British Columbia, and there continues to be a strong link between smoking as a teen and smoking as an adult. Although our province, British Columbia, continues to have the lowest smoking rate in Canada, 14 percent of British Columbia's youth aged 15 to 19 reported smoking in 2005. Previous studies have found that approximately 83 percent of smokers begin smoking before they turned 19. According to the B.C. provincial health officer, young people are less likely to start using tobacco products when they have not already smoked by the age of 19.

Many school and community resources are dedicated to ensuring that our youth never start using tobacco products. Initiatives to reduce the number of school-age children taking up the tobacco habit will have a significant impact on prevalence rates as adults and the overall health and well-being of our population.

This legislation helps support our goals of creating a healthier and safer school environment where our children can learn and grow. We are setting a good example for British Columbia's children to help them choose healthy habits that will serve them well in their adult lives.

We know that a complete ban sends a consistent message, and it reinforces the perception by students that other students don't smoke on school property. Not smoking becomes the social norm and gives students more confidence in using refusal skills. It creates long-term benefits such as healthier workplaces and reduced economic costs.

Ontario banned smoking in schools and on school grounds in 1994. School administrators were more likely to report on a positive result from the ban than a negative one. The majority of non-smoking students were highly supportive. Schools reported a net decrease in the number of students smoking.

We know that it will take a comprehensive approach which includes smoking restrictions, control over sales to teens and advertising in mass media non-smoking campaigns. That comprehensive strategy has been shown to have a beneficial impact on the prevalence rates in adolescence.

This approach is completely consistent with the healthy schools concept, recognizing schools as important social environments where curricula, teaching

practices and policies.... It has to be a combination, and that's why I'm so proud of the work we're doing in terms of curricula and programs that we have put in place over the last number of years. But we know that it takes a consistent and collaborative approach, looking at a comprehensive strategy to actually make a difference. Teaching practices and policies enhance a student's physical, mental and social well-being.

That is why we're legislating the ban on smoking on school property, and in the months ahead we will be announcing other strategies to help ensure that students learn and achieve in a safe and very healthy environment. We want B.C. to lead the way in healthy eating and physical fitness. This legislation will help support that goal by creating healthy and safe school environments where our children can learn and grow to be the best they can be.

[1515]

As we've said, we don't want our children and teens to use tobacco products. We want to set a good example, and today I am delighted to stand and support a bill that I think will make a difference for the young people and young adults of British Columbia.

D. Cubberley: I, too, rise today to speak to Bill 10, Tobacco Sales Amendment Act, 2007. I'd like to begin by saying that we on this side of the House welcome a return to action by the present government. We endorse the progressive features of the bill, including measures to reduce the visibility of smokes, to circumscribe the places where tobacco may be smoked and to ban the sale of tobacco in certain locales.

All of these actions are forward steps in the ongoing battle to stem the scourge of nicotine addiction, lengthen the lives of British Columbians and reduce the ultimate cost to our health care system. These steps may be coming, in some cases, later than we would have liked. They may represent a much delayed reversal of a past mistake, but they are coming at last. We welcome government's signs of a reviving pulse in tobacco control, although we would prefer and we will propose yet more comprehensive action that would restore this province to the level of leadership that the prior speaker was talking about.

For the record, I just want to state that nicotine is a drug and that it's as addictive as heroin. Yet it remains a legal product available to anyone over a certain age, and many people under that age find it quite easy to gain access to it.

Tobacco is also the only licit product that kills people when it's used exactly as its manufacturers intend, and that is as a daily — in fact, an hourly or sometimes even shorter — schedule of reinforcement practice that's driven by cravings that an individual feels he or she has virtually no control over.

I can speak from direct experience in the matter, having been born habituated to nicotine by a parental addiction, then exposed to ongoing substantial doses of secondhand smoke at home from living with two smokers while I grew up, and finally by becoming an addicted smoker myself by the age of 12 and continu-

ing until my mid-20s before I finally found the way to withdraw.

Tobacco is anything but a manageable recreational pastime, although that's how it was viewed when I was growing up. Quitting is a very, very difficult act. The longer you've smoked, probably the harder it becomes. But we as a society have come a tremendously long way since the time when smoking was considered a rite of passage to adult life, which is how it was when I began.

It was glamorized in movies and dramatized around me as something that was simply normal. My God, people smoked on television while they were reading the news when TV first appeared. Hosts smoked on TV.

The path that we've been on is very instructive as to what must be done to bring down rates further still. I intend my comments this afternoon in the spirit of building on the synergy that the member for Vancouver-Kingsway indicated existed on this issue on both sides of the House.

The House will certainly be aware by now that British Columbia became a true leader on tobacco issues in the 1990s when it pioneered important elements of tobacco control like the ongoing multifaceted public media campaign that helped to denormalize tobacco use, sensitize at-risk populations like kids to the dangers of addiction and engage people in actually quitting that addiction.

One outcome of that leadership in the '90s is that B.C. has long enjoyed the lowest rate of addiction to tobacco in Canada — one of the lowest, if not the lowest in North America. California was probably the first pioneer, and as with some other ideas we've seen more recently, ideas migrated north and were put in play here.

Certainly that low rate of addiction to tobacco in this province is a key factor in the assessment of the effectiveness of B.C.'s health system and its population health, and it plays heavily when it's evaluated relative to other jurisdictions contributing to lower rates of cancer and greater longevity.

[1520]

Back in the late '90s the B.C. Workers Compensation Board introduced a provincewide ban on smoking in all workplaces except those it exempted — at the time, those in the hospitality sector, which were given additional time to adjust to the coming change. The move to create smoke-free workplaces was based on a clear recognition of scientific facts. It had absolutely nothing to do with emotion. Sidestream smoke is in fact laced with 40 known or suspected carcinogens, at least. As a whole, the toxic soup with over 4,000 chemicals in it is identified as a composite that is a carcinogen in its own right.

There is no safe level of exposure, and involuntary smoking remains a very large source of environmental cancer. The estimates vary, but a minimum of 140 British Columbians die every year from involuntary exposure to smoke. Extending the ban on workplace smoking to the hospitality sector reflected the fact, when this occurred, that government's responsibility was to se-

cure the occupational health and safety of workers. That responsibility created an onus on the WCB to prevent exposure of employees to known carcinogens.

But in 2002, as we've heard, this government chose to overturn the WCB regulation aimed at protecting workers in pubs, lounges and restaurants. Bending to lobbying by certain sectors of the hospitality industry, it took the regressive step of allowing designated smoking rooms and venues to serve addicted clientele. As the Canadian Cancer Society reported recently:

"Experience has shown that smoke regularly spreads into adjacent non-smoking areas, endangering children, seniors, pregnant women and other patrons with serious health risks, such as lung cancer, heart disease, asthma, strokes and low-birth weight babies. Doors are left open or are propped open. Ventilation systems are not properly maintained or are turned off entirely. Compliance with regulations is erratic. Workers still have to enter into DSRs. Indeed, under current regulations they may be required to spend up to 20 percent of their shifts in a room filled with toxic smoke."

Six years later this indefensible error in judgment is finally being corrected. I suspect it has as much to do with the potential exposure to future lawsuits by affected employees — given that sidestream smoke was an identified carcinogen at the time when the decision not to proceed was made — as it has to do with a clear recognition that banning smoking in all public places is a public-health good.

In any case, however it comes about, we are strongly supportive of government's change of heart and reversal of position. Hospitality sector workers are deserving of the protection this confers, and Heather Crowe, who died of lung cancer after 40 years of involuntary exposure in pubs and restaurants, will rest a little easier in her grave when the policy of designated smoking rooms is finally and fully interred. As she said: "There is not a single worker in Canada who deserves my fate. There should be no second-class lungs." Tolerance for second-hand smoke creates second-class lungs.

This bill also marks progress in further restricting the places outside work where tobacco may be smoked and/or sold and where young people can be exposed to or encouraged to smoke. It will prohibit display, promotion and sale of products at hospitals, colleges, universities, recreation centres, arenas and buildings owned or leased by the provincial government. It explicitly prohibits smoking at schools and on school properties, and I was pleased to hear the remarks and supportive comments by the Minister of Education in that regard.

Further and importantly, it will enable government to establish no-smoking zones around doors, windows and air intakes at buildings, further reducing the potential for involuntary exposure. This will cause some inconvenience to smokers, but employees, clients, students and anyone entering a building for whatever purpose will no longer have to navigate clusters of smokers nor be subjected to secondhand smoke inside buildings.

[1525]

People going to a hospital will no longer be subject to the indignity of running a gauntlet of smokers to

access attention to their needs — an unacceptable door-step message for a primary dispenser of care and cure.

I want to credit the minister for having come a long way on this issue since comments back in 2005 when he was quoted as saying on the subject of people smoking near entries to hospitals and care facilities and of proposals to move them further away: "I think we need to be careful not to kill people in order to save them from themselves."

That's something, by the way, for the minister's awareness. That quotation is still posted — and I think now should be removed, approvingly, with the header "Right on" — at mychoice.ca, which is the official website of the Canadian Tobacco Manufacturers Council. That would be appropriate to remove, I believe, with the passage of this legislation.

We strongly support the direction of change, and we welcome this conversion of the government on the road to the new Jerusalem of zero tolerance for involuntary exposure. Seventy-two percent of British Columbians also support these changes — 72 percent — so it's good that government is catching up with that and moving to the head of the parade.

Unfortunately — and I raise this because I would hope the government will consider this further — the legislation as it stands is stopping somewhat short of the whole enchilada, especially when it comes to dealing with outdoor spaces that are connected to buildings. A significant grey area — that of patios linked to restaurants and pubs — may escape the net, yet could be captured by an amendment of some kind to the legislation.

The CRD — the capital regional district — is currently examining a bylaw that would mandate smoke-free patios because its existing bylaw, which controlled indoor smoking, leaves a loophole that allowed these to become established as smoking places. Other communities in British Columbia could do the same thing, because it's established that they have the power.

This, by the way, reopened the problem that you have of secondhand smoke drifting through doorways and through windows. If it's allowed on a patio outside a restaurant, you have exactly the same problem you had with people smoking at the doorway.

Other communities could implement bans on a community-by-community basis, but it would be far better to learn from the CRD's experience and to have provincial law mandate it, thereby creating a level playing field for the entire hospitality sector. This would avoid ending up in B.C. with a regulatory patchwork and having to go back and fix the problem later. Of course, it would further curtail exposure to the known carcinogens in sidestream smoke. About six in ten British Columbians already support moving in this direction.

Additionally, we note that while government is giving itself the ability to ban the sale of smokes in designated locations, as the member for Vancouver-Kingsway noted, pharmacies are again left off the list. It's increasingly difficult to grasp this government's resistance to the idea of banning the sale of smokes in pharmacies or stores containing pharmacies, especially because we have not heard a rationale.

Pharmacists, as represented by the B.C. College, have been lobbying government to take this step for many years. Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Labrador, the Northwest Territories and even Nunavut have all banned sales of smokes in pharmacies and establishments containing pharmacies. Two-thirds of British Columbians favour banning tobacco sales from stores containing pharmacies.

The public again grasps the rationale that apparently eludes government on this issue, which is that it's contradictory to have an extension of the health care system which provides smoking-cessation aids and offers counselling at the same time as enabling and endorsing the addiction to tobacco. It's a contradictory message.

Pharmacies as dispensers of health-giving medicines are iconic symbols of cure. As the Canadian Cancer Society puts it: "The sale of tobacco products in pharmacies — which British Columbians naturally associate with medications and other health care products — undermines the effort and expense of the larger tobacco-control strategy that encourages people to recognize tobacco as one of the greatest dangers to their health."

[1530]

It's also one of the greatest dangers on earth. And it remains just that in reality, the single largest preventable cause of disease and death, killing over 6,000 British Columbians a year.

A primary goal of tobacco control is to denormalize the product. Making it no longer available at stores containing pharmacies is an important step forward. Is government's reluctance due to a concern about profitability in the sector? If it is, then consider the business case based on experience with displacement in other jurisdictions. Profits do not suffer at all because cigarettes, in effect, are a low-yield item. Sure, the chain store owners will complain. No one likes being told that they can't sell something.

But I invite government to look carefully at the business case developed by the B.C. college based on the experience in other jurisdictions. I call on government to look more closely at this gap in its bill and to overcome its reluctance to act now. I call on the minister to give us a clear undertaking to remedy the error.

Members opposite are demonstrating with this legislation, and we are strongly supportive of this, that they can recognize a mistake such as the exemption for smoking rooms and correct it. But let's forego the time lag of six years and do the right thing now. Getting smokes out of pharmacies is an idea whose time is past due.

Last spring when I introduced a private member's bill to accomplish the ban on tobacco sales in pharmacies and stores containing pharmacies, I indicated our party's support for a full-blown ban on countertop tobacco displays. We're pleased to see government giving itself the power to do important parts of what needs to be done.

Retail promotion is an effective strategy to increase addiction to tobacco. It works. That's why manufacturers had been so innovative in creating prominent displays, such as the so-called power wall that confronts

buyers in most outlets that sell tobacco. These displays are heavily subsidized by retailers. They actually pay for the physical space and often make a direct payment to outlets.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

Prohibiting tobacco display at point-of-sale is a very important tool in denormalizing tobacco use. Product prominence allows cigarette manufacturers to model cigarettes to consumers as products that are acceptable, popular and readily available, and by implication, harmless. Displays that are visible to children are particularly potent in sending the message that smoking is a rational and endorsed adult choice. Reducing their visibility is clearly a public good and in the public interest.

A number of provinces in Canada, like Saskatchewan and Manitoba, already have legislation in place prohibiting display in premises accessible to children. That legislation has already been tested in the Supreme Court in Saskatchewan and has been found to be fine to go ahead with. In other jurisdictions like Ontario and Quebec, legislation will come into force in 2008 but will also include adult-only premises.

We would like to see British Columbia join the leaders in banning point-of-purchase promotion in all retail outlets. This would recognize that people of any age can be encouraged by advertising display to see smoking as a simple consumer choice, rather than a practice that addicts and ultimately kills when used as intended. It would also recognize that such displays in adult-only facilities stimulate cravings among smokers who are trying to quit and encourage impulse purchases among those who may only have flirted with tobacco briefly but who remain susceptible to its pull.

As someone who has had to go through the withdrawal and difficulty of weaning myself from the addiction to tobacco, I can tell you the constant reminders of the availability of it simply restoke the desire. It's a challenging thing for an adult to get off the weed.

B.C. public opinion is more resolved on this matter than on any other aspect of tobacco control. Some 86 percent would support banning prominent displays if this could help reduce youth smoking.

[1535]

Moving to include adult-only facilities would send a clear signal that B.C. intends to move from being a laggard on tobacco control to again being a leader.

Becoming a leader, though, would also require addressing another error made by this government in its first term. Here I'm referring to the fact that there's a need to restore and increase funding for the mass media campaign that plays a key role in reducing the incidence of smoking.

In the '90s B.C. developed a very effective mass media campaign that was central to the success of other components of its tobacco control strategy. Media campaigns are key drivers in denormalizing tobacco use, alerting adults and kids to the dangers of addic-

tion, illustrating the ugly impacts of lung cancer and other diseases associated with smoking, prompting behavioral change with warnings on packages and personal testimonials of tragedy and triumph, and supporting the direction of change by modelling successful efforts in cessation.

Who could ever forget Debi, for one, and the California campaign, the media campaign, that showed Debi dying from cancer, smoking cigarettes through a hole in her neck? Those ads were shown in British Columbia.

What's interesting about those ads, of all the ads that have ever been done anywhere in the world, is that those California ads have the highest recall of any ad. The 95 percent of people who have seen Debi smoke through the hole in her neck cannot forget that image. That is the power of the media campaign — to show people what can happen to them if they play with tobacco. You can't play with smokes. You cannot.

We seem to be open today to ideas emanating from California. We were in the '90s, as well, because they're often leaders. So perhaps we'll hear this from the California department of health services describing the importance of this kind of campaign: "The media campaign is an integral component of California's tobacco control program, one of the nation's longest running and most...comprehensive anti-tobacco campaigns. The...program uses paid media — television, radio, print, outdoor and other media vehicles — to challenge existing social norms related to tobacco use and provides cessation resources for people who want to quit."

One of the most interesting ones that I had ever seen, which was so good because it affected a stereotype around tobacco — and perhaps you saw it, Members — was the Marlboro Man ad. Everybody knows the Marlboro Man ads from our generation. When we had billboards, they were on billboards, but they were on television in exactly the same format.

California did an ad with the two Marlboro men riding out of the sunset and the copy-over is: "I miss my lung, Bob." It is a fantastic ad, because it goes at that macho image of the smoker. It shows you where you wind up — a very, very effective ad.

Tobacco control programs utilizing sustained media campaigns have scientifically documented higher effects than control strategies that don't. But tobacco control funding in B.C. has been going in the wrong direction for a long time. Back in the late '90s B.C.'s strategy had 18 people working on it, with a budget of \$6.5 million — not a very large budget. But that budget was cut, the staff was gutted, and the media campaign was eliminated back in the first term of office.

It's well past time to get back into that business. B.C. collects about \$700 million a year in tobacco taxes, yet it puts virtually none of it back into media campaigns and into tobacco control activities related to it. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control recommend \$6 to \$11 per capita be spent on these kinds of campaigns. Today we could be at — what? — perhaps a dollar per capita in British Columbia?

[1540]

The Canadian Cancer Society states again:

"Public resources applied to tobacco control need to be sufficient, sustained and strategically applied, because smoking rates are not static. Every year a new group of B.C. youth and young adults — those most likely to begin smoking — are exposed to the allure of tobacco products. Without sufficient education, prevention and cessation programs to counter the tobacco industry's subtle messages, thousands more will try smoking, become hooked and eventually suffer the tragic consequences."

Tobacco addiction is like a zombie that rises from the grave if its promotion isn't effectively and continuously countered in the media environment.

Our environment is thoroughly media-ized. Governments that set reduction targets and also collect revenues from sales but then cheap out on media campaigns and other control strategies are not practising holistic, preventive public health. Three-quarters of British Columbians say that educating the public regarding the health risks and associated preventive measures should be a high priority for the provincial government.

The Minister of Education has indicated how clearly that is a priority within the education system to accomplish. I laud that and encourage that, but it is time for government to move to the front of the parade on this issue and lead again. Leaving it to chance, a voluntary effort, is a disservice to British Columbians.

While a Barb Tarbox may come along every so often to dramatically remind us how effective personal testimonials of someone dying from cancer are in alerting susceptible kids to the dangers of addiction, there are limits on what one courageous dying smoker can do to reach people using her own resources. There are, however, no limits on how many kids can be reached by a campaign with a core media component. Barb's message — which is, "Don't ever start, because you may not be able to stop and it will kill you" — can be carried into every school-aged kid's conscience by effective campaigns buttressed by celebrity testimonial and reinforced by champions and positive role models.

It's important that we redouble these kinds of efforts, because some 90 percent of individuals — as I believe the Minister of Health acknowledged — whose death is smoking-related begin smoking during their adolescence. There is clear evidence that youth exposure to media content that conveys positive impressions of people smoking — and they are numerous; we have no advertising, but they are numerous in films and videos — influences kids to try it.

Even its very association with outsiders and rebels can have an appeal in youth subcultures, which is a growing danger as fewer people overall smoke tobacco. It becomes an act of rebellion. Traditional school-based prevention programs have not had the kind of success we need to see in affecting smoking behaviours. But media literacy training is proving very effective in decreasing the likelihood of engaging in media-prompted high-risk behaviours.

Higher levels of smoking media literacy are independently associated in scientific studies with decreased odds ratios for current smoking and smoking susceptibility. Adolescents with smoking media liter-

acy are about half as likely to smoke and half as likely to be susceptible to smoking as those without.

Smoking media literacy bundled with other forms of media literacy, such as food media literacy and exercise media literacy, is the new frontier in public health and it is the new frontier in tobacco control. It's time that government returned to leadership there and began funding effective interventions that reduce the incidence of addiction and increase the likelihood of cessation.

Government is in a great fiscal position to act, having tied revenues from tobacco consumption of \$700 million each year. This year revenues are on track to come in at \$745 million, so there is a windfall of at least \$45 million. I checked the revenue projections in the budget. It's right on target — 45 million additional dollars will come in this year, \$45 million that could be mobilized to fund expanded tobacco control interventions.

One priority intervention should be to medicalize the condition of tobacco addiction. That's a hard step for some to take, but it should be. Fund both doctor counselling and, through it, publicly funded access to smoking cessation medications when taken as part of a course of treatment under the doctor's direction.

[1545]

Smoking cessation medications allow you to bridge the 90 to 120 days of agony when you go through primary withdrawal and help you to make a lifestyle adjustment. The rate of success of people achieving that, of those who do it under doctor's counselling versus those who do it on their own initiative.... The rate goes up dramatically with doctor's counselling. In fact, just having a doctor tell you that you should quit dramatically increases the likelihood that you will act.

Recently B.C. took an important step in this direction by giving social assistance recipients free access....

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

D. Cubberley: Madam Chair, thank you so much for the opportunity to speak to this important legislation, and let me reiterate my support for its overall direction.

N. Macdonald: I seek leave to make an introduction, please.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

N. Macdonald: It's my pleasure to introduce a group again from Invermere. They're grades 5, 6 and 7 students from J. Alfred Laird in Invermere. They're here with some teachers or parents, Mr. Bruce Childs, Ms. Donna Stand, Ms. Brenda Danaluk and the students. Maybe the Minister of Education can identify herself, so you know who's in charge of what you do at school there.

It's Holly Banville, Jesse Hromadnik, Heather Smedstad, Brooklyn Gulbe, Macalyn Snyhor, Aleisha

MacLean, Melissa MacLean, Starry Park, Shara Konkin. They're here playing ukulele. They're having a wonderful time in Victoria, and I'd like you to join me in making them welcome.

Debate Continued

D. MacKay: I think the Minister of Health indicated that 6,000 people die every year in British Columbia due to smoking-related diseases. That is a startling number, and it's a pretty scary number. We've heard a lot of conversation today on Bill 10. I'm not going to go into the details of the bill. I'm going to talk to you more from a personal perspective as to why I support Bill 10 at second reading.

Madam Speaker, I lost my mother to cancer, I lost a brother-in-law to cancer, and I lost my father-in-law to cancer — and he was younger than I am today — three people that were very close to me taken at an early age because they smoked. But that doesn't say that I was pure as the driven snow.

When I was 15 years old — and I heard the Minister of Health talk about going back a few years; well, that goes back probably further for me — the thing to do was to smoke. I can remember going down and buying Vogue cigarettes for 29 cents a package. That gives you some idea how far back in time I'm going to take you — 29 cents for a package of cigarettes.

Hon. R. Neufeld: Twenty-nine cents. A big package, or a small one?

D. MacKay: Oh, that was a small package. I started smoking Vogue cigarettes because they were 29 cents, but I couldn't get started on Vogue cigarettes, because when I tried to inhale I was choking all the time. I couldn't inhale the tobacco. So what I did was switch to menthol cigarettes because you could inhale those. You didn't cough and wheeze when you did that.

But you know what happened over a period of time? I got used to smoking menthol cigarettes, and I looked for something a little bit stronger. So I got on to Buckingham cigarettes. Now, I don't think Buckingham cigarettes are sold anymore. But Buckingham cigarettes were pretty potent tobacco.

Hon. R. Neufeld: It was all there.

D. MacKay: It was all there. You bet. You could smoke every bit of it. There was no filter on the end of it. I could pull one of those cigarettes back and drag half a cigarette into my lungs and hold it there — curl it right down to my toes and hold it there — and got that little high, I guess, from the nicotine.

H. Lali: Too much information.

D. MacKay: Too much information, somebody said. Well, as I said, this is a more personal side of why I support Bill 10.

I started smoking at 15 years of age. When my father-in-law passed away after my son was born....

My son was six weeks old, and my father-in-law passed away, and that was 34 years ago. I was smoking two packs a day.

[1550]

I can remember, when I was in training in the RCMP, waking up in the morning and reaching for cigarettes. That's the first thing I did in the morning. If I couldn't find a brand-new cigarette, I'd look in the ash-tray and find a cigarette that I'd smoked the night before. I'd light that and smoke it. Then I'd go down and look after the horses and then go have breakfast and then have another cigarette. I smoked whenever I had the chance, so I was smoking two packs a day when my father-in-law passed away.

I decided that maybe it was time to quit. I thought: I'll leave the cigarettes alone and switch to a pipe. Well, I started smoking a pipe for a while, and pretty soon I was smoking a package of pipe tobacco a day. My tongue was raw. I was sick. I tried to make myself sick a couple of times because, God, I wanted to quit smoking. And 15 years later I wanted to quit smoking, but do you think I could cut it out?

I heard the member for Saanich South talk about how difficult it was to cut the habit. I heard the Minister of Education talk about all of the cessation programs that we have in place today, but he forgot one, and that's cold turkey. So after burning my tongue and smoking a package of pipe tobacco a day, I finally got the courage to quit smoking. I finally had the intestinal fortitude to say: that's it. And I quit. Some 34 years later I still crave cigarettes. It's a really tough one to get rid of.

Now, when I joined the RCMP — I did that for 28 years — I probably saw things that I doubt anybody else in this room will have seen. I was a coroner for ten years following my 28 years on the force, so I've seen things that I'm going to discuss with you right now. It's basically just a follow-up to the member for Saanich South, when he talked about Debi, who he saw smoking through a hole in her throat. She was smoking, drawing smoke into her lungs. Well, I'm going to carry it just a tiny bit further, and if I upset anybody, I apologize.

As an RCMP officer and a coroner, I attended quite a few postmortem examinations on bodies from car accidents or sudden deaths at home. I've always remembered that. I've always remembered the sights that I saw on the autopsy table when the Y-incision was made in the chest and the chest was opened up.

I'm not a medical person, but I got to the point where I could tell during a postmortem examination whether the person on the table was a smoker or a non-smoker. Normally, the lungs in a healthy individual are pink. I saw a lot of people on those tables that I could identify as smokers because the lungs were black. In some cases they looked like lumps of coal. They were shrivelled up. There was nothing there to absorb the oxygen and pass it to the rest of the body to allow them to continue living.

That was a pretty graphic thing that I saw. I hope that I didn't disturb anybody, but that's the reality of what happens when you smoke cigarettes. When you

smoke cigarettes, you're literally destroying your lungs — the ability to breathe which keeps us all going.

Smoking is such a tragic thing. Young people.... I heard the member for Saanich South talk about the Marlboro Man. I remember the Marlboro Man. Just last weekend I was at home, and I flicked on the television set. I was watching a satellite channel, and there were black-and-white movies on — uninterrupted, too, by the way, with no commercials — and the one thing that stood out: everybody smoked. Everybody in the movie was smoking.

I'm sure if we could see the camera operators who were filming the movies, they were probably smoking as well. Everybody smoked. I guess I was probably smoking in the '50s, as well, so.... Gosh, what a sad, sad state.

Bill 10 is certainly going a long ways to reduce it. My children, as I said, were.... For the first two years my daughter, who is two years older than my son, was exposed to secondhand smoke because the wife and I both smoked. We quit six weeks after my son was born. We both quit. We made a commitment to our kids.

When they got older, we could talk to them about the pitfalls of smoking and explain to them that their grandfather had died from a smoking-related disease and that if they didn't smoke by the time they were 18 years old, we would give them \$500 apiece. I'm pleased to be able to tell you that I had to give my kids \$500 apiece because neither of them smoked, and they still don't today. They're 36 and 34.

Today the peer pressure at school is tremendous on our young people. I'm so upset when I drive around or when I'm walking downtown and I go into a restaurant. There are a few restaurants outside, where they're sitting at tables. Even in Smithers, where there's snow on the ground, there are still young girls sitting outside smoking cigarettes. God, I just want to go up to them and smack them on the back of the head.

[1555]

My dad always said: "If I ever catch you smoking," — I can't use all the words he said — "I'll break both your arms." I'm kind of sorry he didn't do that when I did start smoking at 15. But I'm 65 this year, and I'm able to get up in the morning.... I did it this morning. I got up and went to the gym at quarter after six, and I ran for 20 minutes.

I was a smoker, and I quit at the right time, obviously, because I have not been affected by the pitfalls from smoking that we heard about today. I'm able to go out and exercise. I could probably outrun some of the younger people in this chamber today if we ever had a foot race.

I'm proud of that. I'm proud of the fact that I'm able to go down and exercise that strenuously, and my lungs are still working. They're working like they were when I was 15. It just took a long time for the rest of my body to catch up to my mind.

I've got grandchildren growing up today. I've got three beautiful young grandchildren in Smithers. They're all in school, and they're facing that peer pressure to go and have a cigarette. They're still young

enough that there's not the pressure of the liquor outside of school, but the cigarette smoking seems to be a thing that is very common in our school system today.

I know it's tough on my 14-year-old granddaughter. My wife and I have made the same commitment to our grandchildren that we made to our kids: "At age 18, if you haven't started smoking, there's \$500 in it for you."

I probably give quite a bit more money to those kids every time I go home, but it'll probably be more than \$500. I'm looking forward to the day when those children are 18 and I can say to them: "Here's your \$500. Thank you for not smoking."

I want my kids to grow up, I want them to be healthy, and I want them to have a long life. Smoking will rob them of that opportunity.

We've heard lots of comments on why we shouldn't smoke. I'm pleased today to be able to stand up in this chamber and support Bill 10, because it's the right thing to do. We've got to get rid of those terrible smoking-related diseases that we have out there. With that, I will close and yield the floor to another member.

G. Robertson: I rise today to speak in support of Bill 10, a very encouraging development being put forward to reduce the impact of cigarette smoke on the people of British Columbia. I see a number of strong components to Bill 10 that I am very much in favour of. It's a little late in coming on many of these fronts.

These are ideas that have been around for many years now. Both the research and the implementation of that research in other countries around the world have already taken place in the past. In fact, there have been decades of definitive research on the impact and hazards related to secondhand smoke specifically and, of course, to cigarette smoke directly.

It's time that these actions and in fact many actions that are not present in Bill 10 are taken. I want to speak for a few minutes about what is missing. Beyond the good elements of this bill, there are a couple of really important pieces missing. First of all, I concur with several of my colleagues in the opposition benches on the real concern that the government did not include in Bill 10 a ban on sales in pharmacies.

This is a clear necessity here in B.C. If we recognize the devastating pattern that cigarettes have on the people of this province and we understand the outlets where they're sold, particularly outlets that exist to promote health and to help people get better when they're dealing with health conditions and disabilities.... To have instruments of death, in effect, available in those places totally smacks of inconsistency and deceit.

I don't understand the rationale of taking important steps like preventing cigarette smoke from permeating our schools and public places, and yet not taking that step to ensure that pharmacies are not selling cigarettes. That's a glaring omission in this bill.

[1600]

Secondly, I will mention another very important glaring omission from Bill 10, which is that secondhand smoke is not mentioned as a hazard to residents in

social housing. Although social housing specifically may not be deemed a public place, there are many, many residents of social housing here in the province who are exposed on a continuous basis to secondhand smoke in situations that have ended up threatening their very lives.

In my riding of Vancouver-Fairview I have a number of constituents who have respiratory disabilities and who live in social housing. In this case the landlord is the Greater Vancouver Housing Corp., and they are unable to access social housing that does not have secondhand smoke.

I have been in contact with the Minister of Health and the Minister for Housing raising these concerns. My constituents have taken all kinds of measures to try and have their critical needs addressed in between visits to the hospital. They are suffering from great strife and disability because of the presence of secondhand smoke in their buildings.

To this day there is no solution. There is no movement, either, from the provincial government here through B.C. Housing, the Ministry of Health or the Minister for Housing — both have mandates overlapping here — to rectify this situation. In effect, we have citizens in this province who are living in sponsored housing, in government-supported housing. They have no other alternative to keep a roof over their heads. In the case of my two constituents specifically, their doctors have told them they'd be safer living on the streets than living in their buildings, which is a frightening prospect for them.

I'm really surprised not to see any measure here that addresses this. If in fact we are playing catch-up, which I believe we are with Bill 10, it's been many years in coming now, since this government took office. We've been waiting to make more progress on banning cigarettes and smoking in public places, certainly in schools. We have an opportunity with this bill to address secondhand smoke in public housing, social housing, and that is not being taken here.

In effect, we will continue to make it impossible for those people who live in social housing to move out of those spaces. At this point, there isn't even any flexibility for them to transfer their social housing grants in order to access private housing that is smoke-free. There are no options open to them at this point. The secondhand smoke that permeates their units, their residences, is actually killing them.

Knowing this — I understand that the Minister of Health is fully aware of this and that the doctors and the landlords involved in these cases are fully aware of the implications of the secondhand smoke in these social housing units — I don't understand why there isn't action. I don't understand, when we have Bill 10 in front of us, when we have the opportunity here today, why we aren't including an obvious missing link, why we aren't including something that will allow those people to access safe housing.

As far as Bill 10 is concerned, the contents of it no doubt will benefit many people, protect a lot of our kids and our schools, and I'm very much in support of

that. I strongly encourage this government to look at, as soon as possible, adding protections for B.C. residents of social housing and ensuring that they can have access to smoke-free homes, that they have options that get them out of secondhand smoke exposure — specifically for those who have respiratory disabilities.

[1605]

Persons with physical disabilities are guaranteed access. They are guaranteed social housing that ensures that they have appropriate access for their disability. Persons with respiratory disabilities, on the other hand, have no rights accordingly. I would like to see the government take action on this as quickly as possible, given their attention here in Bill 10 to this very important issue.

With that I will once again extend my support for Bill 10. I look forward to committee stage.

S. Hawkins: I rise to take my place in this debate on Bill 10, which is the Tobacco Sales Amendment Act. I rise, actually, to commend the Health Minister for bringing in very bold and aggressive amendments to deal with tobacco reduction in this province.

This act looks forward in reducing tobacco use in schools and on school grounds by September 2007, in fact banning the use of those on those grounds; banning smoking in all indoor public spaces, to take effect in 2008; banning smoking in all public doorways near public doors, windows and air intakes to protect indoor air quality — I have complained more than once to the Speaker in this House, coming in through the back door and having to run the gauntlet through smokers just to try and get in here without holding my breath for a couple of minutes, so I'm very happy to see those changes — and banning tobacco sales in public hospitals, health facilities, public universities, colleges, public athletic and recreational facilities and provincial buildings. I think that's a great group of amendments to bring in.

I was listening with great interest to the graphic details provided by the member for Bulkley Valley-Stikine. I think most members know that I have a nursing background and also a cancer nursing background. I worked as a cancer nurse for 12 years. The member talked about autopsies and chests being ripped open and black lungs. As an officer working around people that were so addicted to smoking that they would smoke through tracheal holes in their throats and the like, I experienced that on almost a daily basis when I was a primary nurse for head and neck tumour patients — very sad to see. It's a very, very addictive habit, and I'm happy to see that we are making progress in this province and continuing with the leadership position that we have.

When the Minister of Health talks about half a million people in this province addicted to smoking and over 5,600 people dying every year from smoke-related diseases, that is a call to action. We have to congratulate him for bringing forward a package of amendments that I think are going to show some really good results.

We have the lowest smoking rates in the country; we're at 15 percent. I know we have to do more, and I think we will continue working with our colleagues. I don't see this as a partisan issue. It's interesting how members in this assembly can really paint themselves into corners and make it a partisan issue. I don't think it's a partisan issue at all. I think a lot of the organizations that we....

An Hon. Member: Remember 1999? In 1999 you opposed it.

S. Hawkins: A lot of the members of different organizations that come to visit us bring their issues to both sides of the House, and we assess them to see if there are ways that we can move some of these forward.

You know what? It's interesting, hon. Speaker. We do tend to change our positions from time to time, and when we're given evidence that helps us bring it to the forefront, I think we do look at that and say: "Yeah, this is something that maybe at one time we may not have considered a priority, but at this time it is a priority."

Moving forward and setting a goal in this province to be one of the healthiest jurisdictions to ever host an Olympics — that helps government decide that there are things that we can do that can move our population forward as a group.

[1610]

I'm a huge believer that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. This group of amendments that the Health Minister brings forward is about prevention and about taking measures to make sure that people are not exposed to secondhand smoke, to make sure that our children, our youth aren't put in a position where they are bombarded with advertisements that will induce them to smoke. I think those are the kinds of things that we are looking at in this package of amendments to really move the issue of prevention forward.

I was looking at some youth smoking rates, and it's interesting because the prevalence of youth trying any tobacco product has continued to fall. I think that's great. I think that's a good sign. In 2004-2005, 21 percent of youth in grades 5 through 9 had ever tried any type of tobacco product. This is a 50-percent reduction over the ten-year period from 1994 to 2004-2005.

Smoking cigarettes — 19 percent — was the most common form of tobacco product tried. Fewer youth reported ever trying any type of tobacco product in 2004-2005 over 2002. Some 2 percent of youth reported that they were current smokers in 2004-2005, compared to 3 percent in 2002 and 7 percent in 1994. So there has been progress made, and we, to the credit of the Health Minister and his officials, are still working to drive those numbers down.

It's interesting to see why children smoke. One of the most commonly stated perceived reasons that youth start to smoke was that it's cool; 60 percent of them said it was cool. And 57 percent said it was because of the behaviour of their friends. If their friends smoked, well, then they would try it too. In 2002, 45

percent of youth said it was cool. For some reason, it's becoming more cool. So we've got to drive that down.

Anyways, almost all youth, whether they've ever tried smoking cigarettes or not, believe that tobacco is addictive; 88 percent of them know it's addictive; and 87 percent know that smoking can harm the health of non-smokers. It's interesting to see that even though they know that, their actions belie it.

Some of them say they smoke because it helps them to stay thin. That's usually the girls. It's sad to see that, and we've got to make sure we get the message out that it's more dangerous to smoke than it is to use it as a weight-reduction strategy. And 21 percent said it helps when they're bored. Boy. There are reasons we have to address why youth do this.

Some 23 percent of youth reported that someone other than themselves smoked every day in their home. This is a reduction in exposure to secondhand smoke since 2002, when 30 percent of them reported that someone smoked in their home, but the numbers are still high. We need to drive them down. Again, I'm happy to see that the secondhand smoke issue is being addressed in the amendments in this bill.

Also, all of you know I'm a cancer survivor. Three years ago when I had my chemotherapy and my bone marrow transplant at VGH, I used to watch a couple of bone marrow transplant patients with their chemo hanging.... I didn't have the energy to get out of my bed, but they had the energy to get out of their bed, take the elevator 15 storeys down, walk out the door and have a cigarette outside the door. When I finally got in a wheelchair and my family could take me outside, that was the last place I wanted to be, because they were all smoking at the front door. We used to try and find a doorway where there weren't smokers. That's when I recognized some of my fellow transplant patients — after the incredible treatment you receive — were actually still so addicted to smoke that they were downstairs smoking at the doorway.

[1615]

That wasn't something I wanted to see and certainly wasn't healthy for me as a patient. It certainly wasn't healthy for them, as someone who was getting treatment. I'm happy to see some of this secondhand smoke in doorway and public access places is being addressed. I think it will make our hospitals healthier places.

Gosh, 15 years ago, when I was working as a nurse in a hospital, we would have a big cafeteria, and half of the cafeteria or, I guess, two-thirds would be non-smoking, and one-third would be smoking. But it didn't really matter because you got the benefit — or not the benefit — of having the smoke in the whole cafeteria. We've come a long ways, and I'm glad to see that we are putting measures in place to stop some of that.

I was just going through some old articles as well. Did you know that it wasn't until 1990 and 1993 that we banned smoking from airlines? It was less than 20 years ago that we were still flying in airplanes with cigarettes.

The benefits of quitting smoking are just incredible, and I think the more we can do to, first of all, prevent it

and stop people from ever starting smoking is great. Is this an attack on smokers? Some 85 percent of the people in this province don't smoke. About 15 or 16 percent do. I think it's more about protecting the people that don't smoke and making sure that secondhand smoke isn't something that we're exposing other people to and certainly our youth to.

The benefits of quitting smoking. Did you know that the minute you stop smoking your body begins to clean itself of tobacco poisons? Within eight hours the carbon-monoxide level drops in your body and oxygen levels in your blood increase. It's within eight hours. After two days your sense of smell and taste begin to improve. Within two weeks to three months your lungs work better, making it easier for you to breathe. After six months that coughing, sinus congestion, tiredness and shortness of breath improve. After one year your risk of a smoking-related heart attack is reduced by 50 percent.

The younger you are when you quit, the greater the health benefits. If you quit right now, you will prevent the risk of developing cancer, and the longer you don't smoke, the more you lower your risk of cancer. So within ten years of quitting, the overall risk of an ex-smoker dying from lung cancer is cut by 50 percent, and after ten years the overall risk of an ex-smoker developing cancer approaches that of a non-smoker.

Boy, it sure outlines how important it is to quit smoking. First of all, never start. Secondly, quit smoking. Thirdly, try to find a way in which public policy influences tobacco reduction in the general population, and I think this bill brings in the kind of amendments that help support that.

Is there more we can do? Absolutely. I totally agree that there's more we can do, and I think both sides are working together on strategies like that, to help influence public policy. I'm pleased to see members on the other side rise and support this bill and the amendments in this bill. I am pleased to see members come up with other kinds of issues and policies that they would like to see presented. Again, I think members of this House recognize the importance of a tobacco reduction policy, of prevention and of the health benefits of a population that is smoke-free.

With that, hon. Speaker, I take my seat and do say that I will be supporting this bill wholeheartedly. I commend the Health Minister on bringing in these measures.

L. Krog: I am very pleased to rise in this House today and speak in favour of Bill 10, and I compliment the Minister of Health for bringing it forward. But the Minister of Health is one of the most frequent historians in this place. It is the Minister of Health who continuously talks about the '90s, and I always enjoy his history lessons. They're somewhat one-sided, perhaps. They provide some amusement, certainly for the members of the government side, so I think it only appropriate today, when I say a few words about Bill 10, to perhaps engage in a little bit of a modest history lesson myself.

It was this government — its members, its predecessors — when they were in opposition, that spoke out against the Nisga'a treaty. Indeed, the present Premier led a legal fight against it, but suddenly for political reasons they discovered that, in fact, they wanted to engage in the new relationship, and that all got reversed.

It was the Liberals in opposition who attacked the NDP for the Vancouver Island land use plan, for all sorts of progressive legislation around the environment — said it would destroy jobs and was bad for business. Here in 2007 they've discovered that the environment is an important political issue, so now they're born-again environmentalists.

C. Evans: Do you believe it?

L. Krog: My friend from Nelson-Creston says: do I believe it? Of course not, hon. Member.

Now we see another change, another reformation. In 2001 when this government had the opportunity to sidestep the political fallout from this issue and just let the WCB do its job to protect the health of workers in British Columbia, they instead deliberately interfered with that process and ensured that smoking would continue in places that were, without question, leading over time to both significant health issues and indeed the death of workers in British Columbia.

Now suddenly in 2007 we've discovered that we should be banning smoking in public places. I'm sorry. I'm delighted it's happening, and we on this side of the House will support it, but I simply cannot let this opportunity pass to say a few words about the hypocrisy of this government.

What's also troubling is the lack of consideration for those businesses that believed they would somehow be able to continue to allow smoking in their premises. These are the supposed friends of the Liberals, and I suspect what's really happened is they've decided that they can get re-elected in 2009 without worrying about their friends anymore.

There are literally dozens, perhaps hundreds of bar and restaurant owners and operators in this province who installed ventilated smoking rooms in response to the government's attacks on the WCB in the belief that they could continue to allow places — public places, profitable public places — to continue to survive with smokers in them.

What's happened now? The government's done the right thing years after they could have done the right thing. What they're going to do is cause a great deal of economic loss to the very small-business community that they are always claiming to support and be the champions of. I just find it a little surprising that I didn't even hear a word of apology from the minister to say to them: "You know what? We're planning to change this policy. You know, think about this. I tell you, the government's changing its view. Don't bother to renovate. If you're building new premises, don't install one of these little, lovely ventilated smoking rooms."

We heard none of that. The government just turns around and changes it. So I say, on one hand, on behalf of those businesses that operate in my community who spent a great deal of money: shame on this government for not giving them fair warning. Shame on this government for ever having put them in the position where they did that, because if this government had done the right thing back in 2001, they wouldn't find themselves in that predicament today.

If this government had done the right thing in 2001, one can only speculate how much the health of British Columbians who come into contact with smokers, whether they be workers or friends or relatives, how much the health of those individuals would have improved. It was, as I say, a simple step — simply let a supposedly independent organization, the WCB, do its job — and the government couldn't allow that for crass political reasons.

It's just shameful that now they should turn around and pretend to be the champions of the cause of health in this province, of banning smoking, of ensuring that we get tobacco off our school grounds and out of our public places. It is, as usual, an example of the continuing hypocrisy.

[1625]

It is a bit of history that I'm sure will be repeated next year when we'll discover some other new cause that's been championed by the opposition year after year after year, which will suddenly be embraced by the Liberals like a long-lost family member welcomed in and adopted fully.

We will completely ignore that that idea may have in fact come from the opposition. It will become part of the Liberal ideology, and it will become part of the Liberal mantra. We will see it repeated in the election campaign. We will read it in their political platform. They will become born-again supporters of some other good idea that they've stolen from the opposition.

Well, I only hope that come 2009 they won't have to engage in that anymore because they'll be sitting on this side of the House. They can do the criticism, and our government — the NDP government elected in 2009 — will do all the things that this government has had six years to do and has failed to do and is now finally, with an election facing them two years down the road, getting around to doing — that is, the right thing when it comes to smoking in this province.

Instead of talking about the increasing costs of health care, they could have spent the last six years actually doing something that was fundamentally effective in reducing the cost of health care in this province — that is, having brought in a bill or even a stronger bill six years ago. But they didn't want to do that, because they weren't prepared to do it because they didn't care. They now pretend today that they care. I don't believe it, hon. Speaker. I don't think British Columbians believe it, but we're going to support this bill.

R. Hawes: It's funny. The previous government had ten years and didn't do anything. It seems strange to

hear them say that, but I'm not going to get into a bunch of politics here. This is actually a bill that should transcend politics, and I think it does.

The member for Bulkley Valley–Stikine, my friend from Bulkley Valley–Stikine, earlier talked about some personal experiences. I kind of wanted to do the same thing. I've talked about this here in the House before.

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

In 1991, I was at a hockey practice, and I had what I thought was heartburn. At the end of the hockey practice, a friend was there, who was — happily — a medical doctor.... I said to him: "I've got a pain in my chest that doesn't really feel right. It can't be indigestion, because all I've had today is eight or ten cups of coffee and 15 or 16 cigarettes. It couldn't be indigestion."

Well, I got taken to the hospital, and I wound up having angioplasty. I had a fairly major incident, a heart attack caused from a blockage of arteries that actually I believe, and certainly the doctors believed, was brought on by smoking.

Luckily, no damage whatsoever. I was completely healed. However, the last cigarette I ever had was that day. That was in 1991. For me, the thought of smoking and the pain in your chest are irrevocably linked. I think: smoke, pain.

So it was not all that difficult for me to quit smoking. But for others, I do understand what the triggers are and how tough it is to quit. I remember in my smoking career, before I had this problem, how many times I wished I could quit. In fact, I did quit once for two years, went back to smoking, wishing I could get away somewhere in the bush where there were no cigarettes for just a couple of weeks. Maybe that would help me to quit. Nothing seemed to work.

I understand the anguish of people and the difficulty people have, and I do understand a little bit about triggers and what triggers the desire to smoke. For me, it's a reverse trigger — pain, smoke. For others, just walking in a store and seeing that power wall of cigarettes.... People who maybe have quit or want to quit go into the store, and they're going to buy a chocolate bar or a pack of gum. There they are: the power wall, all of those smokes. It's a temptation. For a smoker, it's a temptation that's overwhelming.

[1630]

I am very, very proud of Bill 10 and the way that it not just removes the power wall but takes cigarettes off the display shelf. Any place that people who are underage can be, there can be no display of tobacco products of any kind. I think that's a hugely progressive step.

Now, some months ago in the House here, we debated a motion that was brought forward by the member for Saanich South about withdrawing tobacco altogether from pharmacies. I spoke that day against that motion, although I am an ardent anti-smoking.... In fact, I kind of harp on it quite a bit to friends of mine who still smoke. But I happen to think that taking tobacco out of pharmacies and leaving it in corner stores would be entirely the wrong move.

As you go into the drugstore, the drugstore actually has a power wall — in most drugstores — of smoking cessation products. I have yet to go into a 7-Eleven or a Mac's that has a whole pile of Nicorettes and other smoking cessation products, nor do I see anywhere in a 7-Eleven or a Mac's where you're going to get advice that perhaps you should quit smoking like you would get in a pharmacy.

What brings a smoker, then, into the store? Well, if there are no cigarettes, I can tell you that smokers aren't going to the drugstore to buy them. They're going to the 7-Eleven. So I think it would be an entirely wrong move to take tobacco from pharmacies.

I did have a number of discussions, and I know that the minister had a lot of discussions with the College of Pharmacists, who would like to see tobacco out of pharmacies. But they are extremely pleased with Bill 10 and with the fact that the power wall is gone. They see this as a hugely progressive step. So that's the first part of this bill that I'm most pleased with.

The other part of this bill that I think is really great... I want to send a message to a constituent of mine, Fraser Field, who's a paramedic and who has asked me on several occasions: "Why can't we stop people smoking at the doorway to the hospital or at the air intake into the hospital?" You often see patients grouped there with their... They'll come out with their intravenous. Or visitors are visiting patients in the hospital, and there they are, huddled in the doorway of the hospital, smoking. The smoke is wafting not just into the lobby, but in some hospitals where the paramedics are forced to go through that in order to bring patients in, the paramedics actually are being exposed to that smoke.

So for Fraser Field, who has asked me about this on a number of occasions, I'm really happy that I am able to say to him: the government has done something about that, and smoking in doorways and windows and air intakes is going to be stopped by this bill. I think it's a wonderful, wonderful step. The bill is exactly the direction that we should be going.

I do want to speak for one more second about those who are thinking about smoking or who are early in their smoking career. A few years ago the B.C. Lung Association and the folks who are from the COPD organization came to visit us here in the Legislature. As we talked about what life is like with COPD — with congested lungs, with the difficulty to breathe... One of the demonstrations they gave was to take a drinking straw and breathe through it and not allow any other air in except through that straw, and then get active. Walk around a little bit and get your heart rate up and keep breathing through the straw. I can tell you, very quickly you feel a sense of panic at the lack of oxygen you're getting. It's very difficult.

They said that's very much like breathing through a constricted airway. If you continue smoking, that's very likely what your life is going to be like. I would commend that, because I know I've tried it, and it's a horrible feeling. I would commend that — just a very quick little sample of life in future for those who are

early in a smoking career. I would hope that if they tried that, they would understand that continuing on with the smoking would be a disaster for them, and it would drive them to quit.

It's the triggers. It's like those who we see on our streets that have drug addictions. All of them, when they go into treatment, learn what their triggers are and how to avoid those triggers. With smokers, avoiding the triggers is very much a key.

[1635]

For those of us who have smoked, we understand that there are places that you become used to smoking and times you become used to smoking. Those are the triggers — smoking right after breakfast with your cup of coffee, for some people. For some people it's having a beer, and they must have a smoke with the beer, or going to the bingo hall. Some of my friends from the opposite side of the House speak about smoking after other activities that one might undertake with their spouse. All of these could be triggers.

Avoiding the triggers is key. Avoiding the activity... With some of those activities it's perhaps not as advisable, but certainly keeping away from the triggers or learning how to counter those triggers and deal with them is critical to quitting smoking.

I just wanted to thank the minister for listening very closely to the College of Pharmacists, to the B.C. Lung Association and to many of us in our caucus and in our government who said we've got to do something to take cigarettes out of schools, to take smoking out of schools.

I just want one last word about that. I have three kids that all attended high schools where there were smoking pits. I'm very familiar with, when you walk by the smoking pit, seeing kids out there — often from probably age 12, 13 — in the smoking pit. I've always thought that that was a dreadful thing, because kids are sent by their parents to school on a sort of a trust condition. I've always thought that if my kids aren't allowed to smoke at home, why would the school allow them to smoke on the school grounds? I've always thought there was sort of a trust agreement with the school that they wouldn't allow behaviours like that, which certainly wouldn't be allowed at home. I'm very pleased that we have removed smoking from all school grounds and all public places in British Columbia.

I see the members opposite... Some talk about hypocrisy, etc. I do know that there are strong considerations on both sides of the argument as far as how you help or how you make sure that businesses aren't hurt by a total smoking ban. But the world evolves, and it has been evolving.

The member for Bulkley Valley-Stikine spoke a little bit about how he used to smoke and look for cigarette butts in the ashtray and all kinds of other things. I remember as a banker sitting in my office with clients, closing the door, and a client and perhaps his wife or a couple of the business associates all smoking — all of us sitting in a small office with the door closed, an ashtray with cigarettes now piled up so high that they're falling off the desk, almost. That was standard behaviour in the 1970s.

The way we have evolved as a society to understand how bad smoking is, is a good thing. All of us have learned a lot. All of us have moved on, and all of us evolve. Frankly, I'm quite proud to be part of a government that is able to look at their position on any given issue and say: "You know, the world is changing, and we need to change with it."

I think that's a sign of pretty good government. And what we're supplying here is good government, a good bill — proud to support it. I know my colleagues are all going to support it. I'm quite sure the opposition are all going to support it, because it is the right thing to do for British Columbia.

D. Thorne: I too am pleased to rise today to support Bill 10, and like my colleague from Maple Ridge-Mission, I too have personal experience with smoking. But I'm not here today to talk about my personal experiences, as embarrassing as they would be. Unlike my colleague from up the Malahat, who loves to entertain us with his stories, I don't have the confidence in the listening public to tell all my stories — not yet. When I have the experience of my colleagues, then I might come forth with more personal stories, but not today.

Today I'm merely going to rise to make a few comments about Bill 10. Specifically, I want to say right off the top that section 2.1, "Tobacco not to be sold in certain places...."

[1640]

I want to make some comments on that, particularly around the lack of mention of pharmacies in there. I have a particular interest in this area because my constituent Bev Harris, a pharmacist from Coquitlam, is and has been the primary force behind the movement to not sell cigarettes in pharmacies. She herself now is a counsellor. She has retired from being a pharmacist at Shoppers Drug in Coquitlam at the Como Lake shopping centre. She is now a counsellor with the College of Pharmacists, still working behind the scenes to influence other people to follow her lead and stop selling cigarettes in pharmacies.

I know that the college did support Ms. Harris's movements towards this discontinuation of cigarette selling in pharmacies, as did the Heart and Stroke and several other large health service non-profits. I think they have now decided that they will support the prohibition that is in the act around displaying cigarettes and cigarette products and — as my colleague from Maple Ridge-Mission calls it — the power walls of cigarettes.

They have backed off on their request to include pharmacies, but I don't think the opposition will back off. I feel we are still supportive of the concept. I'm afraid that once Bill 10 is passed — and as we've all been saying today, with the support of the opposition as well we know Bill 10 will pass — it will be some time before we see another amendment to the Tobacco Sales Act. It may not even be in the political lifetime of those of us in this House that we will see a ban on selling cigarettes in pharmacies. I can only say that I'm very disappointed. I think many of my colleagues are very disappointed that that has been omitted.

That was my first comment. Another comment I wanted to make is that I certainly support the recommendations to ban smoking and tobacco use in schools. I think it could be a small problem around some of the high schools and junior high schools. I know that in Coquitlam.... I was on city council when Centennial School brought in a ban on smoking, and it caused great consternation in all of the neighbourhoods around the school because the kids would leave the school grounds during breaks and smoke in the neighbourhoods instead.

We're going to have to perhaps be creative and help the school districts when they come across these kinds of problems, as some individual schools have already experienced. I think this is a move that's worth supporting and worth helping the schools with, because we can't go back on this one. That is where smoking starts. It certainly has for everybody that's spoken today and for myself.

I guess my only other comment that I want to talk about specifically is that it's gratifying to see the government admitting that they made a mistake a few years ago when they did allow the designated smoking rooms to be built in bars and restaurants across B.C. Certainly, as I just referred to, I was on city council, and I spent a lot of time in those days meeting with pub and restaurant owners and people that were struggling to find a way to fit under the guidelines. Those people must be pretty upset today, or they will be when Bill 10 passes and all of their money is down the drain.

But I guess that's the cost of doing business. It won't be the first disappointment that they've had, and it won't be the last. I imagine they'll work it out with the government. I know that most of the pubs in my area support the government of the day and not myself — the official opposition. I'm sure I'll have lots of conversations in the future with those very people, and they'll be very interesting conversations.

[1645]

I look forward to continued debate. If an amendment is made to consider adding the pharmacies, it would be my pleasure to support it. I would speak again in favour of that. I'll wait and see what happens next at the next level.

R. Sultan: I am delighted to rise in support of Bill 10, intitled Tobacco Sales (Banning Tobacco and Smoking in Public Places and Schools) Amendment Act, 2007. This is an important bill. I think it is a testament to the broad support the bill has in this House that we have had not only strong expressions of favour from members on the government side of the House, but also from the Health critic of the opposition and also the former Deputy Chair of the Select Standing Committee on Health, the member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, as well as most of the other speakers.

While we have heard some expressions of regret that the bill does not go far enough or fast enough, I think there's virtual unanimity that it's certainly heading in the right direction and a valuable contribution to

the arsenal of weapons in this struggle against a deadly substance.

We've heard many interesting personal stories from the members for Bulkley Valley–Stikine, Kelowna–Mission, Maple Ridge–Mission. I'd like to add one or two of my own.

My introduction to tobacco was probably at about age ten, when my uncle, who used to come and visit us every summer from California, introduced me to his cigarette-rolling machine, which was sort of something like a credit card thing you zip back and forth. I would put a Chanticleer cigarette paper in it. I still remember those red boxes they were sold in. From his yellow can of Ogden tobacco, I would sprinkle some tobacco, and — zip, zip — he'd have a cigarette.

My cousin and I, in about 20 minutes, could roll probably a half a day's supply for him, and he was a great smoker. There was only one drawback. Because of the impact on his blood circulation, he showed up one summer from California with his foot missing. The next summer he came, his calf was gone. The next summer he had had an amputation above the knee, and we thought: "You know, this is getting serious. There's not too much left in the leg."

Indeed, it did finally get cured, I think — frankly, by the discovery of penicillin at the last minute. He was not in fact subject to the ultimate amputation, which I think would be fatal. So I learned very early that this was not a habit to take lightly.

Although I must confess as well that years later, when I too became a banker — as my friend from Maple Ridge–Mission — I was quite proud, delighted and arrogant to be entered into the ranks of the senior executive of the head office of this grand financial institution of Montreal. Every day at around quarter to 12 we would retire to the 41st floor, where a gentleman in a white uniform offered us a rather strong scotch and, after a rather long and leisurely lunch, a Cuban cigar.

I thought that was the ultimate in being a sophisticated financier, even though we would go down to the offices later completely befuddled. I hope we didn't try and make any serious decisions. We thought absolutely nothing about puffing those grand cigars all the way through the office and inflicting the smoke on everyone without a thought.

I would like to tell the same sort of story as my colleagues — that I jettisoned this habit through better knowledge and rectitude — but what actually happened was competition. Competition in the banking industry prohibited us from taking double scotches for lunch and being befuddled in the afternoons. We actually had to do some serious work.

The cigars themselves were also a victim of competition. These grand Cuban cigars were gradually substituted to what I think at the end were five-cent White Owls or something. They were so wretched. Even though they continued to be offered to us as part of what we thought were perks in those days, everybody refused them because they were just absolutely terrible.

[1650]

That's my personal history with tobacco. As has already been pointed out by the minister and others,

it's a terribly damaging substance. It's still very prevalent, but not nearly as prevalent as it was, as has been pointed out this afternoon.

As recently as 1981, for example, 45 percent of young people were smoking. In 2004 in Canada, that number was down to 20 percent, and we've heard from the member for Kelowna–Mission that in B.C. it's closer to 15 percent.

The consequences, medically, are catastrophic — again just to repeat what my colleagues have already stressed: myocardial disease, vascular disease, chronic lung disease, emphysema, cancer of the lung, etc. etc. Smoking during pregnancy is particularly hazardous to the fetus, and for children, secondhand smoke results in increased rates of respiratory infections, decreased lung growth, increased infections of the middle ear, increased risk of sudden infant death syndrome, increased risk of asthma, and we could go on.

Despite these catastrophic effects, we learned in the 2001 survey I pulled off the Internet that 21 percent of homes with children in them in Canada still suffered from regular smoking. Not only do they make you sick; these substances kill you. The mortality consequences have already been outlined: 45,000 deaths for Canada as a whole in 1996, growing particularly rapidly among women.

According to the 1994 Health Canada study and the researcher Mr. Mahood: "It's the number-one preventable cause of morbidity and mortality in the entire population. There's nothing else out there that is going to kill one out of every two users." Wow. Let me repeat that: "There's nothing else out there that's going to kill one out of two users." I didn't know that. It scares me. Thank goodness the bank reverted to such cheap cigars that we couldn't stand them any longer.

Not only are there great medical and mortality consequences; the economic costs are formidable. Estimates are that for Canada as a whole, the rough cost from smoking is \$17 billion. That works out to over 1 percent of the economy.

We brag about adding a quarter or one-half a percentage growth rate to our gross domestic product numbers, province by province and cyclically as they go up and down, depending upon which government happens to be in office. To say, "Well now, if we just didn't smoke any more, we could add 1 percent to the entire growth of the economy that year" — wow. What a relatively easy way to boost the economy and all the good things that come from more rapid economic growth.

Those costs are about one-quarter of the direct health costs, looking after these sick and dying people. About 75 percent are actually productivity losses for people being sick and unable to work at their full capacity.

Another little side note that I found as an interesting piece — maybe one way to characterize it would be lethal justice — was to be reminded in my brief reading on this topic last night that tobacco was not a European invention or plant. It was discovered in the New World and introduced to the explorers from Europe by the first nations of the eastern seaboard and the Caribbean.

The Indian tribes of the day, in fact, did not use tobacco for recreation but as a spiritual substance. Nevertheless, I read that the Spanish in particular very quickly converted it into a recreational habit, and the consequences have not been very happy for our civilization.

[1655]

At the same time, the Europeans coming to this vast continent brought with them their own form of toxicity in the manner of smallpox, measles and other bacteria, viruses and pathogens, which in a fairly short span of time as the world goes, give it maybe 150 years, managed to wipe out over 90 percent of the native population, reducing it — estimates vary — from 20 million to 90 million persons on the continents to perhaps 5 or 10 percent of what they had been in their own vast civilizations.

So the Europeans who came to this country have much to be accountable for in terms of the inadvertent damage they've done to the health of the native populations. I guess the point that intrigued me.... By giving the Europeans tobacco in return, they've been repaid in kind. In the United States every year half a million people die through tobacco use. I won't say that was a good thing, but it's a curiosity of history that both sides seem to have wreaked havoc on the other, whether deliberately or not.

The arguments against increasing tobacco control are several, and I find some of them worth summarizing. Liberty in choice is one of them. Recently the Select Standing Committee on Health brought forward wellness recommendations, particularly focusing on the issue of childhood obesity, and some journalists chose to argue that the government had no business trying to tell people what to eat or even whether to get off the sofa because this is a matter of individual choice.

It reminded me of the licence plates one sees when driving through northern New England from New Hampshire: "Give me liberty, or give me death." I suppose one might make the easy transition to the slogan, "Give me smoking, or give me death," and the response would be: "No, we'll give you both, actually — simultaneously." Yet we still see a streak of this libertarian view that the state really has no business telling people how to conduct their lives.

I suppose that's one point of view that can gain support, but the people who have advocated that point of view do not perhaps acknowledge the other role the state has taken on — namely, looking after you when you get sick. It seems to me that the two tend to go hand in hand. One cannot have a freedom of choice without also perhaps taking greater responsibility for what you do to your own body and the obligations it might impose upon the state in the long run if not looked after.

A second argument that has been whispered, but only whispered, by the tobacco lobby from time to time — but I have heard this explicitly argued in meetings I've attended in the distant past — was that smoking actually saves the government money because it kills people off and therefore the state does not have the financial expense of looking after them in their old age.

That's a rather harsh theory that I think is a little difficult for the tobacco companies to gain much traction with.

Nevertheless, I have heard it whispered in my ear as a valid truth, and I think we should acknowledge there is truth to that. If people are killed, they aren't much of an expense to anybody. I'm not sure that's much of a moral basis upon which to construct our society, however, but it is an argument that has been made.

Finally, there are the economic arguments that the tobacco industry itself is a form of economic activity. It supports many farmers in southeastern Ontario, for example, in the Tilsonburg area.

[1700]

We have a whole industry here, running the gamut from manufacturing through distribution through advertising and promotion and so on. But I think to say that economic activity for its own sake should be valued — without taking into account the consequences for mortality, morbidity and the economy in terms of incapacitation — is very shortsighted indeed.

Madam Speaker, I join you and the other members present in saying that I think Bill 10 is an important and valuable step forward in the continuing campaign against tobacco in this province, a province which is a leader in Canada in this regard. It's a leadership position that both sides of the House, I think, can rightly take some pride in having helped create.

The health consequences and the financial consequences are so major, and the need to discourage this habit with all the means at our disposal is clear to most of us. Therefore, it's with great enthusiasm that I declare my support for Bill 10.

N. Macdonald: Like others in the House, I think I will join in supporting this bill. Of course, there are few that could object to the direction Bill 10 is taking. The dangers of smoke and secondhand smoke are well known.

About an hour ago I had a group of students join us from J. Alfred Laird School in Invermere. They attended part of the debate. They were engaged, of course, by what was going on here. One of the things they noticed was that nobody else seemed to be listening. I explained afterwards what was going on and how people needed to put on the record what they felt had to be on the record. Then we talked about the topic that was being discussed, which was a bill that would take smoking out of public places and take it away from the school.

These are grade 5, 6 and 7 students, and to a person, they thought that was a great idea. What was heartening was just the level of knowledge that they had from their parents and from teachers. The programs that they had just finished in the school gave them a high level of knowledge, and I think that we can be encouraged by the fact that very few of these students will move on to smoke.

We've had a lot of people here talking about their experiences when they were younger. Certainly, when we were younger, it was culturally completely differ-

ent with smoking and the level of knowledge that we didn't have. The things that were acceptable at that time seem ridiculous now. It's encouraging that we're heading in the right direction.

There are only two things that I really want to put on record, and they deal primarily with my critic area. The measures that are in this bill are supportable, and I will support them, as I think every member here will. But as the critic for the ministry that includes the hospitality sector, I want to address two issues that have been raised with me as I've travelled to different tourism associations. They're important issues, and they're important to put on the record here.

After the election in 2001 the government moved in a direction that was at odds with the Workers Compensation Board. They decided to overturn regulations. In doing that, this government compromised the health of hospitality workers. They did that consciously.

It is known now that secondhand smoke is damaging. That was clearly known in 2001, yet that decision was still made. Hospitality workers, now, would have been protected in 2001 and from 2001 on. As it stands, they still stay unprotected, and they will be in an unsafe setting for a period of time to come. That's a problem, and that needs to be stated.

[1705]

A second concern is raised by small business people in the hospitality industry. When I was at the tourist association conference, someone asked me if I would be fighting against the regulations, the bills they saw coming, which would force them to close their ventilated rooms. They talked about the amount of money they had spent to put these rooms in place.

I said no, that I could not see any way that I would not be supporting changes that would remove smoking from the workplace and that I would not anticipate the NDP would be objecting to that. But I did say that I would raise the point they made.

The point they made is one that we should remember. When government makes a decision, they make decisions that have implications for people outside of here that can be pretty serious. To run a small business is difficult at all times.

To be forced to make investments, to have to reorganize a room and put construction in, in their place of business has serious implications for a small business. To be told four years later that they now have to take it out is something that we are going to support. We say that it should happen, but we have to recognize that it has caused difficulties for those businesses.

A government has obligations to think through legislation that it puts forward. Clearly, this hasn't happened in this case, so others have paid the price for government mistakes. In this case, it's the workers who are forced and continue to be forced to work in an unsafe situation and business people who are forced to waste their money to put in ventilated rooms and now, a short period of time later, are forced to take them out.

Overall, the bill is supportable, but government has treated these people poorly, and that needs to be on record. Like all colleagues here, I will be voting for this

bill. I am glad that it's here. I think that all British Columbians will benefit from its passage.

M. Polak: I'm really pleased to be able to stand and speak in support of this.

As I was thinking about the topic and listening to the various other speakers, I was reminded of my grandfather, who was fond of telling the story of how he quit smoking. He was a very determined individual, but for years and years as a young man he'd been smoking.

When he reached his mid-30s or so, he really struggled to try to quit. And he was angry with himself because even though he was a very determined, self-controlled individual, for some reason when it came to cigarettes, he couldn't stop.

It was his anger at himself for not being able to control this part of his life that caused him to make a deal with himself. He made this deal with himself on a New Year's Eve. He said to himself: I'm not going to smoke for one year — cold turkey. He went for one year.

My grandmother would tell how on that New Year's Eve he sat up all night till midnight just to have that cigarette. He continued to smoke — not as much, but for a number of years after that, eventually quitting. It really illustrates the kind of hold that this substance has on individuals who smoke.

I am currently a recovering smoker. I'm wearing my nicotine patch as we speak, and I've been doing that for a number of months. It is a huge challenge. I would consider myself to be a fairly determined individual, and it is amazing the lengths to which a person's mind will go to get some of that nicotine, to get some of that substance back into the body and, even more so, just to continue in the habit.

For me, Madam Speaker, to look at any actions we can take that are going to make the world around a smoker more conducive to quitting, more conducive to choosing something healthier... Anything that we can do along those lines, we need to do.

I'm very pleased to see that we're taking a look at things that are going to impact young people, what they see and what's around them. Having been involved in education at the school board level, I'm quite familiar with a lot of the research around student behaviour about how you change student behaviour, how you change school culture.

[1710]

We often talk about it when we talk about bullying, when we talk about safety in schools and that kind of behaviour. But the same things hold true for issues like smoking. We know that, for example, when we talk about bullying behaviours, while we need to have punishments for those who act wrongly towards others, we also need to deal primarily with the audience — the other students around who by their inaction endorse what a bully does.

I would argue that it's the same kind of thing with behaviours such as smoking. When smoking was first banned from school grounds in the school district I was in, in Surrey, many people reacted by saying: "Well,

you know, it's not going to stop any kids from smoking. They're just going to go down to the local corner store, or they're going to go around to the neighbour's yard."

Certainly, as we change culture, as we change the ideas people have, those things can happen for a time, but there's something else that takes place as you make it more difficult. Maybe there's that kid on the edge who says: "I don't really feel like walking in the rain all the way down the block to that guy's house so that I can have a cigarette."

There's one kid on the edge who doesn't have it, and pretty soon there's a whole bunch of them that think: "I'd really rather go do that." It's about changing the audience for the behaviour when you're talking about students.

To take a step whereby we're going to say that in all of our public and independent schools and on the school grounds, we are going to eliminate smoking is a natural. It's a natural, and it's the kind of thing that is going to have such a long-term benefit for our students, not just in school but also in helping to change the kind of culture we all live in.

They're our future. They are the ones who are going to determine, by and large, how this world evolves around issues like climate change, health care and smoking. We need them to be believing in a life that is healthy and making choices that are going to reinforce that life.

When it comes to public spaces, public doorways, indoor air quality, that's an area that's really seen a significant cultural shift. I'm sure that we've all had experiences where we've walked through a cloud of smoke to go into a building and felt the discomfort. Even as a smoker, that was an uncomfortable place for me to be in. Yet it probably wasn't because the particular smokers were trying to be rude and nasty or obnoxious. They were probably just doing their thing.

This gives the extra impetus for that person to say: "You know, probably it bothers the folks who are walking by me, so I'm going to move, and I'm not going to stand here." It gives them that extra incentive, and you're making it a little bit harder. From the recovering smoking side of it, I will tell you that it makes it a little bit easier to quit.

When it comes to tobacco sales in public hospitals and health facilities, when this was announced, one of the things that struck me was how many folks approached me shocked that there would be any access in many of those public facilities. They were quite surprised that that wasn't already the case.

I think that there are parts of this where we're leading, and I'm very proud of this. There are parts of it where we're actually following what the culture is already expecting us to do in support of stopping this terrible scourge on not only us as individuals but on the costs to our health care system.

Certainly, the costs to our health care system are tremendous. I have a keen interest with respect to that, being the Parliamentary Secretary for the Conversation on Health. One of the things that is very commonly raised at the regional forums is that we need to be pay-

ing greater and greater attention to issues of prevention and, in particular, preventing chronic disease.

When you take a look at smoking, we know that smoking kills 6,000 British Columbians every year and costs the B.C. economy \$2.7 billion every year. I don't think that you could even accurately calculate what it costs our health care system. You could probably come up with some figures that fit into a court action, etc., but when you really start to think of all of the different tentacles that a disease like lung cancer or emphysema has and what kinds of pressures that puts on all sorts of areas in the system, I don't know that we can even calculate it.

Then, of course, we have to think about the human costs. What kind of a cost is there on a family when someone dies young? What kind of a cost is there on a family when during that time of illness they're helping their loved one get through a horrible battle with lung cancer or with emphysema?

[1715]

I had a wonderful uncle, a brilliant man. He was a dentist, and he was just one of these people that was always active, always outdoors. But he was a heavy smoker. I can remember as a child that it always surprised me to see someone who was relatively young...

In my eyes as a child he wasn't some grey old crotchety fellow. He looked very spry and very young, but he was dragging this oxygen tank around with him because it was the only way he could live and breathe. Eventually it was the emphysema that killed him. In spite of all that, he wasn't able to quit smoking.

I'm really pleased that one of the other things we're doing now is providing smoking cessation materials and the availability of that to those who are in need of it and who have difficulty affording it themselves. I think that's a huge step forward.

We've certainly seen advances in terms of cost. I know that years ago, when I was first considering quitting smoking and was looking at purchasing different products, the price of the products far outweighed the price that it would cost me to keep on smoking. That was a real disincentive, especially when there's all that fear with making that choice and taking the leap of faith that it takes to try and quit.

To be able to make it that much easier so that the availability is there, so that we're helping people remove those excuses that the nicotine and the addiction want to create in their minds... We're doing something that is so profoundly helpful. When you think about it, it's hard to imagine another area where government can have such a direct impact on an individual and on their chance to live. It really is.

In the health care system generally, we're repairing people. We're fixing them when something goes wrong. Here we're actually offering a way in which we can be there alongside someone through all of these various things — whether it's assisting to remove the advertising so that children aren't being influenced by that and aren't being encouraged to smoke, or whether it's banning the smoking outside of doorways or on school grounds. All of these things are going to have a

direct impact on changing the way people think, changing the way children act and, in the end, changing what happens for their life outcomes.

It's a really tremendous thing to think that you can be in government and have that kind of an effect on people. We know that when it comes to smoking, there's more to this than just buying the cigarette and picking up the cigarette. We know that we have to help people with smoking cessation methods. I'm really pleased to see that we're doing that.

It certainly seems inconsistent that we would have ever allowed public athletic or recreational facilities or provincial buildings to sell cigarettes. Then again, we're in a cultural shift. It's a lot like what we've seen in climate change. It used to be that people wouldn't accept that climate change was a reality. Indeed, now they do, and they believe they need to do something about it.

Gosh, I can remember stories about ashtrays in school board meeting rooms, doctors smoking in labour delivery rooms. It was always the common, accepted thing. This is another example of something where you need to pay attention to how the world is changing around you, respond as a government and do something that supports the good things that other people are doing around it.

We certainly can see that we have a lot of support for something like this, and I'm very pleased to see that our opposition colleagues have been speaking in support as well. I wanted to read what the provincial health officer had to say about the kinds of changes, the kind of action that we're taking.

He says: "These changes will close a number of gaps in the protection of public health. It's so important that we prevent youth and young adults from starting to use tobacco and that we encourage and assist tobacco users to quit or reduce their use of tobacco products."

He's absolutely right. This is so critical that we think not just about the balancing of people's rights to their individual choices. We've covered that off, I believe.

We've allowed some flexibility so that people who are only impacting on their own health — in their own cars or their own homes — are going to be able to make that choice, much as we might wish they didn't. So we've allowed for that.

For those who would be using tobacco for ceremonial uses, we're going to ensure that those kinds of activities are also protected. We're taking a reasonable and balanced approach to this. We're taking an important leadership role, and it's not going to be without its challenges.

[1720]

I know it's much simpler to stand in this House and talk about the values we all bring to this and about the fact that not smoking is so key to good health and that of course we want young people not to start using tobacco. It's very easy to talk about those things.

It is going to be extremely difficult, I believe, when we get down to implementation and we're dealing with individual communities and businesses and trying to strike a balance between what they see as their need to operate, to function, and what we know is

good public policy. It's not going to be easy, but I do believe that by starting out on the right path with what appears to be support from both sides of the House, that we certainly have a better chance of achieving success than if this was simply government action.

I'm proud that we're a government leading this, but I'm very pleased that we appear to have support from both sides of this House. I think that's going to make some of the rougher spots along this road pass by with much more ease.

I'm also pleased to note that we're going to be working together with communities, with organizations, in terms of making these implementations work. That's going to be critical when we work with schools and school districts. It's going to be critical when we work with public facilities that we ensure that they're part of solving this and not just seeing this as the heavy hand of government.

It's always difficult to work with something that amounts to a negative, a ban — even when you're talking about banning a dangerous substance. It's going to be a challenge, but we need to be turning this into yet another opportunity to make healthy choices, another opportunity to ensure that we're all working toward our own good health and the good health of others.

It's an opportunity to be creating yet again another opportunity for British Columbia to be that place that leads, not only in health and physical fitness, but in everything that we have around us that makes this province such a wonderful place to be.

I'm very pleased to see us leading on this and very pleased that we're seeing the kind of support we're going need to make this work, to make this operate. I'm quite sure that those who've worked long and hard for many years promoting the quitting of smoking, promoting the removal of advertising, etc., will be coming alongside us and supporting us, as well, as we move forward with many of these initiatives.

With that, Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this bill, and I'm very much looking forward to being able to see these actions taken and to seeing a healthier future for British Columbia.

J. Horgan: It's a pleasure to rise and participate in debate on Bill 10, Tobacco Sales (Banning Tobacco and Smoking in Public Places and Schools) Amendment Act, 2007.

Interjection.

J. Horgan: I'm getting heckled by my colleague from Saanich North. I'm here in solidarity with the Pages, and that's the sort of treatment I get. It's shocking.

I want to commend the member for Langley for her comments about the importance of bipartisanship on these issues. Had we only had that six years ago, we wouldn't be having this debate today.

I know that when the minister gets to his feet to close debate, he'll be gracious and acknowledge that in the 1990s the government of British Columbia was in

fact leading the country on these issues. He'll get to his feet and be gracious, and he'll say that had the critic of the day — Geoff Plant, former Attorney General — agreed with us in 1999, with respect to the lawsuit that we brought against the purveyors of these toxins, we may well have had more progress.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

I listened carefully to the Minister of Education. I listened carefully to the Minister of Health and, most importantly, to the member for Langley about the need for bipartisanship on this issue. Now that I've offered up my hope that we'll get a little bit back from the other side, that the 1990s were a good day for bringing down the purveyors of tobacco and nicotine addiction, we can carry on from this point in a non-partisan way.

I would be remiss, hon. Speaker, and you know that, if I didn't remind members that in the 1990s there were numerous initiatives by the government of the day to try and eradicate this scourge.

It was in the 1990s that I gave up smoking cigarettes, and I'd like to share that. It wasn't a dark decade for me and my health. It was a good day.

[1725]

It was a good day for many other smokers. In fact, the rates went from 25 percent, when we came into government, to just a little bit over 18 percent of the population smoking. Again, we were leading the country then, and I'm pleased to stand and support.... I've had a debate on the last bill of this nature with the minister, and he knows that I will support him all the way.

It's quite important that we all recognize — those at home, the pages here today in solidarity with my bow tie and those in the chamber — that this is a bipartisan issue. All members of this place want to do what we can to improve the health of the people in our community.

I think that tabling a bill such as this gives some credibility to other statements and actions by the government with respect to ActNow, for example, and eating your fruits and vegetables. What we're doing with this piece of legislation is actually practicing what our parents told us when we were younger: don't smoke, stay in school, don't do drugs, and on and on it goes. That's what we do with our kids in our home.

When I quit smoking, and it was a little over six years ago....

R. Hawes: You were in the restaurant business?

J. Horgan: No, I was working in this business, which made it even more incredible that I was able to quit.

A friend of mine's son congratulated me, and my 11-year-old said: "What for?" My friend said: "For quitting smoking." My son turned to me and said: "Do you smoke, Dad?"

That's telling, because my addiction, and the addiction for many people who are taken down by nicotine, is as bad as being in an alleyway in East Vancouver fixing. I smoked whenever I had the opportunity, but I

didn't do it in sight of my children because I was embarrassed and ashamed of my addiction. Many, many British Columbians who are addicted today feel that way.

That guilt is bad enough. But when we don't have the support of the government, when they're addicted to revenues — hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues from tobacco taxation.... I know that the Minister of Finance is thinking carefully about how she's going to replace that, and I know she's delighted to have the opportunity to say: "I don't want this money anymore. We've got enough revenues from world record commodity prices that we can now do away with these tobacco taxes."

It's a good thing that the world economy is humming along, where every corner of the globe is on all four cylinders as a result of high prices for natural resources. The abundance that has been here for all time — not just since 2001, but for all time — is now available to the Minister of Finance.

We can say: "Sorry, Mr. Imperial Tobacco. Sorry, Mr. Benson and Hedges. We don't need you here anymore." That's a good thing, and I know that the Minister of Finance will applaud that. We will certainly applaud her next year when her budget says, "We are not going to rely on tobacco tax because there's no more power wall, no more smoking being promoted and propped up by government," whether it be that government or whether it be this government.

It's just the wrong way to go. People understand that. People will respect all of us if we do leave this place after this bill passes in lockstep, in unison together, Liberal and New Democrat, saying: "We are going to do everything we can to reduce dependence on tobacco."

That's a good thing, hon. Speaker, and I know you'll support me and others in my community. Langford, where I live, is a smoky place. There are a lot of smokers in Langford, more so than in other parts of my constituency.

When I go to the rink, I still go out with the smokers, primarily because they're my friends. I used to go out with them and smoke. Now I just go out with them because they're my friends. I don't beat them up about it. I'm not a reformed smoker that chases people around and tells them they shouldn't do what they do, because I remember the guilt that I felt, and it doesn't help.

It's not helpful to say to an addict: "Hey, you're an addict." Surprise, surprise. It was never astonishing to me to learn that I had to go every 20 minutes and fix because I was addicted to nicotine.

I met a guy in 1999. His name was Dr. Fred Bass. Some people will know him in this place. He was a long-time councillor in the city of Vancouver and a bike enthusiast. He was the head of Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada. It was an organization, a subsection of the BCMA. A very interesting fellow.

I met Fred here one day at the Legislature. In fact I was outside having a smoke, and he came up to me. He said: "Are you John Horgan?" I was at that time someone else. I wasn't the member for Malahat-Juan de Fuca. He said: "Are you who I think you are?" I said: "Yes, I am."

He said: "What are you doing smoking?" I said: "I can't help myself. I'm addicted." He grabbed my head — it was quite startling; he's a big man — and he touched a point at the back of my skull, and he said: "That's where the nicotine's going. If you can stop it from getting there, you can kick this thing."

[1730]

Now, I'd been to doctors. I'd been to numerous doctors. I had acupuncture. I had laser treatment. I had tried patches. I had tried Zyban, but it took Fred Bass grabbing my face, squeezing my head and telling me that the nicotine was going to a particular spot in the back of my brain. It was like the penny dropped. The veil was lifted....

Interjection.

J. Horgan: The veil was lifted — I'm glad that none of the members on the other side are grabbing my skull and finding the spot where the nicotine goes — but it was an epiphany for me, almost like the Premier waking up to climate change. It just kind of happened one day. I awoke to it because he touched that spot on the back of my head. From that point on, I gave up cigarettes.

Fred Bass. I'd like to have a hallelujah for Dr. Fred Bass. It wasn't all of the cessation programs that I had gone into. It wasn't the hypnotism. It wasn't any of that. It was a physician, whom I'd never met before, grabbing my face and saying: "Just don't let the nicotine get there, and you'll be okay." It turned out that he was right.

So whatever it takes people to get through this, do it. Don't guilt people out. Don't give them power walls. Don't encourage them. Don't depend on the taxation as a result of it. Try and help them. I am delighted that the Minister of Health is trying to help people. I am absolutely delighted that people on low incomes and social assistance will now have assistance from government.

It's really difficult when you're an addict to say: "What am I going to do with seven bucks? Am I going to buy food, where I'll get a little bit of food, or am I going to buy 20 of my best friends? My cigarettes are always with me, on those down days and on those high days. I'm an addict, and I can have my smokes." Helping those people is fundamental to getting them out of the rut of poverty, and I commend the minister for that.

I know that we have many other things to do today, and more stories about why I quit smoking and so on are not going to enlighten the minister. I know that he's had the opportunity to hear what I've had to say and will be gracious in recognizing that the 1990s were the beginning of the end of cigarettes in this province and that we can go together — he and I, and all members on this side of the House, my friend from Kingsway, and others — to try and eradicate this scourge once and for all in British Columbia.

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no further speakers, the Minister of Health closes debate.

Hon. G. Abbott: I want to thank members on both sides of the House, who have provided very thoughtful

and very constructive comments today in respect of Bill 10, and I do want to thank them all. I don't want to take a long time here. I know we'll have some opportunities in committee stage, but I just wanted to touch on a few points that have been made.

I think that I'm particularly appreciative of hearing from some former smokers — former addicts, as my friend from Malahat-Juan de Fuca describes us. I think that's true. For anyone who has smoked for any period of time, in fact, it is an addiction. One never really shakes it, as my friend from Bulkley Valley-Stikine said. Even decades later you still think about it in certain circumstances, because it is very powerful. It is a very tough habit to break.

The one quote that I remember.... Obviously, quitting smoking has been an issue for a while. It's from Mark Twain. He said: "Quitting smoking is easy. I've done it a thousand times." I think some people who smoke can recognize just how wise those words are. It is a very tough habit to break. It's quite insidious in terms of the grip that it gets on you — and it is, therefore, more and more important all the time that young people be persuaded not to take up this habit. Again, as others have noted, there's a lot of peer and social pressure to take up cigarette smoking, and it is just about the worst thing that anyone can do in terms of framing their future health outcomes.

Now the last speaker, from Malahat-Juan de Fuca, said, rightly, I think: "We want to hear some non-partisan comments from the Minister of Health, some comments about the 1990s." I want to do that, but I have to also say that I heard some comments during the debate which weren't strikingly non-partisan in character, and which I thought were in fact in the other direction. I want to address that, but I want to address it in a way that I hope is constructive here.

[1735]

I don't want to say, in terms of cigarette control, tobacco control or smoking cessation, that any side, any party, in this House is superior to another. I think what we have with Bill 10 is a reflection of where society has come in terms of its acceptance — or lack of acceptance, more precisely — of the use of tobacco.

I referenced in my earlier comments the fact that back in the '70s, when I was a student at UBC and later at UVic, not only did the students smoke in class, the professors did as well. In the late '70s, early '80s, when I was in local government, we smoked around the regional district table. These are things that today would be just judged remarkably unacceptable. The social standards around smoking have shifted.

I do want to say that the NDP did some great things in terms of tobacco in the 1990s, but I don't think it's fair, as some have suggested, that somehow the Liberal government should be condemned because they didn't immediately seize all of the elements that are contained in today's bill. Again, these things change.

The government, in the period from 1991 to 2001, had some opportunities, which they didn't avail themselves of, to change things. I don't think that they

should immediately be criticizing the group that took government in 2001 because they didn't do something that they might have done in the previous ten years.

Tobacco policies are something that evolve over time. I haven't the slightest doubt that maybe 30, 40 or 50 years from now, legislators in this chamber will look back and say: "Why the heck didn't they just ban it in 2007?" They'll ask questions like that, because as we move forward in time, the dangers of tobacco become more and more apparent to larger and larger portions of the public.

I think that at some point in the future there will be a ban on this very dangerous and insidious commodity in this province. I think that we'll all welcome that day, but I think that what's contained in the bill here is where we need to be in 2007. Is it the be-all and end-all? Perhaps not. I expect this area of public policy will continue to evolve. I think it's a huge step forward in terms of the management, control and prevention of smoking.

Some have noted, and I do appreciate it, that we have made great progress in the 1990s and in the current decade around the number of British Columbians who smoke. We've moved from about half or more of the population smoking a few decades ago, my friend noted, down to 18 percent at the end of the 1990s, I think. Today it's down around 15, 16 percent. Hopefully, that number keeps going down, at some magical point in the future, to zero.

That's something that we can look forward to. We can look forward to cigarette taxes disappearing, because there's no longer any tobacco being purchased in the province. But that's, again, for the future.

Some issues have been raised by members. On some I think we'll have an honest difference of opinion. I did think about the issue of banning the sale in pharmacies, and I took a considered position in respect of that. As long as tobacco remains a legal product in this province and pharmacies are a business in this province, unless we decide at some point that we're going to control the sale of it through liquor stores only, or a source like that.... I had some difficulty coming to the considered position that pharmacies should be excluded from being a place of sale.

Some would argue, in fact, that pharmacists, because they can offer up a range of products and advice around tobacco cessation, are perhaps a better place to be selling tobacco than some others. I don't know about that. As I say, I think we may have an honest difference of opinion around that point.

[1740]

Similarly, I don't know whether it is the opposition's position or just the position of one member of the opposition that we should ban tobacco use in social housing. Again, from a principled position, I would find it difficult to say that we are going to prohibit the use of tobacco in social housing but not in rented apartments, fee-simple-owned condominiums or houses and so on. There's a logical extension to that argument that I'm not convinced of. That member or the opposition, if indeed that's the opposition's position, may want to try to persuade me of that in commit-

tee stage debate, but I'm not taken with that argument now.

At any rate, I know that these are all important issues, and again, I do sincerely want to thank all members of the House for the very constructive, thoughtful comments that they have made today. They've been very useful and supportive, and I thank all members for that.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House to be considered at the next sitting of the House after today.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, you have to do second reading first.

Hon. G. Abbott: Pardon me. Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of the bill.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Abbott: I'm so anxious to get this bill moved forward, Mr. Speaker, that I seized the opportunity to try to move it ahead too quickly, and I apologize for that.

I now move that the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House to be considered at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill 10, Tobacco Sales (Banning Tobacco and Smoking in Public Places and Schools) Amendment Act, 2007, read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration at the next sitting of the House after today.

Hon. G. Abbott: I call second reading of Bill 13, Supply Act (No. 1), 2007.

SUPPLY ACT (No. 1), 2007

Hon. C. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I move that the bill now be read a second time.

This supply bill is in the general form of our previous supply bills. The first section of the bill requests $\frac{2}{12}$ of the voted expenses as presented in the estimates to provide for the general programs of the government. Two-thirds of the financing transaction requirements set out in schedules C, D and E of the estimates have been provided for in the interim supply bill. This will allow time later for more complete debate on these items.

The third section requests the disbursements related to revenue collected for, transferred to other entities which appear in schedule F of the estimates. As there is no impact on the surplus, borrowing or debt from these particular financing transactions, 100 percent of the year's requirements is being sought in this supply bill.

I move second reading of Bill 13.

B. Ralston: Just very briefly, the opposition supports this routine bill.

M. Farnworth: This is an important bill that I think deserves some comment — not a lot, but it does deserve some comment. I think, in part, because people who routinely tune into the parliamentary legislative channel see the work that's taking place. They see the budget being debated. They see the Speech from the Throne. They see all those things happening, and one of the things that's often mentioned is the issue of supply and the Committee of Supply.

It's a very important parliamentary principle, because the supply bill is what allows government to do its work. The supply bill is what allows ministries to function. It's something that is of acute importance, because without a supply bill, government would not be able to pay its bills. Without a supply bill, employees would not get paid. Even this place would not function, because without a supply bill, Committee A and Committee B, where estimates are discussed and debated, would have to shut down. That important debate would not be able to take place. That's important, you know.

We have hours of sitting. For example, committees sit till 6:30, and in the other chamber there are still another 40 minutes of important supply debate to take place. So I think it's important that people understand the importance of the supply bill.

[1745]

This supply bill is intended to allow the government, regardless of political party, to fulfil its financial obligations over the coming months — until such time as the budget is fully debated, the estimates are fully debated — and do so in an upfront and legal manner. The government introduces the supply bill. The opposition has the ability to speak to it. It will go into committee stage, and then it is voted on and debated.

This supply bill will, for example, allow the government to expense billions of dollars that will fund our health care system. The exact amount of that money is, of course, open to debate by government and opposition. But while that important work is taking place, money flows into paying for wages of hospital workers, wages of physicians, money flowing to health care authorities — all the things that are required for a health care system to function.

The supply bill also allows, for example, the education system to function. It gives government the authority to spend money on education, which is one of the largest expenditures that government makes. As a result, teachers are paid. Students are able to go to school in classrooms. Schools, which are part of the capital program, are built. Schools which need seismic upgrading can get seismic upgrading — perhaps not as fast as the opposition would like.

But some work does take place, and it's important that this work takes place while the....

Interjection.

M. Farnworth: Absolutely. The Finance Minister says: "While the clock is running." The business of government, the work of government, does not stop just

because it's five o'clock, and it doesn't start just because it's nine o'clock. It in fact continues 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Interjection.

M. Farnworth: As my colleague said: "Not a dime without debate."

Interjection.

M. Farnworth: And he asks what the history of that is. You, know it is a very interesting history. It predates, I think, everybody in this Legislature, perhaps with the exception — and I don't mean this disrespectfully — of the member for Kamloops, who may have been around, I think, at that time when Bill Bennett was....

Interjection.

M. Farnworth: Oh, one of my colleagues is getting cheeky. When Bill Bennett was opposition leader, the government of the day intended to make some changes, and he uttered the famous phrase: "Not a dime of government expenditure without the necessary debate." That is one of the fundamental principles of our parliamentary democracy. It's an extremely important one, and it's one that we continue today. You know, the government asks for expenditure, and we are happy to see that expenditure take place, but not without the necessary debate. That's one of the fundamental, fundamental pillars of our democracy in this province.

What happens, as I started in my comments, is that opposition has the opportunity and government has the opportunity to debate the budget and to debate those expenditures. But while that's taking place, there needs to be a mechanism which allows government to fund the work that government needs to do. As I said, education is one of those, so that school boards and school districts receive money so that the school system can function and teachers can get paid and students can be taught.

Other areas, for example, where government expenditure doesn't just stop because of the House debating the budget are in transportation and highways. Roads need to be upgraded. Bridges need to be built. Transit systems need to be built. All that infrastructure that goes into keeping the economy of our province running needs to be upgraded and needs to be built and needs to be developed. That requires money the province expenses to ensure that priorities are met and priorities are dealt with. That requires us and government having the ability to do that.

Another area that comes to mind, for example, is tourism, arts and culture, which again is something that many people don't think about, but that's an important part of British Columbia's economy. Government expenditures there are important in helping to develop British Columbia's economy — not just for today, but for a long-term sustainability.

[1750]

So those expenditures are extremely important. They're not necessarily large. In some cases they are. But many of them — for example, in marketing and tourism promotion — are small expenditures. But they're still worthy of scrutiny. They're still worthy of being examined. At the same time, the work of government needs to continue while they're taking place.

I mean, it reminds me.... In a former government, Bill Barlee, when he was Minister of Tourism, had a really brilliant idea. It required some money, and I remember it was debated. You might see something similar from the government across the way today.

He came up with this idea of having rolling billboards. It was a first, I think, in British Columbia. He went to some trucking firms that do international trucking business right across Canada and all of North America and down into Mexico. He got them to buy into a program which saw these magnificent, magnificent pictures — photographs of British Columbia — on the side of trucks.

Interjection.

M. Farnworth: Exactly, exactly.

One of them, for example, was a picture of a big grizzly bear with a big fish in its mouth, and the caption was: "Everybody catches fish in British Columbia." That was on the side of a truck which went all across Canada and right down to the United States, spreading the message about tourism and how great a place British Columbia is.

That was something that was developed by a Minister of Tourism, and it required an expenditure. Now, in order for that expenditure to have taken place, it would have to have been debated here in this House. That process takes several months to do and a lot of work and a lot of time and effort on the part of ministry staff, time on the part of the ministers themselves and the opposition critics to ask the right questions.

What happens is that you get a thorough examination of those expenditures. But those expenditures should not be delayed because of the work being done in this Legislature.

Public safety is another one that comes to mind. That's something that will be debated either in this chamber or in the little chamber several weeks from now. But again, you know, our hours....

J. Horgan: And flooding.

M. Farnworth: And flooding, for example. That's another expenditure. Events occur in this province that we have no control over, that government has no control over. For example, we have record snowpack and questions around dikes and things like that. If something does happen, government has to spend money to deal with the issue.

Well, guess what. Those expenses are debated here. But we can't let the work and the debate that takes place in this chamber delay the very necessary work of government that needs to take place. I was talking

about the Solicitor General's ministry, my critic area. When we debate the estimates, and they start right after question period and they go until 6:30 in the evening, whether they take place in this chamber or whether or not they're in the small chamber — the Douglas Fir Room, known as Committee A for those not familiar with the terminology we use around here.... Those expenditures, which are of crucial importance — dealing with issues such as our provincial jails and levels of staffing in our provincial jails, issues such as programs to deal with crime and punishment, how we deal with the sentencing of people and how we make our streets and communities safer — whether it's through the sentencing programs, prevention programs or restorative justice programs....

Those are all extremely important issues, and they need to be debated in this House and in this chamber. And they will be. But again, I make the point that just because we haven't passed the budget or debated those things does not mean that the money shouldn't be going forward and paying for those necessary services — for those important wages of the dedicated men and women in our corrections facilities, for example, who do the work that helps keep our province and our system of justice going.

It also reminds me of the Attorney General's ministry — another area that many people don't think about. The work of our criminal justice system is very complex and employs a lot of people. It requires a lot of effort in terms of policy development. We will be debating in this House changes that the Attorney General brings forward to the laws that govern this place. He has an entire.... The inquiries act is one of them, for example, we have issues around.

[1755]

For example, Crown prosecutors have a lot of work to do. Their role in society, their role in our justice system, is extremely important. And their work doesn't just stop because a budget hasn't been passed. So we need to remember that when we're dealing with this issue, and people need to understand that this work takes place and it's important.

J. Horgan: It's vital.

M. Farnworth: It is vital, as my colleague from Esquimalt-Metchosin says.

J. Horgan: Malahat-Juan de Fuca.

M. Farnworth: Sorry. Malahat-Juan de Fuca — exactly, where I might add.... You know, the Malahat highway is one of those issues that at some point government is going to have to address and will have to be financed and upgraded and money expended. That money would be debated here in this chamber. That would be an opportunity when that happens for the member for Malahat-Juan de Fuca to stand up and talk about the importance of the Malahat highway.

Other members in this chamber too. I see the member from Bulkley Valley. Again, he will have issues that

he wants to bring forward and raise in this House. Some of those will involve the expenditure of government funds, and you know what? He's right to do that, and this is the place that we do that.

But at the same time, because he's standing up to talk about these funds, to talk about these expenditures that need to take place, is not a reason for delaying the budget, is not a reason for not allowing government to do the work that it does, which is why the Minister of Finance has tabled this piece of legislation. She knows the importance of the work that government does in this province doesn't stop just because she's tabled a budget, and we have to debate that.

That's why this piece of legislation is before us. This is the second reading part of that. This is where we can stand up on the record and make comments about that piece of legislation, and then after this it will go to committee stage.

Committee stage, for people watching this at home who aren't familiar with this, is where we have the clause-by-clause examination of the bill. So at second reading we have wide-ranging debate around the principle of the bill. Then at committee stage we go to a clause-by-clause examination, and members are entitled to get up and put questions to the Minister of Finance and her staff and have answers back.

They may not always agree with those answers, and they have the opportunity to question those answers. But that process allows for detailed scrutiny, detailed examination of exactly what the government is doing in the bill. It allows for detailed scrutiny and examination of the issues that are raised in the piece of legislation. After that a vote will be held. Sometimes the government and the opposition agree and sometimes they disagree, and that's the way our House functions.

After that, once committee stage is done, then, hon. Speaker, that piece of legislation goes to you where you, of course, proclaim it or ask for the vote taken as proclaimed as an act. You stand up and say it's an act. I really hope that one day.... I've always thought it would be kind of neat if you received a piece of legislation that we sometimes have in this House that's, you know, hundreds of pages thick — and I can think of a few — that you were able to stand up, and when you do the, "It is an act...." In this case you would stand up with this massive big, thick act and go: "It is an act. It is one big act."

Hon. Speaker, I'd love to see you do that some day. After that, people think that then it's law. But no, it's not. People may not realize that under our system of government, which as you know is a constitutional monarchy with the Queen as head of state, we have to give royal assent to the bill. And only when royal assent is given and the Lieutenant-Governor comes in and nods and gives assent is the bill proclaimed into law.

I know that we have other pieces of legislation to get to before 6:30, and I know that my colleague....

Interjection.

M. Farnworth: Oh, we may have more speakers, but I know that we have about half an hour left.

Anyway, I know that this is an important piece of legislation. It allows the important and necessary work of government to take place while we debate and pass the budget. So it's my pleasure to speak on second reading, and having outlined my thoughts on this piece of legislation, I will take my seat.

[1800]

J. Horgan: It's a pleasure for me as well to rise and speak to the importance of Bill 13. I am, however, almost at a loss for words. I know that comes as a bit of shock to many in this place. I don't know if it's possible to add much to what the member from Burke Mountain has said on this piece of legislation — just, perhaps, that he didn't mention health care.

Interjection.

J. Horgan: No, surprisingly, he didn't mention health care. And I would perhaps take this opportunity to expand somewhat on the importance of passing this supply bill so that we can continue to fund the important health services that we all need in our communities.

I know there are other issues outside of health care — community services, income assistance and, certainly, economic development. We are involved in a number of economic development initiatives, people in ministries working diligently, and without passage of a supply bill at this point in the fiscal year that work would not continue.

In fact, some viewers and some people in the House may be aware that in the United States, in their disjointed system, quite often bills such as these are held up to the last moment. With the rigorous partisan debate in Congress, money bills are not allowed to proceed until certain things are tacked on and so on.

That certainly doesn't happen here in British Columbia. We recognize on the opposition side, and the government when they, too, were on the opposition side, that without supply, without a flow of money from the consolidated revenue fund to pay for all of the services that we expect from our tax dollars, such as health care, the government of British Columbia can't continue.

I know that the member from Burke Mountain would have raised health care had he not almost exhausted his opportunity to speak to the bill. So I'm pleased to stand and discuss it here today.

When we get into the detailed discussion at committee stage of this legislation, then of course we'll be able to probe more deeply with the Minister of Finance about just how much money is involved in this undertaking — what ministries will be receiving what, whether there are capital advances that are going to be made for certain projects and so on. It's really the meat and potatoes of the Ministry of Finance.

I know there are many members of the minister's staff who are anxiously waiting for the passage of this bill — certainly not today. We can't pass the bill today.

I think the recitation from the Opposition House Leader made it pretty clear that we'll have to go from second reading to committee stage, which happens at the next sitting of the House after today — not, of course, while we're here.

With that, hon. Speaker, I think I've fleshed out some of the issues that the House Leader may have neglected. I know my friend from Kamloops is urging me to take my place, and I'll oblige him in that.

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no further speakers, the Minister of Finance closes debate.

Hon. C. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I have to just say that, you know, I'm a newcomer here. I'm a real newbie, and I learn every day more about how the Legislature should work, and I now have also learned what it takes to be a House Leader. So this is a lesson that I think is historic, perhaps, in the history of this House. It's one that I'm certainly going to keep and frame the *Hansard* record of, because I think some very important principles were discussed today.

On that, I will move second reading of Bill 13.

Motion approved.

Hon. C. Taylor: I move that the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration at the next sitting after today.

Bill 13, Supply Act (No. 1), 2007, read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration at the next sitting of the House after today.

Hon. C. Richmond: I call Bill 9, intituled Securities Transfer Act.

SECURITIES TRANSFER ACT

Hon. C. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I move that the bill now be read a second time.

The Securities Transfer Act is commercial property law that governs the transfer and holding of investment securities. The Securities Transfer Act is not securities regulatory law, which closely regulates numerous aspects of how securities may be issued and traded. Rather, it is a framework legislation that codifies and supports existing market practices.

Current Canadian law reflects the traditional certificate-based system where ownership and transfer are evidenced by possession and delivery of a share certificate. But today most investors do not actually hold their securities in the form of physical certificates. Instead, the vast majority of securities are held in what they call the indirect holding system — the practice of holding securities through multiple tiers of intermediaries.

[1805]

The Securities Transfer Act reflects a successful interprovincial effort to develop substantially uniform

legislation all across Canada. When implemented it will close the gap between existing market practices and the legal regime that underpins it. It will provide a sound legal foundation for securities holding and transfer consistent with international recommendations and with the law that is currently in place in the United States.

Securities transfer legislation has already been passed in Ontario and Alberta. It is planned for Saskatchewan later this spring. Manitoba, Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador have proposed similar timing.

The Securities Transfer Act will provide the legal certainty that investors need, and it will facilitate cross-border transactions by removing the uncertainty about which law applies to market transactions.

B. Ralston: This act is a fairly refined piece of commercial law, and its utility may not be apparent to the general public. Formerly, securities trading would be concluded by giving a stock certificate to the individual who held that form of security. But in the modern marketplace the bulk of securities transactions are settled by computerized book entries, and they're not held directly by the owner of the securities but by intermediaries on their behalf.

What this bill attempts and strives to do is to achieve legal uniformity internationally and within Canada in order to reduce risk and give legal certainty to securities transactions, because those transactions often involve parties and intermediaries in several different jurisdictions. It wisely removes the securities transfer provisions from the B.C. Business Corporations Act and places them in this separate statute. It clarifies the purposes and functions of settlement rules and enables uniformity, often word for word, with the uniform securities regulation that has been passed in various forms in Ontario and Alberta and is also in place, I understand, in the 50 states of the United States of America.

This work flows out of a task force established to modernize securities legislation in Canada, which is a creature of the Canadian Securities Administrators, a forum for the 13 securities regulators of Canada's provinces and territories, which aims to coordinate and harmonize regulation of Canada's capital markets.

We are in support of this legislation, although it's perhaps significant that it is dealing only with that aspect of commercial law relating to the transfer of securities. It bears not at all upon some of the other concerns that the public sometimes has with the Securities Commission and enforcement of various orders in investor protection. This is simply a commercial law transaction to support those aspects of securities trading markets which are settled in the way that I've described.

Most publicly traded securities in Canada today are registered in the name of CDS and Co. Ltd., which is a Canadian depository for securities, and the Depository Trust Co. in the United States. These entities handle astronomical amounts of property and numbers of

transactions. Almost all trading of securities and publicly traded issuers in Canada are executed through these investment dealers, banks, credit unions and trust companies, who hold securities on behalf of their customers through CDS. By having all of the securities registered in the name of the CDS nominee, the costly process of delivering certificates is eliminated, and almost all transactions among the intermediaries are settled by book entries to the participant CDS accounts.

In the indirect-holding system, the ultimate beneficiary owner of the property is not shown on the records of the issuer nor on the records of the Central Securities Depository or even on the records of the intermediary, who is a direct participant. This eliminates many of the problems. It provides a clear legal framework for those transactions to occur not only in this province but throughout Canada and internationally. At this stage we offer broad support for the legislation as tabled.

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no further speakers, the Minister of Finance closes debate.

Hon. C. Taylor: I move second reading of Bill 9.

Motion approved.

Hon. C. Taylor: I move that the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House to be considered at the next sitting of the House after today.

[1810]

Bill 9, Securities Transfer Act, read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration at the next sitting of the House after today.

Hon. C. Richmond: I call second reading of Bill 14, Finance Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

FINANCE STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT, 2007

Hon. C. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I move that the bill now be read a second time.

This bill contains amendments to a number of statutes which deal with the corporate and real estate sectors of this province. The statutes amended are the Business Corporations Act, the Cooperative Association Act, the Real Estate Development Marketing Act and the Real Estate Services Act.

The Business Corporations Act is the basic framework legislation governing the corporate sector in this province. The changes proposed to this act will, first and most notably, introduce a new corporate structure called the unlimited liability company or ULC. As the name suggests, shareholders in an unlimited liability company agree to take responsibility for the debts and liabilities of the company.

Under Canadian tax law ULCs are treated just like any other company. However, under American tax law

profits and losses incurred by ULCs flow through to the shareholders. This means that ULCs can be used by American investors to avoid double taxation of corporate income and to more effectively allocate losses incurred by the ULC. For this reason, ULCs are the vehicle of choice for U.S. firms seeking to move investment capital into Canada.

ULCs have been in existence in Nova Scotia for over a hundred years. They were recently introduced in Alberta. This new ULC framework will make British Columbia competitive with those provinces.

The other Business Corporations Act amendments in this bill are technical in nature, and these amendments will remove ambiguity and enhance clarity.

This bill also amends the Cooperative Association Act, the legislation governing the cooperative sector in the province. As currently drafted, the Cooperative Association Act assumes that cooperatives are profit-motivated businesses. Although non-profit cooperatives such as day cares do exist, these co-ops cannot assure Canada Revenue Agency, funding institutions or the general public that this non-profit status will continue. This is very important because often, if you are a non-profit cooperative, in order to get the tax benefits, you have to have certainty that you will remain non-profit. These amendments will provide co-ops with the ability to effectively guarantee their non-profit status.

The Cooperative Association Act contains numerous cross-references to the Company Act, despite the replacement of that act in 2004 with the Business Corporations Act. Continued reliance on an old Company Act provision has caused inconvenience and confusion for the cooperative sector. This bill will incorporate the relevant provisions of the Company Act into the Cooperative Association Act, providing for the very first time, ever, a stand-alone act to govern the cooperative sector. This is something that has been asked for repeatedly, and we're very pleased that this legislation is coming forward.

This bill also makes minor technical amendments to the Real Estate Development Marketing Act, which deals with the marketing of new real estate developments. Among other things, the amendments will enhance consumer protection for purchasers and create more certainty for developers by clarifying the circumstances under which real estate deposits can be paid over to a developer.

Finally, this bill will amend the Real Estate Services Act, which deals with the licensing and regulation of real estate agents. The most significant amendment will give the Real Estate Council access to the special compensation fund to allow real estate transactions to complete in situations where trust money is missing from a brokerage trust account.

What we're trying to do there is that... We have been made aware of circumstances whereby we have a compensation fund that will compensate an individual if money is lost during a transaction. The problem is that sometimes you know that the money has been lost ahead of time, and you'd still like to complete the deal,

but the way the act has been in the past, it meant that in fact you couldn't complete the deal and therefore got compensation afterwards. This will move the compensation up so that the whole transaction is not affected, and it will be allowed to complete. This amendment will increase consumer protection and public confidence in the industry as a whole.

[1815]

Further changes to the Real Estate Services Act will strengthen requirements that rental property and strata management firms hold their clients' money in trust accounts. This is especially important in protecting the funds of strata corporations.

B. Ralston: I propose to speak briefly first to the changes to the Cooperative Association Act. I've spoken briefly with Mr. Restakis, who is the executive director of the B.C. Co-Operative Association, and he advises me that there's been a lengthy discussion with the ministry. Although he wasn't aware that the bill had been tabled this week, he was well aware of the discussions, obviously, and wanted an opportunity to review it. But in my description of the amendments to him he felt, at least at first blush, that they accorded with his understanding of what was to be introduced.

It does notably also introduce something called a community service cooperative. In the evolution of cooperative law, certainly in European jurisdictions, cooperatives have been used to effect the delivery of social services in a different way than historically one might have conceived of cooperatives working, and my discussion with him and my reading of the legislation would suggest that community service cooperatives are an effort on behalf of the cooperative movement, in association with the ministry, to create such a vehicle that might be used for those purposes here in British Columbia.

I also understand that it's modelled to some extent on the Saskatchewan legislation, which is considered to be, among the cooperative community, fairly advanced in its legal descriptions.

Perhaps the more interesting aspect of this bill is the proposal to create an unlimited liability company. Traditionally, one thinks of companies as having limited liability. Indeed, that's often the very legal basis for incorporating a company — to limit liability. But this vehicle creates what really is, in its result, a hybrid entity. It's a corporation for Canadian tax purposes and a flow-through entity for U.S. tax purposes.

The provision initially existed largely for archaic reasons in the Nova Scotia law and was not used until relatively recently. Discovered, I suppose, by creative and inventive tax lawyers, it came to be used in Nova Scotia, and practitioners across the country would have, through various legal transformations, B.C. or other corporation transformed into Nova Scotia ones for the purposes, typically, of acquisition of Canadian assets by an American purchaser. That led to a flow of revenue to Nova Scotia in the sense of the revenue required to establish a company. Alberta followed in 2005 and established similar legislation, and my impression is that, judging from the words of the minis-

ter, this legislation or these legislative provisions would seek to follow the Alberta example.

What the benefit to the.... Really, this is largely a benefit to individual U.S. investors, because the individual U.S. investor can claim a foreign tax credit on their individual U.S. tax return for Canadian taxes paid by an unlimited liability corporation. So while the company pays taxes in Canada, the U.S. investor that holds it.... And it's deemed to be either a branch or a partnership under U.S. revenue law. It doesn't offend the American-Canadian tax treaty. That tax paid in Canada can be deducted by the shareholder against income in the United States. When one looks at the comparative tax paid — pre-tax net income and the total tax rate — it's advantageous in the United States. So that would seem to be the chief benefit.

Further benefit, I suppose, to British Columbia results from the fact that people might choose that vehicle as a British Columbia vehicle to incorporate their company and carry out that transaction. That would seem to be an indirect benefit, but a benefit nonetheless.

[1820]

It also assists in financing the transaction because similar provisions apply to the deduction of interest in the hands of the U.S. shareholder if that structure is adopted.

There is some concern raised in one of the papers I read by a tax lawyer that there is an incentive to set transfer price and to use transfer pricing to minimize Canadian tax paid. In other words, you would boost the price of the good or service that you were perhaps selling between the Canadian subsidiary and its U.S. parent in order to reduce the amount of tax paid in Canada.

Now, there are rules that have to be followed both within Canadian and American tax treaties and within the Revenue Canada code. But nonetheless, it does open that opportunity to minimize Canadian tax. Although initially, I suppose, the argument on the other side is that it would facilitate certain transactions that would otherwise not take place in this province, and the revenue would flow to the general consolidated revenue fund for that reason.

I look forward to clause-by-clause debate at committee stage on the implications of this particular corporate form. I would say in closing that the proposals to change the various real estate statutes are welcome. There certainly is a real issue in the disparity between the provinces as to what purpose deposits can be put to by a developer.

Certainly in the initial stages of a public sale of properties well in advance — or presales, as they're often called — of a real estate development, the developer will experience, if it's successful — and these days, quite often sold out — an inflow of a substantial amount of money. That money in some provinces can be used by the developer more or less as working capital, and the protection to the individual purchaser may not be what one would hope for.

At a time when we are perhaps at the crest of the real estate market, it's perhaps prudent to introduce these kind of changes that might protect purchasers in the event of a downturn or in the event of rising costs

where developers are not able to actually follow through and construct the projects that they've taken the deposit for.

Similarly, as society changes and living accommodation changes, and more and more people live in condominiums, and strata corporations increasingly dominate as the chosen method by many, there does need to be a better system of controlling and regulating the deposits and the large sums of money that are kept by strata corporations with relatively little financial control. One does hear complaints from time to time about abuse, apparent or alleged, of moneys that are controlled by strata corporations. Those particular provisions are welcome additions to the consumer protection field in British Columbia.

Again, I look forward to more detailed debate at the committee stage on the effect — the relative strength or weakness — of each individual provision. With that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks.

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no further speakers, the Minister of Finance closes debate.

Hon. C. Taylor: I move second reading of Bill 14.

Motion approved.

Hon. C. Taylor: I move that the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration at the next sitting after today.

Bill 14, Finance Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration at the next sitting of the House after today.

Committee of Supply (Section A), having reported resolution and progress, was granted leave to sit again.

Hon. C. Richmond moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: This House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

PROCEEDINGS IN THE
DOUGLAS FIR ROOM

Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF EMPLOYMENT
AND INCOME ASSISTANCE
(continued)

The House in Committee of Supply (Section A); H. Bloy in the chair.

The committee met at 2:30 p.m.

On Vote 26: ministry operations, \$1,479,528,000
(continued).

Hon. C. Richmond: Mr. Chairman, I would like to start by saying that yesterday I made an inappropriate comment about an inappropriate comment, and I shouldn't have. I apologize to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

J. Brar: Yesterday one of the figures which we asked the minister about — 48,000 people, as the current service plan indicates, have been placed in jobs.... Then if you go back two years, which is 2005-2006, that number is 47,000. What it indicates is that basically only 1,000 people were placed in jobs during the last two years. I asked the minister that question yesterday. I think there was a response that the number will be provided tomorrow.

I would just like to ask the minister if that number is ready today, or if that will be offered later on. If that will be offered later on, that's fine with me. I just wanted to clarify that.

Hon. C. Richmond: Yes, I have the placement statistics for all employment programs. We'll start with the year 2001-2002. There were 8,334 placements. In 2002-2003: 10,113 placements. In 2003-2004: 11,330. In 2004-2005: 9,820. In 2005-2006: 7,445 — for a total of 47,000. In 2006-2007 there were 2,513. That's to February of '07, for a grand total of 49,555, which is, as we said yesterday, over 48,000. The exact number: 49,555.

J. Brar: I would like to just clarify this question again that the service plan of '05-06 indicates 47,000, and the service plan of this year, which is '07-08, indicates 48,000. The difference is only 1,000. Can the minister clarify about that difference of only 1,000 within two years? Was it a mistake, or how did it happen?

[1435]

Hon. C. Richmond: The number 47,000 was reported in the '05-06 service plan report, not in the service plan. The report is issued in June of the following year. So it was later than the service plan. The report is effective one year after the service plan you alluded to.

Once again, the final number is 49,555, which is well over the 48,000. As we said yesterday, it was over 48,000. In fact, it's over 49,000.

J. Brar: I still believe that it was reported in the service plan, but I'll come back. I will verify — I have a copy of the service plan — and report back to the minister here. I am almost fully confident that it was not part of the report. It was part of the service plan of '05-06, and I'll come back to that in just a few minutes.

My next question. Bob Paille has worked with the Kamloops Food Bank since 1988. Over that time he has seen the organization's monthly food costs grow from

\$7,000 a month to over \$91,000 a month. One-third of the Kamloops Food Bank's 17,000 clients are children, but the government continues to fail to ensure access to healthy food for its clients.

Fifty-two percent of food bank users in B.C. are on income assistance. My question to the minister is: what is this government doing to extend its priority of healthy eating to them?

Hon. C. Richmond: I have some statistics here, the latest from *HungerCount 2006*. The figures always seem to lag by about a year or so. They report for B.C. a 7.7 percent increase in food bank use over the last year, the highest increase of any province. Isn't this a consequence of this government's tightening eligibility criteria for assistance and time limits, as the member suggests? No. Ministry policy and regulations do not promote the use of food banks as an alternative to income assistance. In fact, 50.9 percent of food bank users in B.C. in 2006 were on social assistance, down from roughly three-quarters of the population in 2001, 2002 and 2003.

A few short years ago in 2001, one child in seven was in a family on income assistance in this province — one in seven. The number is now one in 30. So I think we have come a long ways to alleviating the child poverty that the member alluded to yesterday and to putting their parents back to work. We still feel that one of the best things we can do for children is to make sure that their parents have a job — an income that is far better than being on income assistance.

[1440]

In addition, though, the ministry will provide crisis supplements for food and other emergency needs if people, especially children, are in a crisis. Although food bank usage has reportedly increased 7.7 percent in 2006, food bank usage statistics for B.C. appear highly variable from year to year, showing a 10.5-percent decline in 2005.

J. Brar: It's a very interesting comment made by the minister, but I think it's known in British Columbia that the number of homeless people in this province since this government took over in 2001 has doubled. That's known to everyone in British Columbia. Even the business community now is starting to say that homelessness is hurting the economy of the province. The number in the GVRD has doubled. The number in Surrey has gone up 140 percent.

The child poverty that the minister mentioned, too.... In B.C. at this point in time, according to the latest report, one in four children is living under the poverty line.

We have many more things. You talk about shelter beds, Minister. In Surrey alone, thousands of people were basically not able to access the shelter beds this winter, although this government made a promise that the shelter allowance should go up.

Having said that, my next question to the minister is.... The United Nations position is that it is the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food.

My question to the minister is: do this government and his ministry act on it?

Hon. C. Richmond: Yes, we take children and child poverty very seriously in this government. As I just said, we have reduced the number of children in families that are on income assistance from one in seven to one in 30. The figures that the member uses, the one in four, are reports that are at least three years old. Most of them go back to 2004. The UN report, which came out about a month ago.... Their figures were from 1999 — hardly up to date. We all know what the situation was in this province in 1999, compared to what it is in 2007. We can go into unemployment figures if you like.

In 2001 in the interior we were in double-digit unemployment figures — 14.1 percent, and as high as 16 percent in Prince George. Now they are down to 4 percent or slightly below 4 percent. So we still feel the best way to look after children and make sure they are well-fed is to make sure that their parents have a job.

J. Brar: I am going to come back to a very crucial point again. Since yesterday I have been asking questions on behalf of the people of British Columbia about one very important figure this minister put in the service plan. That figure is that 48,000 people claim to have been placed in jobs through the employment programs. I have challenged that figure a couple of times.

One time I got the answer that the 48,000 people, indicated in the service plan at this point in time, were people who were actually assisted but not employed. When I asked the question again after some time, the answer which is on the record was that actually, 48,000 people were employed by these organizations into programs. So there is a big contradiction there.

Then I asked the minister.... If you go back to the '05-06 service plan, the number indicated there is 47,000 people during the last two years. So that means only 1,000 new people were either assisted in finding employment or placed in employment when we spent almost \$70 million of hard-earned money, of taxpayer dollars.

[J. Nuraney in the chair.]

Now, this morning the minister came back and told me that actually, my statement yesterday was wrong about 2005, that it was not part of the service plan. It was actually a statement.

[1445]

Minister, I'm reading this from your service plan. This is your service plan, Minister. I'm reading it to you, and you are wrong on this. This is page 25, if you have the service plan of '05-06. If you don't, I can give you a copy of that. This is what it says in the last paragraph: 47,000 since 2001.

"In 2005 and 2006, 6,900 clients were assisted to find employment, particularly in the hospitality and construction industries, bringing the total number of job placements to more than 47,000 since 2001." It's the service plan of the ministry of Employment and In-

come Assistance, and this is the page number, Minister. Tell me if I'm wrong. You are wrong on this one.

The Chair: Member, just a reminder. Please address your remarks through the Chair.

Hon. C. Richmond: I, too, have a copy of the 2005-2006 service plan. I have a service plan, and I'm looking for the page that the member is quoting, page 25, and the service plan only has 23 pages.

I go to what I said a few minutes ago: the service plan report. On the bottom — '05-06 annual service plan report, which I quoted from, page 25.... The numbers are as follows. I'm not going to read them all back in, but we said yesterday that in the '07 service plan the number was over 48,000.

We said in the report which came out after the service plan that there were 47,000, which is later than the service plan. The number now, which we said was over 48,000, was 49,555.

J. Brar: This is the report of the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance. This is talking about 2005-2006. This is talking about 47,000 people. Is this wrong or right? Simple answer. If the minister can tell me if this 47,000 figure is wrong or right, that's the answer I want. This is the report from Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance.

Hon. C. Richmond: I think it says right on it "service plan report" — right? Service plan report?

The Chair: Through the Chair, Minister.

J. Brar: My question is.... I understand this is a document prepared by the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance for the years 2005 and 2006, which indicates on page 26 that the total number of people who found jobs through the employment program was 47,000. Is that figure right or wrong? I want to know that.

Hon. C. Richmond: I've already explained to the member. The figure is right, but it's in the service plan report, which came out...

How many months after the service plan?

A Voice: Sixteen.

Hon. C. Richmond: ...16 months after the service plan. So the number was higher, and it was put out 16 months later than the service plan. That's what I said from the start. So that's why the number was 47,000.

The report is published in June, 2006. The 47,000 is as of June, 2006, not 2005 as the member states. It's the same as the numbers I read previously. If you would like, I can read them into the record again.

[1450]

The total, 2001 and 2002: 8,334. The next year, '02-03, 10,113; '03-04, 11,330; '04-05, 9,820; '05-06, 7,445; '06-07 up to February, 2,513. So as of the date of the report

coming out, which is in June 2006, not 2005, there were 47,000. As of last month there were 49,555.

J. Brar: I'll move on to the next question. Now, we have seen in the last budget that the government has begun to restore some of the previous cuts to income assistance which were made in 2001. In light of that, I would like to ask the minister: does the minister also plan to remove barriers to fair and equal access to assistance — namely, the two-year independence test and three-week job search requirements?

Hon. C. Richmond: I believe I have all the answers for the member on this one.

First, the three-week work search overview. While we provide assistance to those most in need, our objective remains to support and encourage clients who are able to work to achieve sustainable employment. Income assistance is intended to be a program of last resort. The three-week work search ensures that applicants make reasonable efforts to pursue employment and other resources before relying on income assistance. Persons with unique circumstances or in emergency situations may be excused from the three-week work search and provided emergency assistance.

The purpose of the three-week work search.... B.C. employment and assistance applicants need to demonstrate that they have made reasonable efforts to search for employment prior to coming to us for assistance. All applicants are informed that they must conduct a reasonable work search for a minimum of three weeks before their stage 2 application interview.

Applicants must demonstrate that they have conducted a reasonable work search. Factors that are considered in determining whether the work search is reasonable or not include the following: availability of employment resources and employment opportunities in the applicant's community, and family responsibilities and circumstances which would preclude employment-seeking activities. Applicants are provided with the following tools to assist the completion of their work search: work search activities record, independent work search toolkit and work search guidelines.

There are exemptions to the three-week work search, and they are as follows: if they are fleeing from an abusive spouse or relative; if they are over age 65; if they are participating in the Child in the Home of a Relative program; if they are legally not able to work in Canada; if they have a physical or mental condition that precludes the person from completing a search for employment, and if they have an immediate need for food, shelter or urgent medical attention for themselves or their families. This brings us back to the emergency response needs.

[1455]

There are expedited applications. Our policies and regulations are clear. The clients' needs come first. Applicants who are not required to conduct a three-week work search are given an expedited application. The emergency needs policy allows us to assess and address the needs of these clients immediately.

If it is determined that they have emergency needs, they are processed for income assistance as soon as possible, usually the same day or within 24 hours. Expedited applications are intended to provide immediate and appropriate services to all applicants, taking into consideration the increase in applicants who are disabled or who have multiple barriers.

The next part of the member's question was the two-year financial independence. To be eligible for income assistance or hardship assistance, at least one applicant in the family unit must demonstrate that he or she has been financially independent for at least two consecutive years.

The purpose of the two-year independence requirement is to encourage people, particularly young adults, to achieve independence through employment or education and decrease their likelihood of requiring income assistance. It also emphasizes a shift in focus of the ministry from entitlement to employment and self-reliance and reinforces the message that the ministry and the taxpayer are the last resort.

There are exemptions to the two-year financial independence. Persons with disabilities are not required to meet this requirement. The two-year financial independence requirement does not apply to applicants who are pregnant or have dependent children, including foster children and children in the homes of relatives; who are under 19 years of age; who have been supported by an employed spouse, are caring for a disabled spouse or have been incarcerated for at least six months of the two-year period immediately preceding the date of application or have been in care until their 19th birthday; are fleeing familial or spousal abuse or have a medical condition or persistent multiple barriers to employment that prevent the applicant from working the next 30 days or, due to factors beyond their control, could not have achieved two consecutive years of financial independence and the applicant would experience undue hardship if eligibility were denied; and have a two-year diploma, bachelor's degree or higher.

J. Brar: My question was pretty simple, but I got the whole policy. I will take it that the ministry has no plans, basically, to remove the barriers. At this point in time out in the community the advocates and the people are saying that there are barriers, and we have seen that homelessness has gone up due to some significant changes to the employment act.

My next question. The government continues to claim that the decreasing caseload of income assistance recipients in this province is due to the success of the employment program. This is one reason for the decrease. But the other reason is the continued denial of access to income assistance. There has been a significant growth in poverty and homelessness since the Liberal government took over in 2001.

An FOI done by Bruce Wallace, Seth Klein and Marge Reitsma-Street found that the first year after the new income assistance rules were introduced by this government, the number of applicants who received

assistance dropped 40 percent. In other words, the entry of 8,234 clients per month went down to 4,914 only — so a 40-percent drop in one month. The acceptance rate at the same time dropped from 90 percent in June 2001 to 51 percent in September 2001. That's a significant drop as well.

These facts speak for themselves on how difficult, how challenging the access to income assistance has been made since this government took over in 2001. Government continues claiming that every success is because of the economy and the employment program. But the people who speak for them, the advocates out there, are saying very clearly that close to 50 percent of the people who are not on that list anymore are not there because of the tough policies, the close-to-impossible requirements to meet before you get to the income assistance. That is the other reason why the number of people on the welfare roll is low.

[1500]

My question to the Minister of Employment and Income Assistance once again is: will the minister admit today that the so-called success of the system is due not only to the number of exits from the welfare roll but also because of the decreasing number of people who are able to enter into the system in the first place?

Hon. C. Richmond: First of all, to the previous question.... I guess after all of my telling you what the policy was, I neglected to say: "No, we have no intention of changing the policy." But I did note all the exemptions, too — the two-year independence and the three-week work search. What the member is saying, that the reason the numbers are down is because it's harder to get on income assistance — I just don't buy that for a second.

The main reason the numbers are down is because people are coming off income assistance rolls, and they're working now. They're getting full-time employment — 320,000 jobs created since 2001. B.C.'s unemployment rate is the lowest it's been in decades. There are jobs out there to be had for people who are able to work. We're talking about the expected-to-work. There are jobs there for them.

I quoted to the member yesterday.... I guess I'm most familiar with my own home of Kamloops, where the unemployment rate is 3.9 percent, which is full employment. We have jobs looking for people all over town. So if people are able to work, there is a job there. We're not talking about those who cannot work. We're just talking about those who are able to work. That's why the number of our expected-to-work people on our income assistance list is way down. It's way down from what it was just five years ago.

J. Brar: Here is one case. This will probably put some light on as to what's going on out there when it comes to access to income assistance. The B.C. Public Interest Advocacy Centre, which is also known as BCPIAC, recently filed a court case against the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance for denying assistance to one of their clients, a diabetic man from

the downtown east side. He was turned away by the ministry, despite indicating that he had no place to sleep, and was told that he would have to wait a week for an appointment. As a result, he was forced to sleep outside in the rain without adequate food and unable to place his medication in a refrigerator.

The minister said yesterday that if an applicant has an urgent need for food, shelter and medical attention, emergency needs assessments are typically completed immediately. But the B.C. Public Interest Advocacy Centre states: "We are still receiving consistent reports from welfare advocates around the province that the clients with no shelter or food are often not given emergency assessment unless they have an advocate who knows the ministry buzzword. Even then, assessments are often scheduled up to a week or more." So that is a very responsible agency that represents the people who are denied access to income assistance.

So my question, Minister, to you is: first, do you totally disagree with what these people are saying? Second, can the minister explain how it can turn away vulnerable people such as this man when the ministry is supposed to assess emergency needs immediately, as stated by the minister yesterday?

[1505]

Hon. C. Richmond: It's a complicated question. First of all, while we are aware of the case that the member speaks of we, of course, cannot comment on it now because it's in front of a judicial review. So without commenting on a specific case, which we're not at liberty to do, I do want to read just a few things into the record.

First of all — and I read part of this yesterday in an answer that I gave to the member — it is my expectation that when a client is assessed as having an emergency need, their eligibility for income assistance will be assessed as soon as possible — usually the same day or at least within one business day. When a person comes into an employment and assistance office and is assessed as having an immediate emergency need, ministry staff have the ability to provide for their immediate needs — for example, meal tickets, shelter referrals and medical assistance. In addition to expediting the application process, ministry staff may assist a homeless person to access an emergency shelter in the interim.

Ministry staff also refer homeless individuals to appropriate community resources to find longer-term accommodations. The ministry believes in the importance of treating people with respect and empathy in all its interactions and in providing service to the public in a manner that is courteous, professional and consistent. Employees must be sensitive and responsive to the changing needs of a diverse client base while respecting the legislative framework in which they base their decisions.

From April 2006 to December 2006, on average, 35 percent of applicants had requested an emergency needs assessment. Over the same period 82 percent of emergency needs assessment requests were granted.

In November 2005 we introduced a new application process. It's a very lengthy.... What we expect from the staff.... I don't think that I'll read it all for you, unless you insist.

Recent action.... Since November 2006 we've updated the policy again for the emergency needs process, and we've taken a number of further actions. On November 21, 2006, the ADM sent a policy directive to all field staff setting out expectations for doing emergency needs assessment and expedited applications in a timely manner. Then we have gone through another long list of what is expected when someone comes in, in an emergency situation.

Just this month in 2007 we are holding a series of conferences with field staff in Vancouver. In fact, we are bringing just over 1,700 staff into Vancouver for a two-day field training which includes emergency needs assessment policy and procedures in field staff and attendants, emphasizing the importance of staff meeting expectations laid out in policy directives.

With these training sessions, our field staff will all be up to date not only in emergency needs but on all of the changes that we have done to service delivery in the ministry.

[1510]

J. Brar: Thank you for the clarification. Can the minister tell us how many people applied for temporary assistance last year and how many people actually received benefits?

Hon. C. Richmond: The approval rate has varied over the last ten years from about 50 percent to 60 percent of those applying being approved. That hasn't changed substantially for about ten years.

[1515]

Last year about 4,700 applicants per month approached us and requested assistance — from 4,700 to 6,000 per month, so it varied, depending on the month of the year. About 3,500 to 4,800 were approved each month. The percentage remains about the same as it has for the last ten years.

J. Brar: During the last few weeks there has been a lot of discussion in the House about the child care cuts, particularly the child care centres being closed. The response from the provincial Liberal government has been that the major part of the problem is that they got funding cut from the federal government, so therefore they're not able to provide any help.

One of the areas which were significantly impacted by that decision of the federal government, or by the inaction of the provincial government to come up and support child care, is single parents, which is part of the Income Assistance Ministry. A single parent is only temporarily excused from his or her employment obligations if his or her child is under the age of three, which used to be seven before.

Keeping in mind all the cuts for child care, which this government claimed it has no control over, but this government does understand the impact of the child

care on single parents — as well as on other people but particularly on single parents. With these cuts that we are witnessing to the child care program, how are single parents on income assistance supposed to re-enter the job market without having any child care?

Hon. C. Richmond: First of all, the child care issue doesn't belong with this ministry, as you know. It's a different ministry.

Interjection.

Hon. C. Richmond: Yeah, you're aware of that, I know.

Suffice it to say, as Minister Reid has said many times, that the federal government pulled their funding of \$455 million, which is a considerable amount of money. That was the policy of the former federal government. The current federal government has a different philosophy. They pulled that funding, which for B.C. was \$455 million, and they introduced a \$100-per-child allowance for all children under six years old. Whether they were in child care or not, whether the mother stayed home and looked after them, or whatever, they got \$100 per month.

We immediately said that we would not class that \$100 a month as income, so it does not affect anyone who is on income assistance. In fact, I think we did that the day they announced it. We were the very first out of the gate, and other provinces followed us. We said, "No, that is for the children, and we will not call it income," so it does not affect their income assistance.

We have done other things to help people on the low end of the income scale by providing shelter rate increases and assisting clients with children to find sustainable employment. The ministry supports families in building a brighter future for their children, to break the cycle of dependency on assistance.

To that end, this year's budget provides the following new supports for low-income families. We standardized our support and shelter rates for families with children, regardless of the classification of their parents. What we did there was boost everyone, all children, up to the maximum allowable on income assistance. Those increases ranged from \$97 to over \$200 per family, depending on the number of children in the family.

[1520]

Through Housing Matters B.C. we are providing \$40 million annually towards a new rental assistance program for working families with an annual income below \$28,000. Last year we put the income supplement for families earning \$20,000 a year or less. This year we boosted it to \$28,000. So anyone in the workforce making \$28,000 or below is eligible for rental assistance.

I think the significance of that program is that it provides housing assistance for people right now. They don't have to wait for something to become available or something to be built. It provides them with rental assistance in the housing in which they're living at the moment. They can either spend more money on their

children, put more food on the table, or they can look around for better accommodation and move into something better for their family.

We've also cut personal income tax rates by another 10 percent, in addition to the 25-percent reduction introduced in 2001 and the B.C. tax reduction introduced in 2005. This resulted in a reduction or elimination of income taxes for 730,000 British Columbians. B.C. now has the lowest provincial income taxes in all of Canada for all lower- and middle-income levels.

Families of three with incomes of less than \$28,000 do not pay for MSP, and premiums have been reduced or eliminated for 290,000 people. We've ensured that children in low- to moderate-income families receive full dental and optical services through the Healthy Kids program. Over 169,000 children in low-income and income-assisted families will be eligible.

About 6,500 more children are eligible for subsidized child care because the income threshold for the subsidy rose from \$21,000 to \$38,000 for a single parent with one child. An additional 6,000 families received an increase in their existing subsidy. As I said, we were the first province to ensure that the universal child care was not included as income.

B.C. families on income assistance are further supported by over \$360 per child each month, in addition to their full income assistance amount, through the Family Bonus, the child care tax benefit and the new universal child care benefit for children under six years.

J. Brar: I think that one day we should have some sort of standards about the budget debate as to how long the question could be and how long the answer could be, so that we can have an equal debate.

My question was a very simple question. Under the existing circumstances, which this government says are not under its control because there's a huge child care cut from the federal government.... But this government changed the policy when it came into power. The single parent now has to go out and find a job after the child becomes three years old, rather than seven years old, which used to be the case.

If there's no child care, which this government says is not in their hands at this point in time, the question is: how is that single parent going to go out and find work? That was the question I was looking for an answer to. Part of the response was related to it. The minister said that now the federal government had changed the policy, now they had started to give \$100 a month to parents.

I would like to ask the minister: can those single parents afford — I'm only talking about single parents receiving income assistance and not talking about anyone else — with \$100 per month, any child care in this province, in any part of the province, and go for a full-time job? Can you tell me if there's any place in British Columbia?

Hon. C. Richmond: Well, I know that the member didn't like that long-winded answer I gave, but I pointed out many of the things that we do for single parents, for low-income families, for their children, so

they can look after their children better. But I'm also aware, because I've talked to many parents, both single and otherwise, on this day care issue.... While I do not try to speak for the minister, I have talked to everybody on all sides of this issue.

[1525]

As one day care operator, who operates a big day care, said: "In many instances, I don't see what the problem is." Her day care has asked the single parent, if you like — which is whom you're asking about — to pay an extra \$2 per day per child between three and six, which amounts to about \$42 a month. The federal government is giving that single mother \$100 a month for that child, and we are not clawing it back from any income assistance.

Yes, I realize that the person — depending on their income bracket — if they make over \$16,000 a year, would have to pay tax on it. But according to this day care operator that I talked to, they're still money ahead, because they've been getting \$100 for that child since last July. The new policy doesn't come into effect till this July, so the mother is \$1,200 ahead right now, and the \$42 a month that they're being asked to pay shouldn't work a hardship.

J. Brar: I would move on to.... Because we have limited time, I would appreciate it if the minister could give me more specific answers, so that we can go through this debate. We have done very well during the last couple of days.

How many people are receiving the community volunteer supplement? What is the process, if you can just...?

[1530]

Hon. C. Richmond: Wait-lists for volunteer supplements. This is a pretty complete answer for you. To address the demand, a significant increase in funding from \$3 million to \$5.3 million has been allocated in the 2006-2007 budget for volunteer supplements. The significant increase in funding will increase the total participation to approximately 4,200 cases — an increase of 2,700 cases.

The increase in funding resulted in the wait-list being absorbed. We reached a maximum caseload in November of last year, 2006. There is a wait-list starting to grow again in some areas, not in all areas, but we completely absorbed the wait-list as of last November. To answer your question, the number of cases now is 4,200.

J. Brar: My next question is: has the minister considered what kind of direct impact the switch to multichannel service delivery would have on the most vulnerable people in its system?

How are people without secure shelter expected to access phones or Internet services if they have no permanent address because of the astonishing lack of affordable housing? How are they supposed to leave a callback number for their caseworker? How will it impact a person with mental health issues as well — if you can explain that?

Hon. C. Richmond: The ministry is committed to providing the right tools for employees to deliver the best possible service. That's why, to improve service delivery model, employment and assistance workers in many offices around the province have adopted a shared service caseload model.

In a shared caseload model, clients are seen by the first available worker. All information is electronically recorded and available to each worker. This allows people, especially in the less populated areas like up north, to be seen a lot quicker. This allows ministry staff to serve clients sooner, since any workers available can provide the clients with the services and supports they need. Clients no longer have to wait for one particular staff to become available.

In most cases, the majority of them, it works very well, and the clients and the staff like it. But we do recognize that in certain circumstances, clients may need the assistance of one particular worker. If this is the case, a client can be seen by the same worker. There are a variety of reasons for that, and sometimes the client just feels more comfortable and will wait and wants to see a particular worker. In that case, we oblige them.

[1535]

J. Brar: First nations individuals were overrepresented among the GVRD's homeless, which is 30 percent compared to the share of total population, which is only 2 percent. My question to the minister is: will the ministry be developing any unique program particularly designed for the first nations people to address this issue?

Hon. C. Richmond: The government is committed to fostering new working partnerships with aboriginal people. As outlined in our service plan, the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance will work with aboriginal leaders and organizations to identify and pursue social, educational and economic opportunities for aboriginal people.

These opportunities include increased participation in aboriginal education and literacy programs and expanded access to new and existing employment opportunities. A component of this strategy is our support of the Ministry of Advanced Education's joint skills training and post-secondary education strategy made for British Columbia.

We will also be implementing a voluntary aboriginal self-identifier project. By identifying our aboriginal clients, we are better able to assess the effectiveness of ministry programs in meeting the needs of aboriginal people.

Aboriginal clients have access to the full range of income and health supports and employment services that are available to all ministry clients. As well, the ministry has within the bridging employment program a special component specifically for aboriginal women who are leaving abusive situations.

With this additional information we will be better able to connect aboriginal clients with the appropriate supports and services they require. It will be com-

pletely voluntary for applicants to provide information regarding their aboriginal status. I emphasize that it will be completely voluntary. Their decision either way will not affect their eligibility for assistance.

J. Brar: What is the appeal process for people who are denied assistance? How much time does that process take?

[1540]

Hon. C. Richmond: The appeal process is as follows. A client submits a request for reconsideration to the ministry — that's the first step — within 20 business days from the date the client received notice of the ministry's original decision. The ministry conducts a reconsideration and mails a reconsideration decision within ten business days of receiving their request for reconsideration.

The client submits a notice of appeal to the tribunal. If the reconsideration turns him or her down, they submit a notice of appeal to a tribunal within seven business days from the date the client received notice of the ministry's reconsideration decision.

If the appeal is within the jurisdiction of the tribunal, the chair of the tribunal appoints a panel, and a hearing is commenced within 15 business days of the notice of appeal being delivered to the tribunal. The client and ministry are informed of the hearing date, time and place at least two business days before the hearing.

The panel decision is forwarded to the chair of the tribunal, and the panel returns all hearing documents to the tribunal within five days of the date of the hearing. The chair of the tribunal may extend the time limit by no more than ten additional business days if it is in the best interests of all parties. The chair of the tribunal forwards the panel decision to the client and the ministry within five business days of the tribunal receiving the complete decision.

J. Brar: Minister, one individual I've been in contact with has been attempting to get provincial PWD status. He has federal PWD status, but because the funds he receives from his pension are sufficient, he is not on income assistance. Because of this, his application for PWD status has been denied by the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance, even though his medical doctors have documented his permanent disability.

My question is.... Terry wants to know why the government and this ministry in particular choose not to accept as valid the federal government determination of an individual's disability.

Hon. C. Richmond: Without commenting on a specific case — I don't know this case — applications are only given to people who are eligible or likely eligible for assistance. The person may not be eligible because of income in excess of eligibility, and it is income-tested. We do not have the same criteria for PWD status as the federal government. We have our own PWD assessment forms, but they are only given to people we deem to be eligible.

[1545]

J. Brar: This government talks extensively about early childhood development and wanting to give the children of this province the best possible start. According to community advocates such as PEERS, a simple way to do this would be to improve support for pregnant women. At present the only extra supplement expectant mothers receive is a \$40 nutritional supplement.

My question to the minister is: will this minister start supporting pregnant women on income assistance and ensure that the health of this province's future generation is in the right hands?

Hon. C. Richmond: The Sheway program is a partnership initiative that brings together representatives from government agencies and the community, including this ministry, MCFD, the YWCA and Vancouver Coastal Health Authority. The program provides comprehensive health and social services to women who are either pregnant or parenting children less than 18 months old, who are involved in the downtown east side and who are experiencing current or previous issues with substance abuse.

MEIA's role ensures income supports, medical coverage, supplementary assistance and outreach for applications and other services. This is a pilot project which is still in progress, and it's one which we will be evaluating as soon as it has run its course. It's something which we have talked about a lot, and this is why we did the pilot program. It's something we're very interested in. When we get the results back from this pilot, then we will be making decisions as to where we go from here.

[1550]

J. Brar: ASPECT is an umbrella organization that has over 145 member organizations with approximately 3,000 employees in over 100 communities, throughout British Columbia. After in-depth consultation with member organizations, ASPECT developed a position paper, which includes a number of meaningful recommendations with regard to the accountability and effectiveness of employment programs.

The minister and his senior staff have met with the West Coast Group and Grant Thornton, two big service providers of the JP program and the B.C. employment program, who also made a funding contribution to the Liberal party. But the minister hasn't met with ASPECT, even after they requested it. They represent 150 community organizations across the province which I think are very, very important when it comes to serving the community, particularly the most vulnerable people in the province.

My question to the minister is: will the minister commit today to meet with the executive or any member representative of ASPECT in order to listen to their viewpoints on community organizations of this province?

Hon. C. Richmond: We were just checking to see if I had met with this group ASPECT, and I have. I make

it a policy that I never turn down a meeting with any group that asks me. I do believe, although we can't prove it at the moment, that I have another meeting scheduled with them.

We're always willing to sit down and talk and listen, and sometimes they have some excellent ideas. I just want to get on the record that we are very open here about meeting with people, and I've yet to turn anyone down.

J. Brar: I appreciate that. In particular, I think it will be meaningful for the minister to sit and meet with them. They do have this position paper which includes, of course, feedback from lots of people throughout the province. I appreciate that commitment, Minister, if you are already scheduled to meet with them.

I have the last two questions, and I will put them together, because then you can find the information. Then my fellow members have a few more questions before we finish.

One question — a simple one, which I asked you last year too — on the supplement. It's just a clarification, probably, about the seniors supplement. I remember that in responding to my question, you mentioned that if a senior leaves the province and comes back, they can continue receiving the seniors supplement until three months. You also indicated at that time that you were probably thinking to extend it to six months. I just want clarification on whether it's three months or six months.

The other part of the seniors supplement is that when this public policy was established last year, the eligibility criteria for this was that the people who receive the seniors supplement are the people who receive the federal... What do they call it?

Hon. C. Richmond: OAP. Old age pension.

[1555]

J. Brar: Yes, old age pension. Only people who receive the federal old age pension were eligible to receive this. At the same time, the other condition was put on that, which was: the people born before 1939.

That's my question. At that time people born before 1939 were probably close to that 65-year senior figure. But if we tie that to 1939, then there are a lot of people after that who now have become 65-plus and who also receive the federal old age pension but are not receiving the supplement. So I would like to see the clarification on that as well.

Last but not least, if you can give me the breakdown of the \$1 million recovery on the employment program, as to how much recovery you made from each of the three or four organizations, I will appreciate that.

That's my list of questions. After me, my fellow members will ask their questions.

Hon. C. Richmond: The seniors supplement was introduced in 1972 to help ensure a minimum income level for low-income seniors in British Columbia receiving federal seniors benefits — for example, old age

security and guaranteed income supplement, GIS. The seniors supplement is a monthly top-up payment to B.C. recipients of the federal GIS. There is no application process. The supplement is paid automatically to GIS recipients who qualify.

GIS is an income-tested supplement to the federal old age security and the federal allowance, formerly spouses allowance. It increases quarterly, based on indexation to the cost of living.

The maximum rates for the restored seniors supplement are \$49.30 per single senior and \$120.50 per senior couple. The benefit to seniors across the province will be \$75 million over three years. The current minimum federal guaranteed income level for a single senior who has resided in Canada for at least ten years is \$1,112.84 per month or \$13,354.08 per year.

For couples, this level is \$1,803.94 a month or \$21,647.28 yearly. This is approximately 75 percent of Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off figure — LICO — for singles living in a large urban area.

Finally, in February 2006 the government announced a grace period allowing seniors to continue to receive their seniors supplement payments while they are away from B.C. for up to six months. It was previously three months.

Recoveries from JP service providers: \$627,000 from JobWave; \$362,000 from Destinations. The total was \$989,000.

[1600]

J. Brar: There is only piece missing, if you can clarify that. That is the 1939 piece. At that time the eligibility criteria was tied to 1939. Does that go with just 65-plus people who receive a federal pension, or is it only people who were born before 1939?

Hon. C. Richmond: We used the federal government database on that, and I'm told that it moves up a year every year. It's from 65.

J. Brar: So it's not tied to 1939, then.

Hon. C. Richmond: No.

J. Kwan: I have a couple of questions for the minister, and they're in different areas. First of all, on the question about people with persistent multiple barriers, could the minister please advise whether or not anybody in that category has been kicked off of income assistance?

[D. Hayer in the chair.]

Hon. C. Richmond: Mr. Chair, I would just like a little clarification from the member — if she could tell us what she means by "kicked off of welfare."

J. Kwan: Hon. Chair, I'm not quite sure how to clarify that for the minister. If a person has been kicked off income assistance — that is to say, the ministry says to the person that they are not eligible to be on income

assistance — they are no longer receiving the assistance under the definition of a person with persistent multiple barriers. I really don't know how else to define it for the minister other than to say that.

[1605]

Hon. C. Richmond: There's a best answer that I can give you. The Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance overall caseload has been declining, as has the PPMB caseload. Currently PPMB constitutes 7.4 percent of the total caseload, slightly lower than the percentage in 2002, which was 8 percent.

Of those clients leaving the PPMB category, 38 percent leave the caseload, and 35 percent are moving into PWD category, making them eligible for a higher rate. Others who may have overcome their barriers to employment moved into either expected-to-work medical condition or temporarily excused, where they could continue to increase their employability by accessing the ministry's employment program.

People leave assistance, of course, for many reasons, including employment, going back to school, spouse's employment and moving to another province, but we do not have specific numbers on people who, as you put it, were kicked off of welfare, off PPMB. I don't know if we have those numbers anywhere for you, but this is as close as I can come to an answer. We just don't have that statistic.

J. Kwan: On that note, with the people that are deemed to be temporarily excused because they no longer qualify under PPMB, is that a reason why they have moved on to a category called "temporarily excused"?

Hon. C. Richmond: I have a little further information here. Many clients are able to overcome their barriers and become classified as employable. On average each month, January 2006 to December 2006, 140 cases converted from PPMB to employable and another 104 converted to other classifications that do not have employment obligations, mostly PWD.

In cases where clients have been able to overcome some of their barriers, they may move into one of the employability categories, which are expected-to-work or no employment obligations. In cases where the client may require assistance with daily living activities, they may become eligible for persons with disabilities designation and receive disability assistance.

J. Kwan: When the minister says those who have overcome their medical condition, who were classified formerly in the PPMB category.... Could the minister please advise, with his stats for those who went on to be temporarily excused, whether or not that was at their request, or was that at the request of the ministry?

[1610]

Hon. C. Richmond: Again, we don't have the statistic that you specifically asked for. We just don't know that. It is important to remember that PPMB is a temporary classification, and many clients do overcome their barriers. A good example would be alcoholism.

Of course when you say, "Would it be at the ministry's request or at their own request?" it would be probably be as a review of their case. If they had gone through an alcohol program and overcome their barriers, then they would be reviewed. If they were deemed employable, they would be put in the expected-to-work category.

J. Kwan: So that is to say people with addictions — whether it be alcohol addiction or other addiction issues — would actually be qualified, then, for the PPMB classification?

Hon. C. Richmond: It gets a little bit complicated. PPMB clients are those individuals who received income assistance for 12 of the last 15 months and who meet the following criteria: have severe multiple barriers to employment as measured by the employability screen prescribed by regulations; have taken all steps the minister considers reasonable to overcome those barriers; and have a medical condition, other than an addiction, that is confirmed by a medical practitioner to have lasted or recurred frequently for at least one year and is likely to continue for at least two years, which in the minister's opinion seriously impedes their ability to search for, accept or continue employment.

A medical condition is considered to seriously impede when the recipient is unable to achieve financial independence from income assistance based on the temporary assistance rate or has a medical condition, other than an addiction, that is confirmed by a medical practitioner to have lasted or recurred frequently for at least one year and is likely to continue for at least two years, which in the minister's opinion by itself precludes their ability to search for or accept continued employment.

[1615]

A medical condition is considered to preclude when, as a result of the medical condition, the recipient is unable to participate in any type of employment for any length of time, except in a supported- or sheltered-type work environment. Eligibility for PPMB is reviewed every two years.

J. Kwan: I don't need the minister to read to me what I can find on the website, and that's what he just did. My question was around alcoholism. He just said that a person who can overcome alcoholism would then move off PPMB. Is alcoholism not an addiction? If it is an addiction, then how is it that they qualify for PPMB? My submission is that people with addictions should be qualified for PPMB.

I'd like the minister to answer that specific question on his specific comment around alcoholism. If people are qualified for PPMB with alcoholism, then all people with addictions should be qualified.

Hon. C. Richmond: Alcohol and drug treatment will also deal with the underlying medical condition. Once they have overcome their addiction, they will be reassessed to determine if the underlying medical condition still exists.

J. Kwan: Drug addiction and alcoholism would be considered as a medical condition under PPMB. Is that what the minister is saying?

Hon. C. Richmond: No, that's not what I said.

J. Kwan: Then I would ask the minister to review *Hansard* to make sure that he knows what he said. He just said that people on PPMB will be able to overcome their medical condition, and that included alcoholism.

Alcoholism, in my definition, is an addiction. If the minister says alcoholism is a medical condition that someone could overcome under PPMB and move off onto another category, then addictions — people with addiction challenges — should be qualified for PPMB.

If the minister persists in saying that wasn't what he said, maybe then he can explain to this House why it is that addiction is excluded from PPMB classification.

Hon. C. Richmond: Let me say again very carefully for the member. If they have a medical condition other than an addiction that is confirmed by a medical practitioner to have lasted or recurred frequently for at least one year and is likely to continue for at least two years which in the ministry's opinion seriously impedes their ability to search or accept continued employment. A medical condition is considered to seriously impede when the recipient is unable to achieve financial independence from income assistance based on the temporary assistance rate. Alcohol and drug treatment will also deal with the underlying medical condition.

It's very clear that an addiction alone does not qualify for PPMB. There usually is an underlying medical condition. I thought I made this clear at the beginning. Once they have overcome their addiction problem, then they will be reassessed to see the condition of the underlying medical condition.

J. Kwan: Is the minister then saying that alcoholism and addiction are not medical conditions?

Hon. C. Richmond: I guess to simplify it or make it very clear, alcohol or drug addiction is not the condition that determines whether a person is PPMB. The policy is very clear. I have read it into the record twice, and it says "excluding addictions."

[1620]

J. Kwan: We will review *Hansard* to see what the minister actually said — what are medical conditions and what are not, and whether or not the minister himself thought alcoholism is a medical condition. We'll set that aside for the moment, because it's taken the minister almost ten minutes each time to answer a question, and we're running out of time.

Let me ask the minister this question. There is a restructuring of the CAP program that led to a loss of funding for many non-profits in the community. United We Can, which is a group in my community, operates in the downtown east side and provides employment and community engagement to those with

employment disadvantages through community cleanup, recycling initiatives, and the like.

Between 2004 and 2006 it employed some 500 people in the community, and in 2006 it lost \$85,000 in funding. Can the minister please tell this House and ensure that the new budget for CAP will actually provide stable funding for invaluable community programs such as United We Can? By the way, the organization also won awards from this government in the good work that it has done.

Hon. C. Richmond: A request-for-information process was completed in May 2006. This community consultation process allowed service providers to provide input on the needs of clients based on their experiences. Input from this process was included in the program design process for CAP. A request-for-proposals process was completed in July 2006 in which community-based service providers were selected to deliver services in communities throughout the province. An additional contract has since been awarded for the northern community of Chetwynd, which did not receive submissions for the formal RFP process.

The revised CAP commenced October 2, 2006. The majority of contracts are geographic by community, with four of them targeting particular client groups at risk such as youth, women and those with severe alcohol and drug barriers. The ministry has signed 50 contracts with 33 different community service providers who deliver life skills services and referrals to community resources to approximately 5,000 vulnerable income assistance clients annually. The contracts for the \$7½ million-a-year revised CAP have a four-year-term minimum with the possibility of two one-year extensions.

J. Kwan: That is the point the minister doesn't get. The revised CAP program disallowed community groups like United We Can that actually hire people who are most marginalized and most vulnerable and who need the most support to transition back into the workforce. That revision disallowed United We Can to hire those exact people and disallowed those people to actually receive an income for the work they do. That is the point the minister is not getting at all. It's about the revision of the program.

[1625]

Will the minister actually commit to bring back a program that would allow United We Can and other groups like it to provide employment opportunities and to pay the people who are most marginalized in the community for the work they do in the program, which this government recognized as award-winning? When will the government commit to do that?

Hon. C. Richmond: It was a fair and open bidding process, as I have outlined. We're not even aware if the organization the member mentions even bid on it. I have no way of knowing that. If they did, they weren't successful.

J. Kwan: I swear to God I'm actually talking to a vacuum here, because what I'm talking about is the

revised program. What I'm talking about is the changes in the program that have caused the problem that the minister is not paying attention to, and he is refusing to hear the message.

I wrote the minister a letter on this as well, so it should not be news to him. If he knows his file, he would know the difference and would know what I'm talking about and would actually honour the people who are doing the work in the community and would actually make a change in the CAP program to accommodate those community groups who work so very hard to make a difference.

The Chair: I would remind the members to keep the tone parliamentary, please.

Hon. C. Richmond: I know exactly what the member is talking about, and we've gone through it very thoroughly. We have revised the CAP program with much consultation with clients, with advocacy groups and with staff. We went out for a very extensive request for proposals. When I said I have no way of knowing if the organization she mentioned even bid, the ministry has. We can find out that information. I don't have it with me at the moment, but I understand completely what she's talking about.

C. Trevena: I have two questions for the minister on very different aspects. One is the family maintenance enforcement program, and the other is the clawbacks. I know I've canvassed the minister in previous sessions about clawbacks, but I have a further question about this.

The first question on the family maintenance enforcement program is the issue of an individual constituent of mine, Elmer Albeluhn, from Port Hardy. He is in a position of many people. He's essentially having to pay alimony to the province and is really very stuck. His story is as follows, Mr. Chair, if I may have some latitude.

He was married in '71, divorced in '85, and he did pay alimony and did pay child support. About eight years later his former wife went on disability and Mr. Albeluhn continued to pay alimony. In 2004 his ex-wife married a man who is also on disability. That year Mr. Albeluhn — who had worked at the Port Alice pulp mill, which then closed — found himself on disability, and his present wife has a chronic illness. As you can see, it's a pretty sad case. They've had to turn to food banks, they have lost their home, and they've had to declare bankruptcy.

They are starting to get back on their feet, so Mr. Albeluhn applied to have the court-ordered maintenance payment stopped because his ex-wife was remarried. The judge ruled that Elmer would have to continue to pay. He said the taxpayers should not have to support Mr Albeluhn's ex-wife, and this is after he's been divorced for almost 22 years. Further to that, the alimony that he is paying is also deducted from his ex-wife's assistance.

Mr. Albeluhn can't afford to take on the court battle to sort this out. Minister, it will take a commitment

from your ministry — I believe it would be your ministry alone, or maybe your ministry working with the Attorney General — to make sure that this happens, that the courts will reverse their decision. I would hope, Minister — and I know that you are familiar with this case because I have written about it to you in the past — that you will make the commitment that Mr. Albeluhn's case will be examined and that the court will be requested to reverse that decision.

Hon. C. Richmond: First of all, and I think that the member knows this, we can't comment on individual clients and individual cases. There are privacy concerns, and it just precludes us from commenting.

[1630]

Secondly, if a judge has ruled on it, then that's it. The clients, I guess, have the opportunity to get a lawyer and go back to court. But once a judge has ruled on it, it's out of our hands.

C. Trevena: I understand the discretion that the minister has about issues of privacy. However, I think that Mr. Albeluhn is not alone in this. I think it is an issue facing many people who are dealing with family maintenance enforcement. What I'm asking the minister is whether he will review this program to make sure that people are not responsible for their former spouses.

I think that the minister is living essentially in fantasy land. If you are so strapped for cash that you are having to declare personal bankruptcy, you cannot afford a lawyer to go to court to challenge something. We don't have legal aid anymore for civil cases.

What I would like would be to have a guarantee from this minister that he will review the family maintenance enforcement program and that he will examine this case once more.

Hon. C. Richmond: The best I can suggest is that the member visit the Attorney General Ministry. It's his legislation, and it's totally in the hands of the Attorney General. I don't know if she has written to the Attorney about it, but if she hasn't, maybe she should, and go and talk to the Attorney. I have no say over this legislation.

C. Trevena: It is your ministry, however, that does do the clawbacks when somebody is getting assistance, and any extra payment that goes to them is immediately clawed back, so this is doubly punitive for this family. In that respect, I think that the minister cannot absolve responsibility, and it is very unfortunate for those people who are in very difficult circumstances that he does absolve responsibility for this.

I have another question which is also on the issue of taking back money from income assistance recipients. This is for those people who are on income assistance and are trying to get off income assistance. Nobody wants to be on income assistance. It's quite clear, it is punitive.

There are many people, oftentimes women, who are trying to get off income assistance by starting their own business. I would therefore like to ask the minister

whether he will again review the policy which looks at clawbacks. When somebody starts their own business.... For instance, a woman wants to start trying to make some money by selling cookies. She bakes the cookies and sells the cookies, and she has the gross amount reduced from her income assistance rather than the net amount. Therefore, the money that it costs to buy the supplies is not accounted for.

This issue was raised at a women's economic conference that I was at along with the Minister of Community Services. Your colleague the Minister of Community Services had this question raised at that meeting. The Minister of Community Services was, I would say, shocked that this was going on and assumed that this policy had been changed. She said that she would be speaking to the minister.

I would like, firstly, to know whether this issue has been raised; secondly, whether it is being looked at; and thirdly, whether that looking at and examination will mean a reversal to ensure that women who are trying their best to get off the punitive system that you have forced them into have the opportunity to do so.

[1635]

Hon. C. Richmond: We do have a self-employment program. It's available for persons with disabilities. Of course, persons with disabilities are exempted the first \$500 per month without any, as you quote it, clawback, and it does address net versus gross. They have to show us their income statements, and we do address that particular problem. It's adjusted to the net amount of income.

C. Trevena: Unfortunately, the minister didn't answer my question. I asked the minister whether the Minister of Community Services has approached him about this, because she was very concerned about the issue. I asked the minister whether he would be reconsidering this policy. What the minister just quoted me is the issue of people on disability. Not everybody has a disability, and there are many people who don't have a disability who are on income assistance, who are trying to get off income assistance and who would like to have the same sort of latitude as people with disabilities.

I would like to ask the minister, firstly, whether his colleague has approached him about this, and secondly, whether he will consider, when he gets the approach from his colleague as well as from others, changing this policy.

Hon. C. Richmond: Yes, I'm well aware of the Minister of Community Services's views on this, and we have discussed it, mainly in terms of those with disabilities. It is a subject that we don't ignore. We discuss it from time to time. It goes with earnings exemption — that's what it is — and we do discuss it. Our policy at the moment is that there are no earnings exemptions except for those with disabilities, because it is our experience that it serves to keep people on income assistance longer than if they don't have an earnings exemption.

Without talking about an individual case, I know there are probably differences for those who want to

become self-employed. It's a subject we have looked at many times. At the moment the policy remains, but we're not closed-minded on the subject. I'm certain that I'll have talked to my colleague in the past. She'll probably be around to see me again on the subject.

C. Trevena: I hope that you will review this policy, because even the Fraser Institute thinks that it's very good to have the earnings exemptions to help people get off income assistance.

Thank you on that. I move to my colleague.

R. Fleming: I want to ask a question about a decision and a change of practice that was made in Victoria at the ministry office about three months ago. That was a change relating to the way that the ministry releases cheques to people on disabilities and single mothers on that particular Wednesday in the month when they come in person to receive their income assistance.

Until a few months ago there were five separate offices in the building. Today there is only one. It has been amalgamated into just a single first-floor facility in the building on Pandora. There have been a number of complaints by parents who have to take their children. There is inadequate space in this new office. Many of them are required to stand in the rain outside; there is not enough room in the building.

Parents feel danger by being in the same lineups as people with serious substance abuse issues and psychosis issues, among other things. There was an incident reported recently where a man pulled a knife, and I believe that was in the presence of children. Another woman was complaining about drug addicts touching her children in this situation.

[1640]

This is a very cramped, inappropriate space. Many of your front-line staff members have said they think the model is not working in the interests of clients. I understand that the policy is being reviewed.

I know the renovations were only recently completed, so I want the minister to tell me if that review has culminated and whether the minister will change the Pandora office to have again a safe and separated office for people on disabilities and for single parents to pick up their income assistance.

Hon. C. Richmond: Mr. Chair, I think I have an answer for the member. I have seen an issues note on it, so I'm somewhat familiar with it. First of all, though, all disability clients go to the gateway office; they don't go to the Pandora office. There are still five offices located in the Pandora office, but they're routed through the first floor.

Now, after the problem that the member talks about — which is, I think, two or three months ago — the staff held focus groups with people, with staff, and decided to make some changes. Single parents now pick up their cheques at the other entrance. They don't stand in line with the people you mentioned. We're also encouraging most people now to go to electronic funds transfer to eliminate this problem.

I think the problem now has been dealt with. We're monitoring it very closely, but most of the problems that occurred, like the one that you mentioned, have been dealt with. I don't think there is a problem anymore.

R. Fleming: Well, I thank the minister for the answer. I had written to him on February 22, and I didn't get a response. I appreciate the opportunity to hear directly this afternoon on that. I will of course go back and check information from the clients who came to my office — to see if indeed that is the case.

It was a very serious circumstance. I can only imagine the money that the government spent to physically alter the building. I'm glad that an accommodation, if it is the case, has been made. It was a very dangerous situation — one that his own ministry staff immediately saw the problems with. They were left to deal with very frantic clients who were very concerned about their children's safety.

I have a second question I wish to ask, and it's about a different population that the ministry deals with. It is basically around the area of programs such as a few cities have — and are desperate to keep — that deal with the homeless youth population. These are programs that help bring those street kids into contact with social service agencies, which have temporary emergency shelter in some cases.

[1645]

That is the case in Victoria. I'm speaking about the out-of-the-rain youth shelter program. I want to ask the minister if he will consider making changes to the way that they are told about their funding allocation.

This program has been on life support for the last two years — the last two fall and winter, wet and rainy seasons, 2005 and 2006. The lead agency wasn't even told whether it would receive funding until well into November when the season had started. A lot of the church and religious-organization partners to the lead agency were very upset with that situation.

I know that the minister is aware of the issue because I spoke to him this last fall, and I wonder if the changes are going to be made for 2007-2008 so that the program will know of the ministry's intention around funding — whether the commitment will actually be made well in advance of the wet, rainy and cold season, so that the youth shelter program does exist in its current form.

Hon. C. Richmond: The mandate for what the member is talking about doesn't lie with this ministry. It's really in MCFD and in Housing. I remember talking to the member or writing to him, one or the other, about this situation. I think, if my memory serves me correctly, there was a miscommunication here between the people providing the service and the eligibility for funding. Somehow, I think, we got that straightened around, but with Housing.

Last year the providers were given a one-time grant. It was a one-time-only funding from this ministry, but it really falls under the Housing Minister's purview.

R. Fleming: Well, I clearly recall that the problem was that there was a complete lack of communication from the ministry to the lead agency, not that it was inaccurate communication. I'm hearing now that that was a one-time commitment as far as MEIA's involvement.

I hope that it will be the case that rather than splitting support for the program in this coming year, your contribution is made up for by B.C. Housing. Maybe the minister can tell me whether he's had conversations with his colleague in that regard, because if it's just the ministry pulling the support away, then the very life and existence of the program could well be in jeopardy.

Perhaps the minister could comment on that. He may wish to comment on that now.

Hon. C. Richmond: As I said, my memory is a little fuzzy on exactly what happened last year, but I know that there was a lack of communication or a miscommunication. At that time I worked very closely with the Housing Ministry, and we did come up with \$20,000 in one-time funding out of this ministry.

Again, I'm not trying to speak for the Minister for Housing, because I don't have all of the details in my mind, but he has made some significant changes this year to the out-of-the-rain shelter component of his ministry. In fact, if I'm not mistaken, they're converting those to year-round, full-time shelter spaces rather than just for the rainy season of the year.

I would suggest, though, to the member that he work closely with the Minister for Housing or go talk to him about this funding, because it will no longer come out of this ministry.

R. Fleming: Yes, I will ask the Minister for Housing precisely that, then, and follow up in that way.

I want to ask one additional question, and that is around the barriers that are maintained by this ministry that prevent people seeking and receiving literacy training, including adult basic education at community colleges and other appropriate institutions.

[1650]

For people on social assistance in this province who are trying to get themselves out of poverty and get into work, in some cases their main barrier is the fact that they don't have a grade 12 certificate. They don't have the means to go on to do further training that will lead them to employment that will be able to sustain them.

I wonder if the minister can tell me whether that rule that prohibits people on social assistance from attending college and taking adult-based education courses and doing what they can to lift themselves out of poverty, whether he will consider changing that as a way of reducing poverty overall in this province.

Hon. C. Richmond: It is a question that I believe I answered for the critic earlier in the estimates, but the policy is that the ministry believes that the best way to help employable clients is to get them quickly into paid employment. That's our mandate, to see if we can get people back into the workforce as quickly as possible.

Employable clients are encouraged to work and improve their education through part-time or evening study, such as anyone else who is in the workforce. The government has improved accessibility to adult basic education programs so people can work and continue their education. Clients who are not expected to work have no barriers to educational opportunities and may pursue a variety of funded and unfunded programs.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

J. Brar: I would like to make some very brief concluding remarks. Particularly, my thanks to the minister and each and every staff member for their support and patience for the last couple of days. Also, my sincere thanks to my staff members and my colleagues who were here to finish the whole thing within the prescribed time.

The last question I would like to throw and the minister can respond during his concluding remarks, if that is part of the portfolio. One of the announcements when the budget was made was that there will be 300 additional shelter beds, and also it was said by the Minister of Finance that the government did not exactly know where those beds are going to go. If there's any breakdown, I would like to know that. Other than that, thank you very much for all the great work.

Hon. C. Richmond: Just one closing remark, and I, too, would like to thank the member for a very amiable and good estimates. I hope we've answered all his questions. Some of the stats that we might not have had that we said we will get to you, we will.

On the 300 beds, it's the responsibility of the Minister for Housing, so if you would put the question to him.... With that, Mr. Chairman, I'm finished.

Vote 26: ministry operations, \$1,479,528,000 — approved.

The Chair: As the Ministry of Transportation is expected to begin estimates shortly, I will declare a brief recess until officials are ready to resume.

The committee recessed from 4:53 p.m. to 4:59 p.m.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION

On Vote 42: ministry operations, \$881,847,000.
[1700]

Hon. K. Falcon: What I'd like to do, Chair, with your forbearance, is to make some opening remarks. But prior to making the opening remarks, I'd like to introduce, for the benefit of the members opposite, the staff with whom I am joined here today, starting with my deputy minister, John Dyble. I've got several assistant deputy ministers also joining me here today, in-

cluding Sheila Taylor, Frank Blasetti, Kathie Miller; and Peter Milburn, our chief operating officer.

It's a pleasure, hon. Chair, to stand before you today as we begin the estimates for the Ministry of Transportation. Some time ago, as members around this room will well know, we set out a plan in British Columbia to get the economy working again, get people back to work, get communities feeling hopeful about their futures, and a big part of that was transportation. We recognized that in an economy where \$80 billion worth of goods moves in and out of the province annually, we wanted to ensure that we had the ability to move those goods as efficiently and effectively as we possibly could. At the end of the day, our future is tied directly to how efficiently we as a province are able to move those goods.

We know that we've seen some positive results. B.C. is now a leader in job growth in Canada. In 2006 B.C.'s economy created over 65,000 additional jobs, virtually all of them full-time. It's one of the best records in Canada. The unemployment rate in B.C. has fallen now to 4 percent in February. That's one of the lowest rates since they ever started keeping these kinds of statistics.

I say this not to simply try and blow the horn of the government, because actually, most of this is delivered by the private sector. But the private sector makes those decisions and investments on the basis of the confidence they have in government policy and as a result of the belief they have that the government gets, and has a plan for, where it wants to take the economy. We definitely have that plan in place here in British Columbia, in all ranges of ministries but certainly in the Ministry of Transportation.

In three short years we're going to welcome the entire world to British Columbia to witness the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Those people are going to come in a whole range of ways, but they are going to be experiencing our transportation system. It's very important to all of us, and all legislators — I believe this — want to ensure that the experience they enjoy is going to be one they will never forget and that they will see operating in British Columbia some of the most fantastic in terms of a transportation system — in infrastructure and public transit and rapid transit — than they will have seen anywhere in the world.

We do have a huge system: over 42,000 kilometres of roads, over 2,700 bridges, tunnels and snowsheds, over 3,000 kilometres of rail lines, a 35-ship ferry fleet, nine deep-sea ports, four major airports, 19 regional airports. That is a fairly substantial transportation base. Because of that we will be investing over the next three years in capital alone some \$2.4 billion into projects right across the province. Those include, of course, the Kicking Horse Canyon, the Sea to Sky Highway upgrade, border upgrades, the William R. Bennett bridge. All of those are going to be guided, as they always are, by the issues of safety and reliability — two key criteria that will continue to guide this ministry as we move forward.

We're going to make sure we expand B.C. as Canada's trade gateway. I know that in the course of our

estimates we will have an opportunity to talk more about the gateway of British Columbia. But I think the critical thing to recognize is that British Columbia is going to seize this opportunity. We see this as an opportunity as big as that of the earlier initiatives that governments in the past had — like in the 1950s when the government seized the opportunities to make significant investments in eastern Canada. We want them to recognize the same opportunities here in British Columbia, the province being the only Pacific province in the country.

We're going to work to better integrate our ports, our airports, our rail to ensure that we have a supply chain that works fluidly, is reliable and delivers for our trading partners and for our domestic producers here in British Columbia.

Obviously, there are going to be projects right across the province, and I hope we'll have an opportunity to discuss them. I listed over a few of them. I want to emphasize again that the Kicking Horse still remains the province's number-one transportation priority. It is a project that is proceeding along extraordinarily well. Phase 1 is complete, on schedule, on budget. Phase 2 of that public-private partnership is proceeding well ahead of schedule, on budget. That's a \$130 million phase.

[1705]

We've got the William R. Bennett bridge — again, working extraordinarily well, on schedule, on budget. You will find that these are very typical things you'll hear when we discuss private-public partnerships, one of the reasons why this government is strongly supportive of them. That's another project that is extraordinarily challenging from a technical and engineering point of view. It continues to move along extraordinarily well.

We're also seeing the Canada line project, a \$1.9 billion project — again, ahead of schedule and on budget. A very complex project. It's going to deliver some major benefits in the lower mainland. The Sea to Sky Highway — again, another private-public partnership, on schedule and on budget. It's another important project that is going to deliver extraordinary benefits for the folks along that corridor — a corridor, by the way, which has the unenviable record of having over 300 accidents per year. That's something that I never forget.

I always remind myself and others that when those corridor improvements are completed, we are projected to see a 30-percent reduction in accidents. It's easy to talk figures in the world of government, but what that really means is that lives will be saved. There will be people that will not have to be visited at their door by an RCMP officer late in the night or early in the morning to provide bad news about a family member or a loved one. I never lose sight of that and how important that is.

Of course, there's the Gateway program, which we are very, very excited about — again, a \$3 billion commitment by the province in the lower mainland. I'm very pleased to see one of the important elements of the Gateway program, the Pitt River Bridge, moving forward. Construction beginning on that \$198 million bridge and interchange project is, ironically enough, being delivered by Peter Kiewit and Sons, the same

contractor that is doing such an outstanding job on the Sea to Sky Highway. We expect that project, of course, to be completed by late fall of 2009.

The South Fraser perimeter road continues. The work continues in terms of environmental assessment. Public consultations have gone very, very well in that project. Same with the twinning of the Port Mann Bridge. The improvements along the Highway 1 corridor are something that is very, very important for this government as we move forward and make sure that we have in place in British Columbia the kind of improvements that are going to meet the needs of a growing region.

We recognize that in the lower mainland, in particular, we are going to be expecting another one million people moving in over the next 20 years. As those one million people move into the lower mainland, we have got to be able to ensure that the rapid transit options are going to be there for them and the strategic investment is going to be there for them. That's where the twinning of the Port Mann Bridge, the building of the South Fraser perimeter road and the new Pitt River Bridge and interchange improvement is going to be so very important in making sure that we can move goods and people as we go forward.

I also want to touch on a project on the lower mainland that, frankly, doesn't receive as much attention as it should, but it's also very important. It's almost a quarter of a billion dollars that's being invested in border infrastructure improvements to ensure that we can get goods from the lower mainland or from the interior and northern parts of this province to the marketplace south of the border in a manner that is efficient.

It is still amazing to me, as a member of our riding in Surrey, to think that the fourth-busiest border crossing in the country, the Douglas border crossing, is serviced primarily by a two-lane highway — Highway 15, up to Highway 1. If people could only see what those MLAs in Surrey will know well — the number of trucks that are moving along that two-lane corridor. It is truly an awe-inspiring situation, but it is clearly something that should have been addressed a long time ago.

Of course, we're in the midst of four-laning that entire Highway 15 corridor so that we will have continuous four-laning from the Number 1 to the Douglas crossing. We are, again, right in the midst of the four-laning of Highway 10 to provide continuous four-laning from Langley all the way through to Delta to Highway 91. We're going to be doing interchange improvements on Highway 91 and 91A and improvements to the Queensborough interchange, which is going to be very important for getting better movement on the north side of the Queensborough Bridge.

Many of these projects have had a significant amount of preload that has been sitting in place for quite sometime. I know that for the good folks out there who have been driving for the last number of many, many months.... They look at that and think: "When is that going to be removed and some activity happening?"

[1710]

I'm pleased to say that they are going to see significant paving activity happening beginning this spring and significant work continuing on many of those interchanges that I just referenced.

Finally.... I appreciate the members opposite. They're being very good to allow me to touch on some of this because it's such a huge province and we have so much going on.

D. Chudnovsky: You're in charge, man.

Hon. K. Falcon: And I'm in charge. Thank you, Member for Vancouver-Kensington, in pointing out the obvious.

But I also want to touch on northern B.C. I think the thing we have to recognize about northern B.C. is they are facing some very significant challenges with the pine beetle. The pine beetle has an impact, particularly in terms of the truck movements we're seeing along some of our key corridors, but even along some of our secondary routes that would not typically be seeing that kind of traffic.

More than 700 trucks move between Prince George and Prince Rupert each day. Truck traffic is up 37 percent in the last five years — 37 percent. In Smithers and Prince George traffic volumes can reach up to 23,000 vehicles a day. You think about that in a place like Smithers and Prince George. That is really a stunning amount of vehicle traffic.

As members will know, as part of the Cariboo connector strategy, we are moving forward with the twinning of the Simon Fraser bridge and the reconstruction of Highway 97 and the Queensway interchange in Prince George. We have already issued over a \$1 million contract to get the design work under way for that twin bridge, and we expect construction to begin later this summer, something that I know folks there will be looking forward to.

There are other significant projects — I'm not going to list them all — in the Cariboo connector corridor, but the one thing I do want to point out is the continued challenge that the pine beetle causes our road network in the interior northern parts of this province. We've already invested almost \$10 million to upgrade interior highways to deal with some of that increased truck traffic, but inevitably with the continued movement of the harvesting and the pine beetle and attempts to try and get a lot of that wood out of the forests prior to it becoming ultimately destroyed by the pine beetle, that harvesting activity continues to move. We have to make sure we're ahead of it.

That's why a year ago I was in Prince George with the Prince George MLAs announcing that the province will be putting an additional \$90 million dedicated towards dealing with the impact of the pine beetle truck traffic, and making sure that we can not only deal with the impact but get ahead of it by trying to invest in advance on a lot of those roads where we know there are going to be cuts coming forward.

I think the only other thing that I would comment on is.... I'll just touch briefing briefly on B.C. Ferries. I

think we'll be talking about some of that tomorrow. Last year, you will recall, I was leading off with comments — it was following the tragic loss of the *Queen of the North*. A lot has happened over the last year. Although reviews of that sinking are ongoing, I'm going to sort of limit my comments to the actions that have been taken to restore, and eventually exceed, the existing B.C. ferry service that we have seen on the northern route.

As you will recall, when the ferry sunk, the *Queen of Prince Rupert* was immediately brought back into service. They had to finish up, of course — it was in the shipyards to get some seasonal refits and improvements done. It had to be brought back into service very, very quickly — unexpectedly. They did that, and to the credit of the shipyard workers — and we should never forget it — worked very, very quickly to get it back into service, obviously, and do it in a way that safety requirements are not undermined at all.

We amended the service contract for the northern routes so that we could move forward by two years, getting new vessels in place and operating on the northern routes, something that I am very, very excited about. I know the member from the north coast will share my excitement about that.

We've got acceleration of the building plans for a new replacement vessel for the *Queen of Prince Rupert*, of course. We've got the new replacement vessel, the *Northern Adventure*, which is going to replace the *Sonia*, which is getting about \$8 million worth of refit work done at a local shipyard here to get it, ultimately, ready to begin sailing there. That's part of an unprecedented \$2.5 billion program to replace 22 new ferry vessels.

[1715]

Not in the history of the province will you see such an ambitious vessel replacement program over the next 14-to-15 years. Seven of those new vessels are going to be in service by 2009 — the *Northern Adventure*, which I mentioned, three new super C-class vessels. I know the members opposite will want to talk about that.

It's such a great success story on going to the German shipyards to have those built without political interference. My goodness, they're delivering them ahead of schedule, under budget — just an absolutely tremendous validation of the decision that the board made sometime back. We'll have lots of opportunity, I hope, to canvass those issues.

In conclusion, I want to say that it has been a tremendous honour for me to serve as Minister of Transportation during a time when we are investing more in upgrading transportation in all its facets in British Columbia than we ever have in the history of this great province. I am honoured by the fact that I serve with an executive team and a staff in every office right across this province that do an incredible job in serving the public of British Columbia. I never like to undertake estimates without reminding members opposite and the public of that very important fact.

I am truly well served by the professional civil servants that work in the ministry each and every day. I never cease to be amazed at how important it is that we

have an independent, professional civil service and why that's important for the job that they do in the work and support that they provide me. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for the work that they have done and continue to do on behalf of all British Columbians to deliver a great transportation system that I'm very proud of.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would like to go to questions.

G. Coons: Again, I'd like to also recognize the public service and the time and effort they put in for keeping our province going and to thank you for being here today. Today we're going to talk about ports — airports, inland ports and perhaps smaller airports — and just sort of seeing where we are going on that in the time that we have left, and then on to ferries tomorrow. We'll see what happens there.

As we realize the emerging, huge opportunities we have for Canadian port and intermodal opportunities, you have the pieces of the puzzle that we need to fit together — cargo demands, capacity, funding, port productivity and the ever-increasing environmental stewardship that we have to go forward on. I think it's vital that we look at the province as a whole.

I think it's interesting that the minister talked about northern B.C., especially some of the questions coming today after the Stats Canada census and the concerns that we have in the heartlands. I noticed that there is a bit of a change in the income statement last year where it was called the heartlands roads program, and all of a sudden it's transferred into the interior and rural side roads program. I guess the government and the minister have recognized that we are.... They can't call us the heartlands anymore, because it is the "hurtlands."

A key component to this, as the minister recognizes, is in the north, the northern corridor from Prince Rupert and the excitement that we had not only in our community and on the north coast but all the way through the whole northwest corridor — through Prince George and right through to the Alberta border. We realize that the global container growth is going to outpace GDP by more than 300 percent, and continue to. It has in the past five years. We have to move on.

My first question. The minister talked about the Gateway program, and he has said that it's going to get to close to half a billion dollars this year and \$3 billion over the next ten years. I'm just wondering: how much is going to be going towards the northern corridor, Prince Rupert right through to Prince George?

Hon. K. Falcon: I appreciate the member raising that question. The north coast and the corridor of which the member speaks is going to potentially play a huge role in the opportunity to have British Columbia fully realize its potential as a true gateway to North America for Asia — China and India, in particular.

I think the member will recognize and applaud the leadership that the Premier showed in making sure that we spearheaded that opportunity and that devel-

opment by making sure the government, in cooperation with the private sector and the federal government, each contributing roughly \$30 million — although CN is committing an additional amount, almost the equivalent of that amount — to make sure that this corridor becomes a reality and that that port is going to open up and become a reality.

[1720]

There are a couple of reasons why that's important for the member opposite to know. The lower mainland has the opportunity of having several ports, of course. So there is an agglomeration of traffic that is already visited on those particular ports. We've set out, as the member probably knows from our B.C. port strategy, that we want to see the 20-foot equivalent units, or TEUs, that come through B.C. ports. We want to increase that from \$1.9 million, which was sort of the last hard number in 2003, up to \$9 million. That's our very aggressive goal. By 2020, I believe, is the time frame.

To do that, the Port of Prince Rupert will play a very important role. Here's the advantage for the province and the country with the Port of Prince Rupert. The Port of Prince Rupert is currently serviced by a rail line that is underutilized, totally, and that is both the opportunity and the challenge.

The opportunity is that CN has the connections and the ability to take that line along to Prince George and take goods directly from Asia — and of course we know it's a closer shipping time — put them into the Port of Prince Rupert, fire them over to Prince George, put them on the Chicago Express and have them down in the Chicago Midwest before an equivalent ship even gets unloaded in the Vancouver harbour. That is the real opportunity.

The challenge is going to be, of course — and Member, I've learned a lot about the ports in the last little while — the backhaul. What we want to do and what CN is going to be looking for — and this is why it's so critical, and CN plays an absolutely critical part in making this work — is that the vessels that drop off to Prince Rupert want to be loaded up and take something back. That is really the missing ingredient that has hobbled Prince Rupert from realizing its true potential in the past.

What you will see happening is.... CN has been making numerous trips abroad. They have extraordinary relationships with some of the major retailers in North America and some of the major shippers in Asia. What they are ultimately trying to do is to create backhaul opportunities to work with grain sectors, the forestry sector so that they can have perhaps a transshipment possibility in Prince George. So when the train cars are coming back from the U.S. Midwest, they can reload in places like Prince George with forest products and other products that they can try and identify and bring them back to Prince Rupert fully loaded to be put back onto those ships and get them off to Asia.

That is something that is being worked on very aggressively by the Port of Prince Rupert and of course by CN and the province in every opportunity that we have — that the Premier has, that I have. In any of our

travels, particularly to Asia, we are really playing up the potential of the Port of Prince Rupert.

The other thing that's happening that I think is important for the Port of Prince Rupert is.... There was a lot of doubt when I visited Asia about whether it was really going to happen. There was a lot of question whether there actually was going to be containerization and whether that was going to be going forward. I think the fact that we can now go there and the member opposite and myself can say to those interested that cranes are going to be in place by this summer and that the port will be operational by the late fall gives encouragement to the shipping communities so that we can realize the true opportunity.

Member, I hope I haven't gone on too long, but the point I guess I'm trying to make is that we see Prince Rupert playing a very, very critical role to handle a lot of the growth in container traffic that we think B.C. has the potential to realize.

G. Coons: Yes, thank you for that promotion. Again, we promote that wherever we go about Prince Rupert: high-capacity rail line, no port congestion, shortest route, export opportunities — phase 1, phase 2 coming.

But there are some concerns. I notice that in the Gateway project from last year's estimates for this year, it went up from \$71 million to \$187 million — up about 150 percent. For ports and airports it's gone 50 percent less. It's gone from \$26 million to \$13 million. I hope I'm looking at the right line.

[1725]

I guess the concern that we have in Prince Rupert is that as we try to build towards capacity and try to meet the needs of the growing container and intermodal capacities, the city and the region really need help with port infrastructure. I believe the minister's staff were met by the mayor of Prince Rupert, Herb Pond; Jim Rushton, my next door neighbour, from economic development; and Gord Howie, the city administrator — having major concerns about the challenges that are facing the city and about the future port having enough power to operate, the amount of power.

The other one is the Internet access. In the world of ports, you know, if the Internet goes down, two hours can be fatal. It went down in December for two days. I'm just wondering. You had a delegation come down in the last couple of weeks. I'm aware, and wondering if there's any word on infrastructure that can go to Prince Rupert to maintain the port capacity and keep it where it should be heading.

Hon. K. Falcon: The number that I believe the member is looking at is from last year's transportation plan. What the member will see, and continue to see, is a ramping up of numbers on the Gateway program as that program ramps up. You will definitely continue to see those numbers going in that direction. As to ports and airports, of course we flow those numbers in line with the requirements of the port when they need the number. Prince Rupert is a good example, in fact. I

think that a fairly large amount goes out to Prince Rupert this year.

The one thing, though, that I should caution the member on a little bit is.... The member is right. There were representatives that came down from the Port of Prince Rupert. I know my deputy minister met with them to talk about future opportunities. We're trying to work as cooperatively with them as we can. We think that there's an area.... Although much of this, as the member probably realizes, is under federal jurisdiction, we do believe we can add value in areas like Crown land availability or working with first nations. There are first nations issues that also need to be addressed.

[R. Cantelon in the chair.]

I think it's important to say to the member the same message that I also delivered to the Port of Prince Rupert; that is, as we talk about additional phases, it won't be government driving those phases forward. It's going to be the private sector that's going to be driving that. What the Port of Prince Rupert needs to do.... The reason why government money came in, in the first place, when the private sector was largely unwilling unless the government played a big role in the initial phase, and Maher Terminals was brought to the table in large part because of that.... It was because we needed to get that initial investment in to get the containerization process happening so that the vision could be realized for major investment to really govern the next phase, which is going to be very significant and very expensive. But that is going to be driven by the private sector.

The federal government — I know I've spoken to the federal minister, Minister Emerson, about this particular issue. Certainly, that's what this province believes. The private sector is going to have to step up to the plate in a pretty major way if the opportunity is as great as we believe it is. We do believe the opportunity is great.

[1730]

In fact, when we go to Asia we're constantly, essentially, marketing Prince Rupert and the benefits of the Port of Prince Rupert to shippers in terms of everything the member opposite correctly identified, including a deepwater port, which is something that is really key.

That's how I see that going forward, Member. I don't see additional further public investment, at least none that we've identified that is going to be required, except for our commitment, which we will maintain. But we do see and we are certainly getting the sense that there is going to be significant private sector interest in driving it forward through the next phase.

G. Coons: I did notice you said that there would be a fairly large amount going to Prince Rupert. If we look at the budget for ports and airports over the next three years, it's \$13 million, \$10 million and \$10 million — \$33 million over three years. I also noticed that from that \$33 million there is going to be \$6 million going to the development of community cycling networks.

I have nothing against cycling. For eight or nine years when I worked in Prince Rupert, I rode my bike every day, and I think we should. As far as coming under the ports and airports jurisdiction, I can envision us long-hauling our containers on the backs of our bikes for our 9-percent to 17-percent growth in containers.

You said a fairly large amount to Prince Rupert, so out of the \$33.6 million, and that's over three years, \$6 million of that is going to cycling paths, networks of paths. I'm wondering: what is the estimate for the breakdowns for ports and airports and bike paths for this year?

Hon. K. Falcon: The reason why it may seem odd at first glance as to why you would have cycling grants in a port and airport package is primarily because they are grant programs, so therefore we lump all the grant programs together. They are programs, of course, where we're providing essentially one-time or ongoing grants to ports, airports and cycling paths. That's the reason why. What I would remind the member is that for the Port of Prince Rupert \$22 million will flow in the '06-07 fiscal, and \$8 million is going to flow in '07-08. That represents the \$30 million provincial commitment to the Port of Prince Rupert.

G. Coons: So the \$30 million that was committed two or three years ago is starting to flow now.

Hon. K. Falcon: It's going to flow now, as they do it in construction.

G. Coons: Okay, I see. And there's no new commitments coming beyond that \$30 million for Prince Rupert. As the minister knows, the port authority is stymied by the cap that they have for what they can borrow. That's a real concern in the community and in the port community up there.

I'm wondering if there are any initiatives or strategies to get public money in there, because there are some concerns not only in our region but B.C. Stats had a report out: *Will B.C. Miss the Boat on Port Expansion?* I think it's not saying, "Is the public sector going to miss the boat on port expansion"; it's "is this province, is this ministry going to miss the boat on port expansion." I'm wondering if there is any push to get any funding or to push the federal government to up the cap.

Hon. K. Falcon: The short answer is yes. The Canada Marine Act does provide a cap on all of the federal ports' ability to borrow. That's something that we've been working on with the federal government. We believe that that cap is something that should not be in place, that it could potentially inhibit the various ports from making the kind of borrowings necessary for them to maximize the assets they have in place.

I do think, in terms of the Port of Prince Rupert, that there is a significant amount of public dollars that have already gone into the port. We will play an important role. We're working very closely with the Port of Prince Rupert and the federal government on that

port. I don't want to take away from that for a second, because we actually think that the Port of Prince Rupert is going to be a vital asset and a vital port. It's also going to be a vital player in revitalizing that entire corridor.

We believe that while we're going to work on removing the Canada Marine Act cap limitation, we actually still think it is private sector capital that is going to have to drive the next phase of that port. I think that's also very important, because the private sector terminal operators are the ones that operate ports around the world. They really understand how to operate those, and they are able to best judiciously make a decision on what amount of investment and what kind of risk criteria are there.

[1735]

What we are trying to do is work with the Port of Prince Rupert, the federal government and the first nations to try and deal with the risks that we would expect that a private port-operator or potential investor would look at and perhaps be scared away by. Those will be issues of land availability, first nations issues, etc.

What we're trying to do is work to deal with those issues as best we can, to try and work with, as I say, the first nations, the community, the Port of Prince Rupert and the federal government to essentially be able to ultimately prepare a package that investors and potential terminal operators could look at and say: "Aha. We see something here. There's land available. There are first nations onside, community backing, provincial and federal government support." That would then lend them the confidence to actually move forward with a significant investment in the next phase of the port development. That's where we're at right now.

G. Coons: I believe I heard \$22 million last year and \$8 million this year for Prince Rupert. There is \$13 million budgeted, so there is \$5 million left — a portion of that for bike paths.

What about airports? Is that where the rest is going? What is the amount for small airports, especially Prince George? I'd like a comment on the Prince George Airport and the \$11 million that they're expecting.

Hon. K. Falcon: On the \$13 million that you see in the '07-08, what you will find from that is you subtract \$8 million for Prince Rupert. There is \$2 million available for our cycling program, so that leaves about \$3 million available — if we all do our math right here — for airports.

The one thing I would say about airports is that these are multi-year programs. As you know, we funded a significant number of airport expansions, including Cranbrook and Abbotsford. We've got commitments in Kamloops, Comox, etc. A lot of these are multi-year programs, so they don't require all the funding up front. They usually require it over a period of time. Of course, once we make our commitment to them, we'll accommodate that.

This program, which is really the ports-airports program, is essentially \$10 million a year on a rolling

basis that we have available for all of those programs — whether it's ports, airports, cycling, etc.

I think it's also important to point out to the member that, wherever possible, we will be going to the federal government, trying to lever dollars out of them. We don't want it all to be just the provincial government that is having to put dollars into these regional airports. We think they are very important, but we want to have federal dollars also going towards these projects.

We've been successful in some regard on that. The announcement by the federal government on the Prince George Airport, which the member referenced, I think is very, very positive.

[1740]

With respect to Prince George, I'll be very candid with the member. We actually are still doing due diligence. We got the business plan from Prince George. I forget the exact date. I believe it was a couple of months ago, and I could be wrong. We've gone back to them for a fair bit of additional information. We just received that two weeks ago, so we're still doing a lot of due diligence with them.

We accept as a principle the expansion there. We think it's got to go ahead. It's something we're very, very supportive of, but once we get through the examination of the business case and sit down with the Prince George Airport, we'll have more to say about the provincial government's involvement. I can tell the member, at a high level, we're very supportive in principle of what they are trying to do.

G. Coons: As far as the budget.... I start looking at a few of the references I've referred to before when you look at B.C. Stats. Will B.C. miss the boat on port expansion? Will west coast ports miss the boat? George Stock had some comments about Prince Rupert, and I've referred to that: "Building a rinky-dink terminal." BMO Capital Markets are saying: "We must embrace China or risk falling behind." The Asia Pacific Foundation: "Expand port or get left behind — be left with scraps in the competition for Chinese trade."

When I look at the budget that we're working with, the minister talking about \$2.4 billion over the next three years and all of the Cassandra-like heedings coming out from reliable sources, I'm wondering: is the minister concerned at all that we are going to be missing the boat and that they should be putting some of their investment in the northern corridor and especially into Prince Rupert?

Hon. K. Falcon: I actually think that is an excellent question, because I think it's a very, very important issue. If we are not bold and aggressive on this issue, we will potentially miss the boat.

I think the member should know that we have an industry advisory group that we work with, made up of stakeholders from the private sector — whether it's rail, port, trucking, other levels of government, the provincial government. We actually chair that. It's a group that meets every other month to talk about these

issues and to make sure that we have an implementation strategy for our B.C. ports strategy. We don't want this to just kind of be out there; we want something to get done.

I would actually say to the member opposite.... In fact, I would encourage the member to speak to some of his colleagues, because we need their support. The Gateway program is a big part of us delivering on port, yet unfortunately we see the member for Vancouver-Kensington very much opposed to the Gateway program.

That's really too bad, because what we're trying to do with our ports and our Gateway program.... Remember, when you think about the supply chain, you have to think about the supply chain holistically. Everything has to work as part of that supply chain. The shippers are not going to go to a market or ports unless they can get their goods to market cheaper and more efficiently and reliably than they can somewhere else like the L.A.-Long Beach ports, the Seattle port or whatever other competitive ports they have the opportunity to ship through.

We will miss that boat unless we are bold and aggressive. Bold and aggressive means we actually have to do something. We can't just talk about it. Sadly, sometimes I hear members of the opposition who want to keep having a debate about whether we should do some of these things. I've said many times and I'm very honest about the fact that the debate is actually over. We're not debating anymore whether B.C. is truly going to be a Pacific gateway. We're actually going to get on and make sure it happens.

I can tell the member opposite that as far as Prince Rupert, this Premier, this Minister of Transportation, the mayor of Prince Rupert, the head of the Port of Prince Rupert all agree that Prince Rupert is going to play a critical role there. But the private sector is also going to play a critical role, and we are going to do whatever it takes in terms of working with those stakeholder groups in the Port of Prince Rupert that I talked about to make sure that we've got the stability and the package in place to lure private sector investment into making the investment that's needed in that port to make it truly realize its opportunity.

The Port of Prince Rupert is only one leg of the gateway stool. It's an increasingly important leg as we go forward, but it's only one leg. The other legs are also the Port of Vancouver and the Surrey-Fraser port. Those ports right now face a challenge of expanding their capacity and getting their goods to the market. That's why we're investing in the Gateway program, and that's why that's a big program going forward.

[1745]

I hope and I'm encouraged by the member's comments about his support for Gateway, because if that member could especially talk to the critic for Transportation, I think together we could move this thing forward even faster, with a great hallelujah from all the folks in the lower mainland and in the Port of Prince Rupert that really want to see this go forward.

G. Coons: Well, hallelujah, let me say, here we go.

Yes, my belief in the gateway is that instead of putting the congestion, the environmental concerns, the land concerns down south, we've got to push some of that money up north. That's where I am talking with my colleagues and working on where we need to go with the gateway — not create more of a highway jungle down here and get the port working up there as efficiently as possible and make that five-year window of opportunity that they talk about.

It's interesting that the throne speech.... You follow it, and in the last couple of ones Prince Rupert was mentioned seven or eight times. You sort of get that tingle up your spine.

It's not mentioned once this year, so again, in lots of people's minds it's just forgotten. "We gave our \$30 million. Oh no, we still have to give another \$8 million, I guess, this year. We're done with them. We've shoved them aside." There's a real concern about that five-year window of opportunity.

The Premier recognizes the impact: the closest port to the Asian market and the dream that went down with Charles Melville Hays. The Premier said: "We're aiming too low. We should go bigger. The order of magnitude of our imagination is too small here."

Gordon Chu, the Premier's adviser, gave real sober warnings to this government last November: "We must act fast. We have a lot of catching up to do."

To me it seems there is no plan, no vision, no strategies, no provincial funding to supplement that \$30 million, the initial pot that needed to grow so that we don't miss that five-year window of opportunity.

The minister did mention he was on a committee. I think it was IAC. I'm not to sure what he... Is the province a member of WESTAC?

Hon. K. Falcon: To go back to the member's comments, some of which are frankly a little surprising to me, because the member should know that we need both. We need investment in the Port of Prince Rupert, and we need investment in the lower mainland. Both of them are going to be increasingly important parts of the supply chain.

The member talks about no money and how we apparently didn't reference the Port of Prince Rupert in the throne speech. That's interesting, because for ten years that member had a government of his friends that were in power, and nothing happened with the Port of Prince Rupert.

What a great tragedy for the folks in the northwestern part of British Columbia because, actually, today I can tell you that nobody five years ago was ever talking about Prince Rupert. But today in some of the major financial centres in Asia — that member probably hasn't been to Asia; I would encourage the member to go — they are actually talking about the Port of Prince Rupert.

That is not a discussion that was taking place in the 1990s. The Port of Prince Rupert was not even on the radar screen in the 1990s because government didn't even put it on the radar screen. It was only when this Premier started talking about the Port of Prince Rupert and its potential.

This Premier said that we're going to take from the CN revitalization agreement and the partnership agreement with CN. We're going to make sure that we reinvest into that port. CN was going to put in \$30 million, the province \$30 million and the federal government \$30 million. That's the first time that government showed some leadership for the Port of Prince Rupert and started to ensure that dollars were going to go into it.

With the greatest of respect to the member opposite, I think the member perhaps needs to talk to folks in his own community, and they will tell them that they haven't seen so much activity and excitement around that port and around the cruise ship facility and around the improvements that have been done there since this government actually got elected in 2001. I know it's hard for the member to take, because facts are always the difficult things.

Facts are also very stubborn things. They're hard to ignore when the facts are as apparent as they are. I would encourage the member that he should talk to some of these industry groups, talk to the stakeholders, find out what the stakeholders are saying. What the stakeholders will say to the member is: "We don't need to be selectively bold and ambitious. We need to simply be bold and ambitious, and we need to open up B.C. as a gateway." That doesn't mean we pick and choose what parts of the gateway we think we can open up. It means we open up the entire gateway.

[1750]

As I've said before, and the member for Vancouver-Kensington as my critic.... I am looking forward to him showing the same enthusiasm for Gateway as the member for North Coast I believe is coming close to showing. The member for North Coast gets how important it is for the Port of Prince Rupert to have the kind of investment that's going to see the port go forward.

And it won't be all government investment — just as in the ports in the lower mainland where you see significant investment by the private sector terminal operators that realize the true potential. We have now kicked off the opportunity for Prince Rupert with federal dollars that the Premier helped bring to the table, with provincial dollars, with private sector dollars. We've given them the start.

We're going to work with them on the second phase to make sure that we provide a package for the private sector that will be so enticing that they will want to invest the hundreds of millions of dollars that will be required to see the next phase of the Port of Prince Rupert move forward. That is going to be a very exciting day for both the member for North Coast and also for this Minister of Transportation and this government. But it will be one leg of the stool, and the other legs are in the lower mainland. They will also be moving forward in a very exciting direction.

G. Coons: When we start looking at where we're going and the importance of the northern gateway.... I asked a question on whether or not the province is a member of, I think, WESTAC, and I don't think the

government is. You can correct me, but it includes the government of Canada, all western provincial governments, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Yukon — not B.C. It's all the carriers, CN, CP, Seaspan, producers, shippers, labour organizations, ports and terminals, Chamber of Shipping, Greater Vancouver council.

Here is a whole group of provinces and all of the stakeholders involved, every province in the western part of Canada, but the minister seems to be an isolationist in this aspect as far as WESTAC. I'm just wondering: why would the minister be so unwilling to work for a strategic plan not only for the region but for western Canada?

Hon. K. Falcon: We withdrew from WESTAC in 2001. Very candidly, and I've told WESTAC this, we didn't feel that we were getting value for the dollars that we were investing in WESTAC. It doesn't mean that we don't still have a lot of work that we do with WESTAC. We're not a member, but we still meet with them. My deputy occasionally goes and speaks to WESTAC. We meet with every single member that the member listed off on a regular basis anyhow. We meet with the western provinces. In fact, the western provinces and our collaboration together were critical for British Columbia getting the Pacific gateway dollars out of the federal government.

I will be even more candid with the member opposite. We would not have received those dollars from the federal government for Pacific gateway unless the western provinces were actually there with us saying: "It's important for all of us, too, that British Columbia get those dollars." I can tell you that in the annals of federal-provincial relationships and interprovincial relationships, it is a rare day indeed when other provinces will line up and say: "Please, federal government, provide dollars to one province and not to all of us on some equal pro rata share based on population, etc." So that has been a significant departure.

Member, you're right. Occasionally I think about whether becoming part of WESTAC would make sense, but up to this point we just haven't found that the value of the association outweighs the costs that are involved. As I say, we meet those requirements through all our other meetings and stakeholder groups and industry advisory groups, etc.

G. Coons: The minister mentioned that in 2001 they withdrew, but since 2001, the last six years, there's been quite a bit happening. If the minister could shake off the cobwebs of the '90s and get into the future, he would realize that yes, we are trying to expand. We've got the capacity, and WESTAC, I believe, is trying to develop a strategic plan — without the province of British Columbia and without this minister.

Just out of curiosity, how much does it cost for WESTAC?

[1755]

Hon. K. Falcon: We're not entirely sure. The number that was clicking around in my brain was \$50,000

or \$60,000. That was my recollection as to what the figure was. It's not a huge number, obviously, in the scope of our ministry, but again, the issue for me is the value we receive for the dollars we send out.

I also want to thank the member for recognizing that much of the great activity he has seen happen has happened since 2001. I readily agree with the member. There are a lot of exciting things that have been happening since 2001 when our government spearheaded, of course, the B.C. ports strategy and investments in the port of Prince Rupert and the Gateway program and all the exciting things that are going to be happening as a result of our new focus on port....

Interjection.

Hon. K. Falcon: Interest rates. I think the member for Vancouver-Kensington also pointed out that interest rates have declined, though I find it interesting that through the whole decade of the '90s when interest rates would go up and go down, the only place our economy went, sadly, was down. It was the worst in the entire country.

But that's really beside the point. I take the correction of the member opposite that I should shake the cobwebs of the 1990s. I assure the member opposite that I try as hard as I can to forget about those very dark years for all of us — personally. But I welcome the member's further questions.

G. Coons: When we start talking about dark years and we start looking at dark years for the most vulnerable in the province and what's happened the last five or six years, I think, especially in Prince Rupert, we start looking at.... The minister has been there. He has seen the devastation, the stores closing and the unemployment rate.

We say we're booming. We're booming, and the unemployment rate is.... The minister knows what it's like. Yes, we're optimistic. Maybe in the next year and a half we will see some benefits. Right now we are the "hurtlands." The minister knows that fairly well, and hopefully, yes, we can move together. But again, the investment — I'm trying to press forward — is desperately needed.

The minister starts talking about the huge role the port is going to play — not only for British Columbia, but for a whole part of western Canada and for our nation. But the one thing we're missing here.... The throne speech mentioned a true partnership with the federal government. The minister knows there is litigation with the coastal Tsimshian, both the Lax Kw'alaams and the Metlakatla, over phase 1.

The port strategy, he says.... I'll quote, "To successfully advance the strategy and capitalize, cohesive action is required," and the ongoing engagement and communications with municipalities, local associations and first nations will be essential.

I'm just wondering: what engagement has the minister or any of his staff or the government had with the coastal Tsimshian in trying to alleviate the concern about the port development?

Hon. K. Falcon: Phase 1 of the Port of Prince Rupert. The discussions with the Tsimshian and the first nations in the area were being led by the federal government. I don't want to talk about the efficacy of how the federal government conducts its first nations negotiations, but it would appear there is a problem. I don't know if that's the case, actually.

There is apparently some litigation there, which I don't want to talk about except to say that we have offered our services as part of the phase 2 discussions. I am led to understand that the first nations have agreed to have the province take part in those discussions. We think we can add some real value there. We do have some significant experience in dealing with local first nations. We're hopeful as we go forward that we can create an opportunity for the first nations to also realize some job opportunities and some economic stability for their first nations going forward.

G. Coons: In the port strategy, I read.... It says that continued cooperation with the federal government and first nations will provide strategic synergy, and that first nations consultations must be completed.

The chart where that says.... The lead is both governments, federal and provincial. I see that this government has invested \$30 million of taxpayers' money, and I'm just wondering: is there anybody from the province at the table doing due diligence with taxpayers' money?

[1800]

Hon. K. Falcon: On the phase 1 it was all federal land that was involved, so we really didn't have much of a role to play. In phase 2, obviously, there would be the potential for some significant Crown land to be utilized. That's why we believe that we can play a helpful role in that process, and we will.

The other thing the member mentioned is due diligence. I can assure the member that the provincial government actually undertook significant due diligence with the Port of Prince Rupert to ensure that that project would move forward on a staged basis, in a manner that was respectful of the taxpayer investment and achieved the opportunities that the Port of Prince Rupert saw for the area.

G. Coons: Again, I would disagree with the minister. I would think that there is a role to play, especially under the new relationship. The government should take a leadership role and be an advocate, be a sounding board, be at the table and push to be at the table.

I wrote to the Premier on that, and he cc'd my letter to a few other ministers but not to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, which I thought was quite interesting. I still take that ploy. I think that this government should play a leadership role, even if it's federal money they are having a concern with.

In the service plan on pages 8 and 16 it says that environmental impacts need to be managed. And in the *B.C. Ports Strategy* it says that there is going to be unprecedented growth expected, that there is an in-

creased need to manage the environment for the long term and that this includes mitigating environmental aspects from increases in domestic and international traffic at port facilities. I'm wondering: how is the minister and the ministry going to mitigate environmental concerns in our port infrastructure?

Hon. K. Falcon: This is a very big part of major projects like this. We go through a joint federal-provincial environmental review. I can assure the member, having looked through these and having spent a significant amount of time involved in this, that it is exhaustive, to say the least. I think that's a good thing. I don't want to take away from the fact that it also can be a time-consuming process, but I think it's time well spent given the importance that our government places on making sure we do it right.

I think the one thing that I've found as I've gone through environmental assessment processes on major projects is that we always have to be upfront with the public about the fact that there will be impacts. Too often we try to pretend everything can be done without impact. I think the issue for the government is that we want to make sure we minimize those impacts as much as humanly possible.

What you will see as we go through the joint environmental assessment processes.... We have some experience in this, because we've undertaken many, many major projects across the province. I'm very proud of the fact that our ministry has received awards in terms of our environmental management. I know that going forward, we'll do the same.

It is a process that we spend a lot of time on, and we have to get right. By doing that and by having a joint federal-provincial process, although it has challenges — I won't pretend it's always smooth sailing — I think it helps to provide a little bit of certainty or comfort to any potential investors, too, knowing that the governments are working together on dealing with whatever environmental issues may come about as a result of major port expansion and investment.

G. Coons: As the minister knows quite well, marine vessel emissions are a significant source of air pollution and a major source of sulphur dioxide. Down south, especially in Vancouver, it's a huge concern.

I'm wondering whether there are clean-fuel requirements out there — requirements to use electrical generators, plug-ins while in port, fines for running engines while docked, subsidies for tugboat engines, upgrades and other measures. I'm wondering if these emission reduction initiatives are a strategy or initiative that you're looking at.

I believe other ports, like Seattle, Long Beach and perhaps L.A. are pretty environmentally progressive in this aspect. Is the minister or the ministry looking at that, or is going to adopt initiatives to look at that?

[1805]

Hon. K. Falcon: I really appreciate the member raising that issue because I think that's actually a very,

very important issue. It's certainly important to this government. The member may recall that the throne speech actually talked about these very issues. It is something that is very, very important to the Premier personally and very important to me.

I can share with the member that I did a trip down to the Port of Long Beach and Port of L.A. Part of the purpose of my trip — in fact, a significant portion of that trip — was spent talking to their environmental specialists that they have at the ports, to find out what steps they had taken. I know that in L.A. and Long Beach they are particularly under the gun in terms of the environmental issues because, of course, of the massive population that is very close to the ports of L.A. and Long Beach and the regular flurry of lawsuits and litigation they receive as a result of a whole range of operational issues at the port, including environmental issues. So it's one of the things that we feel very strongly about.

The member mentions marine vessel emissions. The member, I know, recognizes that although the ports — certainly the ports that come under the authority of the federal government, including our lower mainland ports and the Port of Prince Rupert — technically don't need to listen to the provincial government, they have been very, very good at working with us. I have met with them on several occasions, including their board. I'm talking about the Vancouver Port Authority, including the board of the port and the senior executives, including Capt. Houston, on many occasions. I've really pushed them very, very hard, Member, on behalf of the province, that I want them to show leadership in this regard.

I don't want us to be following the ports along the west coast. I'd actually like British Columbia to show leadership in this regard. I gave them specific examples of what I had seen in the ports of L.A. and Long Beach and what we've heard about in some of the other west coast ports.

A good example is the example the member mentions there, when he talks about the marine vessel emissions. We want to see the electrification of our ports, and this was called for in our throne speech. It's so there is plug-in opportunity for those vessels so that when they land in the ports, they have the opportunity to plug in and not run their power while they're obviously having all their goods loaded and unloaded, which they have to do, of course, to keep everything cold or warm or whatever the case may be.

That's something where we think British Columbia can play an important role. I'll be working with our Minister of Energy and Mines to make sure that B.C. Hydro is involved in these discussions.

We are also going to be under the leadership of the Premier, who is meeting with Governor Schwarzenegger this week. He's also going to be meeting with Governors of Washington State and California to make sure that we all work together on really trying to harmonize some best practices, that we can all not be trying to undermine each other on the environmental front and that we all adopt the best practices so that there's no

competitive advantage or disadvantage to any one of the ports along the coast. We think that that is something that will operate to the benefit of the public, for sure.

I should say that the Vancouver Port Authority in particular has taken many steps that I'm really encouraged about — using hydrogen-fuelled vehicles and alternate fuel vehicles on the ports that are operating there 24 hours a day, that aren't going to be gas-burning, that aren't internal combustion engines that can create pollution for the environment. They are examining everything they do to make sure that they adopt leading-edge environmental practices as we go forward.

We will continue to work with them. The province, where necessary, will provide dollars, even though it's federal jurisdiction. Electrification may be an area where we may need to get involved financially through Hydro. We want to negotiate that with the port authority to make sure that we can make these things happen.

At the end of the day, we want to ensure that our ports are leading edge in North America in terms of the environmental measures they put in place.

G. Coons: I probably have about three or four more questions, and then my colleague from North Island would like to comment at the end.

I hear what the minister is saying, and it reminds me of the announcement yesterday of the Ecotrust money that came into British Columbia and the electrification — perhaps, maybe, nudge, nudge — of Highway 37. Yeah, we have a strong belief that we want to do it, but we aren't really ready to commit money until we get some other private funding. I have that concern with the Port of Prince Rupert and other ports. The government needs to take a strong role in that and take the initiative on that.

[1810]

I notice that there is an environmental enhancement fund in the service plan, and it's \$2 million. I see it's an environmental enhancement fund but basically for birds and fish. I think that should be nothing again. I think that our birds and fish should be looked after, and the Minister of Environment has a big role in that and needs to have a bigger role in that. But in this ministry, I think some of the money should be looking at environmental aspects to making our ports environmentally friendly.

I just have one question here about the port strategy. The strategic plan mentions short sea shipping. What initiatives is this government looking at for short sea shipping among the smaller and shallower ports like Massett, Kitimat, Bella Coola, Powell River, Campbell River, Shearwater and Klemtu to open up a west coast container distribution hub? I'm wondering what work is going on in that.

Hon. K. Falcon: Last point first, on the issue of short sea shipping. This is really an emerging area, Member. The federal government actually sponsored a conference last summer that I spoke to about this issue.

I can't pretend to the member that this is one that is a fully formed process yet — that we've landed or the federal government has landed on where exactly the opportunities are. The federal government and the province are very much alive to the fact that there could be potential on the short sea shipping side that we want to make sure is fully explored.

On the environmental enhancement fund, just to talk about that for a second, that is an ongoing \$2 million-a-year budget item that we've always had in place, and it is specific to birds and wildlife. It's something we're actually very proud of. It's where we'll do things like preserve wildlife sanctuary opportunities. We work very closely with Ducks Unlimited, for example, who have awarded us their platinum award for the work we've done in preserving wildlife habitat. It's something I'm very, very proud of.

I want to emphasize that that's for a very limited environmental process which goes with our highway projects that we do. That's why we've put it aside, and we continue that year after year. It does not include, of course, when we undertake a major project like Gateway, for example, where there will be literally tens of millions of dollars potentially invested in environmental improvements that will need to be undertaken to try and mitigate some of the issues associated with environmental impact.

C. Trevena: Minister, I'm very interested in the concept of the electrification of the ports. Campbell River is about to get a new cruise ship.... Well, we have the cruise ship terminal, and we're starting to get the cruise ships coming through this year. I was wondering what sort of time frame you are looking at with electrification of the ports and whether it will be these smaller ports as well as the Vancouver harbour authority.

Hon. K. Falcon: I appreciate the member reminding me about the great investment of \$3.75 million that we put into the Campbell River cruise ship terminal facility. It is something that I can't wait to get out and see. I haven't seen it since it's been up and running. I was there for the announcement but not subsequently to see it up and running.

The one thing I will say to the member is that the electrification is very important. Right now we're starting with the VPA, the Vancouver Port Authority, because that's where most of the large ships and the big volume of ships are taking place. It is not something that is not without significant costs associated with it.

[1815]

We've been very clear, and the throne speech telegraphed that that's something we are prepared to work on with the Vancouver Port Authority to get this done. That will be the first area we'll start with, and then of course we'll start to turn our eyes to areas like Campbell River. But Campbell River obviously, as the member well knows, in no way enjoys anywhere near the volume of cruise ship activity that the lower mainland does.

We want to get our heads around how we can make the model work; what the costs involved are; whether the federal government's going to be involved in some way financially through the port authority; and what, if any, financial commitment needs to come from the province. But at the end of the day, we're very clear we want this to happen, and we are going to make it happen.

C. Trevena: That's very good news. I was wondering: it's obviously at an early stage, but what sort of time frame are we looking at? Campbell River is getting a few cruise ships this year, it's going to be getting more, and we all know the quantity of emissions that cruise ships do put out. I mean, it's going to be the equivalent of the whole city of Campbell River almost every time that a cruise ship is in port. Obviously the sooner we can do it, the better.

Hon. K. Falcon: I think I have to say that we are probably talking years before we get to Campbell River. The reason, and I say this judiciously, is because I don't think I can begin to sort of fully.... It's hard to comprehend what a huge effort this is in terms of the infrastructure that's required and the power that's generated. These cruise ships are like small cities, effectively, that pull into these ports. They use a huge amount of power. I remember when we were in the ports of L.A. and Long Beach, the plug-ins are literally the size of the room that we're in. It is a very, very major infrastructure investment and a major cost component.

However, though that is daunting and though the costs are no doubt going to be very significant, the benefits, I also believe, are very, very strong. We're going to begin working as quickly as we can to try to get our heads around what the costs are, how we can apportion those costs, where we get the infrastructure, where we can put it. We've got a fair bit of work to do; I don't want to try and underestimate that. It is something that we will be moving forward with as quickly and responsibly as we possibly can.

C. Trevena: I thank the minister on this. I understand what a big project it is. I'm very pleased that the government is moving ahead with it. It's something that should be applauded, and I'll be very happy to, when he comes up to see the cruise ships come in.

I have one last, very quick question. Is this something that the government and your ministry is envisaging as we move up the coast, as this progresses — that this will be the norm, so in the smaller ports that this will also happen?

Hon. K. Falcon: I thank the member for her supportive comments on this, because I do think these are.... It's rare that we can find things to agree on sometimes, but certainly these are areas where all legislators, I think, can really identify that this is a real benefit.

For the smaller communities, really the biggest challenge we're going to have there is the communities themselves probably don't have the power capability,

just in the power that is being delivered to those communities, to allow us the opportunity to then fuel vessels that are often much larger, a multiple of those communities.

I don't pretend to be an expert in terms of the power side of it, but I know there are other people with much more knowledge about that issue than I have. What I'm led to understand is that the smaller communities are going to be the most challenging ones, because they haven't even got the power capacity within their own communities to think about or even consider the massive requirement that would be utilized by a lot of these cruise ships.

[1820]

They are definitely going to be a little longer down the path, but I don't think that's all so unreasonable at this point, given that they don't have anywhere near the volume of cruise ship activity that you would see, for example, on the lower mainland, where you have much greater volume and activity. That's something

that we need to gather some information and do our homework on, but I thank the member for the question.

The Chair: Member, noting the hour.

G. Coons: One last comment. I see the time, and I thank the minister and his staff. I do have about three or four more questions, but I don't think you'll need your staff. It's more of a philosophical type of discussion we'll have. Then we'll start on B.C. Ferries, and then the rest of the day will be dealing with highway issues — the bumpy road for the minister.

On that, I move that the committee rise, report resolution and completion of the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance and progress on the Ministry of Transportation and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 6:21 p.m.

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