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*of* BRITISH COLUMBIA

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THE HONOURABLE RAJ CHOUHAN, SPEAKER

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LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR

Her Honour the Honourable Janet Austin, OBC

FOURTH SESSION, 42ND PARLIAMENT

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# CONTENTS

Wednesday, April 26, 2023  
Afternoon Sitting

Page

## Routine Business

Introductions by Members.....	10853
Statements (Standing Order 25B) .....	10855
Ride-hail and food delivery drivers	
J. Routledge	
Tanner Molendyk and hockey accomplishments	
S. Bond	
B.C. Ferries travel for medical services and travel assistance program	
J. Rice	
Lisa Scott and support for women and youth in trades	
C. Oakes	
HMCS <i>Discovery</i> and HMCS <i>Malahat</i> and 100th anniversary of Naval Reserve	
S. Chant	
Community support for displaced Ukrainians in Fort St. John	
D. Davies	
Oral Questions.....	10857
Surrey school district portable use	
K. Falcon	
Hon. D. Eby	
T. Halford	
Hon. R. Singh	
Police actions and press freedom for journalists	
A. Olsen	
Hon. M. Farnworth	
Oversight of policing and implementation of Police Act committee recommendations	
A. Olsen	
Hon. M. Farnworth	
Government action on Representative for Children and Youth recommendations	
M. Bernier	
Hon. M. Dean	
C. Oakes	
D. Davies	
S. Bond	
Reports from Committees.....	10863
Children and Youth Committee, review of the Representative for Children and Youth Act, April 2023	
J. Sims	
M. Bernier	

## Orders of the Day

Committee of the Whole House.....	10864
Bill 18 — Haida Nation Recognition Act	
Hon. M. Rankin	
M. Lee	
Reporting of Bills.....	10867
Bill 18 — Haida Nation Recognition Act	
Committee of the Whole House.....	10867
Bill 19 — Money Services Business Act	
Hon. K. Conroy	
P. Milobar	
Report and Third Reading of Bills.....	10870
Bill 19 — Money Services Businesses Act	

Committee of the Whole House.....	10870
Bill 20 — Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2023	
P. Milobar	
Hon. K. Conroy	
Report and Third Reading of Bills.....	10872
Bill 20 — Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2023	
Committee of the Whole House.....	10872
Bill 22 — Strata Property Amendment Act, 2023	
M. Bernier	
Hon. R. Kahlon	
Report and Third Reading of Bills.....	10875
Bill 22 — Strata Property Amendment Act, 2023	
Committee of the Whole House.....	10875
Bill 26 — Municipalities Enabling and Validating (No. 5) Amendment Act, 2023	
M. de Jong	
E. Sturko	
Hon. R. Kahlon	
M. Lee	
Report and Third Reading of Bills.....	10887
Bill 26 — Municipalities Enabling and Validating (No. 5) Amendment Act, 2023	

#### **Proceedings in the Douglas Fir Room**

Committee of Supply .....	10887
Estimates: Ministry of Health ( <i>continued</i> )	
S. Bond	
D. Davies	
Hon. A. Dix	
C. Oakes	

#### **Proceedings in the Birch Room**

Committee of Supply .....	10918
Estimates: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship	
Hon. N. Cullen	
L. Doerkson	
R. Merrifield	
A. Olsen	

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26, 2023

The House met at 1:35 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

### Routine Business

Prayers and reflections: S. Chant.

### Introductions by Members

**E. Sturko:** On behalf of my colleague from West Vancouver–Capilano, who is on Zoom today, I'd like to welcome Susan Chambers to the House today. If the member was here, she would say that Susan has been a longtime friend, a staunch supporter and a great contributor to the community.

As well as her professional career in sales and marketing, Susan is a board member of the Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society, a phenomenal fundraiser for many important causes and an ever-committed volunteer for B.C. United, serving in several volunteer roles.

Susan has always been the kind of woman who supports and mentors other women to be successful leaders. Will the House please join me in making Susan Chambers welcome.

**Hon. H. Bains:** The Canadian Union of Public Employees is having its B.C. convention this week in Victoria, and some of the delegates are here to watch question period.

All the way from Peace country in the gallery are Carla Sanford, president of CUPE Local 3052, Chetwynd; Shawna Patterson, CUPE Local 3052, also from Chetwynd; and Stephanie Goudie from Dawson Creek, the CUPE B.C. regional vice-president, north.

Will the House please join with me and give them a warm welcome.

**B. Anderson:** It is with great delight that I welcome a member back to the chamber. Today we have Michelle Mungall. This is the first time she's been in the chamber since she was an MLA and a former minister. Of course, Michelle was MLA for Nelson-Creston. I am so grateful for Michelle's mentorship and friendship, and I certainly wouldn't be here today without the guidance and support of Michelle.

With her on the floor is Vivianne Mungall, who is her daughter. This is her first time, Viv's first time on the floor. It's wonderful to see her here. She is just under two years old.

We also have, up in the audience, Zak Matieschyn. Zak, of course, is Michelle's husband. We have Zavier, who previously would be able to sit on the floor. I think he was one of the first children that was on the floor, when Michelle had House duty. And we have Roman Matieschyn.

Welcome. It's so wonderful to have you back here in the House.

Will the members please all welcome the family back to the House.

**Hon. B. Bailey:** I hope the House will join me in welcoming my cousin Lance Bailey to the precinct today. Lance is a millwright and works in the natural resource sector. As a good British Columbian, he very helpfully married a woman who is a health care worker and working in Victoria Hospital, which we're very grateful for.

Would the members please join us in making my cousin, Lance, feel most welcome.

**Hon. K. Conroy:** We have a shared guest in the gallery today. Jason Marsolais is actually from Trail, so he's my constituent, so I get to introduce him. He's celebrating his 47th birthday with us. I'm sorry, but your dad told me that, who's sitting beside you.

[1:40 p.m.]

Jason is actually known as a snow angel in Trail, because he can be found outside early on cold winter mornings — we have a lot of snow — clearing snow in the community to help keep fellow residents safe from the slippery side-walks.

Would everybody in the House please join me in welcoming Jason and wishing him a very happy birthday.

**J. Sims:** Today I have the pleasure to introduce my cousin-sister. Even though she is my cousin, we've been like sisters.

When I first arrived here in B.C., she was only about three years old. I've watched her grow. She has become a mom. Now she is a grandmother, a very strong, passionate woman who actually has followed her career, followed her heart but right now took early retirement and is really enjoying that too. There is an irony in there somewhere.

Of course, accompanying her are four other soul sisters, as we call each other — Navneet Freeza Anand, Sandy Dakha, Binder Aktar and Taranjiv Kaur Kooner. I've gotten to know these ladies over the last number of years. During any campaign I have, they're there, heart and soul. But they really are my soul sisters, because they manage to feed my soul, which all of us need to do when we do this job.

Thank you, and please help me welcome them.

**D. Davies:** I thought the Minister of Labour was going to take some of my thunder, but he stopped just shy. I am going to introduce some of my constituents that are down all the way from Fort St. John to also attend the B.C. CUPE convention. Brandy Frocklage, Dave Shipley, Marie Westergaard and Bailey Van Der Meer are down from Fort St. John attending the conference.

Would the House please make them feel welcome.

**H. Yao:** I do take pride today for not learning how to follow instructions. I want to wish a good friend, a colleague and a political mentor her tenth 19th birthday.

I will ask all the members in here to let us wish a happy birthday to our Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**S. Chant:** I have some very distinguished guests here today. There are a dozen members of the naval reserves here today from HMCS *Discovery* in Vancouver and HMCS *Malahat* in Victoria. I have the commanding officer of *Malahat*, Cmdr. Cameron Miller, and his coxswain, CPO2 Harry Godwin; and the commanding officer of HMCS *Discovery*, Cmdr. Rebecca Hardie, and her coxswain, CPO Jason Eldridge.

They have with them other members of the ship's company who are naval reservists, who spend time working with the reserves as well as doing the things that they do in their civilian life.

I ask you to make them very welcome.

**E. Ross:** I have three guests. It's always exciting when rural MLAs get guests to witness what we do here in the people's House. We have Dr. Carla Gemeinhardt and her daughter Aoife Baryer, who is nine years old and goes to French immersion school in Terrace.

Dr. Carla is a local family doctor, has a primary care practice and provides labour and delivery care, works in the emergency room and teaches with the UBC medical program. She also has another child, who is not here with her today. Aoife enjoys the Blueback Swim Club, plays piano, makes art, loves skiing and mountain biking.

My third guest is a blast from the past, Brendon Grant. I used to play soccer against him. He's 20 years younger than me, and he used to cheat quite a bit. But we got over that.

Brendon is an example of what we're going through as the Haisla Nation Council when we start to see the proceeds coming from LNG development as far back as 2007. At that time, we weren't quite sure about how successful we were going to be in terms of advocating for the export of LNG, but it's surpassed all of our expectations, where the council could no longer control the opportunities coming at our members.

[1:45 p.m.]

Brendon is an example of that success. Initially, he wanted to go to college and then return to be our band manager. I encouraged him to set his sights higher, which he agreed with. He now works with an investment management firm out of Toronto. It's called Jarislowsky Fraser, and what they do is support investment mandates coming from Indigenous communities across the country. They work with the trustees to steward hard-won capital for economic development and settlement agreements for First Nations.

He was guided by his grandparents, who I knew very well, and by his parents, who I know very well, and his family, who I know very well, and he is an example of true

reconciliation in terms of what economic development can do to First Nations across B.C. as well as across Canada.

Would the House please welcome my guests from Skeena.

**Hon. M. Dean:** Today is Admin Professionals Day, and admin support workers in the work of my ministry are absolutely vital. They support our social workers, our front-line workers and, very often, they're the first point of contact for people when they are in a crisis and when they're needing help, either at the end of the phone or sitting at reception in one of our team offices.

I'm really delighted, today, to see that we have some admin professionals from the ministry in the gallery. They're joined by ADM Carolyn Kamper.

Would everybody please show your appreciation for the work of all of our admin professionals and make them very welcome.

**H. Yao:** This is my second introduction for today. I want to take a moment to welcome Hunan Fellow Association. As an organization, they have been doing a phenomenal job fundraising for Richmond Hospital Foundation and are continuing to find ways to benefit and strengthen the Richmond community as a whole.

I would like to ask the chamber to welcome Coco Luo, president; Linda Zhen Li, executive director; Xin Yao Guo, member at large; Yi Hyuang, member at large; Bei Feng, member at large; Xiaodan Luo, member at large; Xue Zhu Zhu, member at large; Yajing Sun, member at large; and Shu Lin Xie, member at large.

Please join me in welcoming this group of delegates and thank them for their dedication to our Richmond community.

**J. Rustad:** It's always a blessing to have people from your riding come down and visit. As the member for Skeena pointed out, you don't often get a lot of visitors from rural B.C.

Today I have a group of 31 students, ranging from grade 9 to grade 12, along with their chaperones, led by Adrian Pelzer. These students are from the Northside Christian School from Vanderhoof. I had a chance to meet the students, quite remarkable individuals.

I thought I would read a little something from their church's website. It goes like this: "Blessed are those who trust in the Lord and who have made the Lord their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along the riverbank with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not worried about the heat or worried about the long months of drought. Their leaves stay green and go right on producing delicious fruit."

These young students are a fine example of that quote. Would the House please make them welcome.



**Statements**  
**(Standing Order 25B)**

RIDE-HAIL AND FOOD DELIVERY DRIVERS

**J. Routledge:** British Columbians have come to rely on app-based ride-hail and food delivery services. The drivers and cyclists who provide those services are increasingly present in our day-to-day lives. In fact, it's been estimated that there are upwards of 40,000 people engaged in this industry in British Columbia. That's a massive number.

I'd like to say a few words about what life is like for the people who bring us our takeout dinners, pick us up at the airport or bring us home from the bar. First of all, contrary to popular belief, being a ride-hail or food delivery driver is not a side hustle. For most of them, this is a main source of income.

[1:50 p.m.]

Many of them are new immigrants and refugees who are trying to create a self-sufficient life here for themselves and their families as quickly as possible. While one of the attractions of the work is that one can get hired quickly and easily, one can also be fired just as quickly and easily.

I met one ride-hail driver who was top-rated by his company, but he was discontinued. The app blocked him from accepting any new assignments. In other words, he was fired. When he tried to find out what he'd done wrong, he couldn't get a straight answer. Two weeks later he was told it was a case of mistaken identity, and he was reinstated, but he couldn't recover his two weeks' lost income.

Drivers can be discontinued as a result of a bad rating from a grumpy customer. Many of them experience racism, sexism and constant abuse on the job. Some customers have insisted that their dog come with them, even though it's not a therapy dog and even though the driver informed the customer they were allergic.

We know of one driver who tried to return a phone to a customer and got punched for his efforts. Then there are the big messes sometimes left in the cars that have to be cleaned and disinfected at the driver's expense.

So next time you order takeout or a ride home from the game, please be kind to your driver, and remember to tip them well. They are just trying to make a living like the rest of us.

TANNER MOLENDYK  
AND HOCKEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**S. Bond:** He wore his first skates before he was two. It didn't take long. He was skating at the local arena once a day, and twice if he could. He loved to play hockey at the rink, on the street, even in the house. His love of hockey and countless hours of skating would serve him well.

In April 2020, he was picked fifth in the first-round Western Hockey League bantam draft to play for the

Saskatoon Blades. After the draft was complete, the Saskatoon Blades president and general manager tweeted: "This kid is special."

You can imagine how excited his family was, not to mention the entire village of McBride, B.C., and people throughout the Robson Valley. You see, Tanner Molendyk grew up in McBride, and the arena he learned to skate in was the Robson Valley Recreation Centre in his home community of McBride.

As a defenceman, Tanner's job is to stop people from scoring, but he takes every opportunity he has to put points on the board as well.

Tanner was selected to play in the U18 World Juniors 2022 Hlinka Gretzky Cup as part of Team Canada. That team won the gold medal, the first time that Canada won the medal in four years.

The WHL playoffs are underway, and after losing the first three games in their second round series against the Red Deer Rebels, the Blades made a historic comeback, winning four straight games, earning them the right to play in the Eastern conference championship.

Tanner was invited to play in the CHL-NHL Top Prospects Game, and Sportsnet has listed Molendyk as one of the top ten WHL players to watch for when the 2023 NHL draft takes place this June. Whatever happens in June, he will have the support of an amazing family, an entire community and region where he grew up, and they will be cheering him on.

We're very proud of you, Tanner, and can't wait to see what the future holds for you.

B.C. FERRIES TRAVEL  
FOR MEDICAL SERVICES  
AND TRAVEL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

**J. Rice:** At the end of January of this year, the Premier appointed me as B.C.'s first-ever Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health. One of my mandates is to look at the travel assistance program, otherwise known as TAP, with the goal of making health care more equitable for those living in rural, remote and First Nations communities.

I'm delighted to talk about yesterday's announcement that reservations on B.C. Ferries sailings will be waived for those using the travel assistance program. The TAP supports British Columbians who need to travel within the province for medical specialist services that are not available in their own communities.

The program is a partnership between the Ministry of Health and transportation providers who agree to waive or discount their fees for medical travel. TAP helps alleviate some of these travel costs that urban British Columbians don't have to necessarily incur. We are encouraged by B.C. Ferries' support for this program to help British Columbians access necessary medical care.

[1:55 p.m.]

We have much more to do in making health care more

equitable for rural remote and remote First Nations communities, and I'm glad to be taking on some of these challenges as the Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health.

#### LISA SCOTT AND SUPPORT FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH IN TRADES

**C. Oakes:** Today I am proud to highlight a change-maker in my constituency, Lisa Scott. Lisa is an active supporter of the B.C. Centre for Women in Trades, an organization that has made a significant difference in her life and her career.

Lisa has been organizing Discovery Trades Camps for young women and Indigenous youth in Quesnel. They provide youth the opportunity to experience the fun and excitement of interactive trades exploration while also providing them very important life skills.

In each of the week-long camps, participants are introduced to an array of trades and industry. The camps include occupational health and safety, different trades such as carpentry, electrical, welding, masonry, painting, plumbing, welding, sheet metal, heavy-duty equipment operations in the forest industry, under the guidance of skilled tradespeople, facilitators and mentors from across British Columbia.

I had the opportunity to attend the first graduating class of students from grades 4 through 7. I can share with members of this House.... What a humbling and impactful moment, one of those truly clarifying job moments in my career.

The pride of both the young students and their families — parents, grandparents, and in many cases, great-grandparents — came to our local North Cariboo Community Campus to appreciate the work these students did. I can share that the students made some remarkable projects.

This passion for supporting trades in our community has now expanded across this province. Just in the last few weeks, Lisa has been able to do electrical projects with a group of Indigenous students at Quesnel Junior School, sat on a panel to speak at the B.C. Centre for Women in Trades leadership training conference and supported students in Lytton at the Stein Valley Nlakapamux School with the electrical portion of the trades sampler program.

Lisa and her colleagues, partners and organizations have come together to support this training, making a considerable difference. It is changing people's lives, and for that, let us offer her our appreciation.

#### HMCS DISCOVERY AND HMCS MALAHAT AND 100th ANNIVERSARY OF NAVAL RESERVE

**S. Chant:** I rise today to acknowledge Canada's Naval Reserve in their centennial year, 2023, and to recognize, in particular, the contributions to this province made by the sailors of His Majesty's Canadian ships *Discovery* and *Malahat*.

To begin with, I will also acknowledge that I'm speaking from the ancestral lands of the ɫəkw̓əŋən people, the Esquimalt and Songhees, on which HMCS *Malahat* is also located. I also have the privilege of representing North Vancouver–Seymour on the traditional lands of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples, upon which members of HMCS *Discovery* live and work.

The Naval Reserve was established on January 31, 1923, as the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve. Many reservists participated in the keystone Allied marine campaign of the Second World War, which sustained supply lines from the Americas to the European war effort.

Today the Naval Reserve is represented in 24 divisions across the country, comprising more than 4,100 Canadians. We are fortunate in British Columbia to host two naval reserve divisions. HMCS *Discovery*, located on Deadman Island in Stanley Park in Vancouver, was established in 1924. HMCS *Malahat*, now located at Shoal Point here in Victoria, was established in 1947.

Over the years, reservists have deployed from these stone frigates on operations such as maritime security for the 2010 Olympics, responding to the pandemic and supporting communities stricken by emergencies, including B.C. wildfires and B.C. floods. Further afield, they contribute to international security and Canadian Armed Forces operations in Central and South America, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and other areas.

Members of both *Discovery* and *Malahat* join us today in the gallery. These proud British Columbians, past and present, have chosen to be citizen sailors who serve full- or part-time in the Royal Canadian Navy while engaging in their civilian lives and careers.

We recognize them for their bravery, thank them for their dedication over the last 100 years and wish them and their shipmates well in their endeavours, near and far, in service to Canada.

[2:00 p.m.]

#### COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR DISPLACED UKRAINIANS IN FORT ST. JOHN

**D. Davies:** Getting to Canada is easy. Settling in Canada is much harder.

Fort St. John was unprepared for the number of displaced families arriving from Ukraine, sometimes late at night at the local airport with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Families ranging in size from four to 11 members, usually with limited English.

My constituency office in Fort St. John was being flooded with inquiries about what could be done. After finding out, two employees from school district 60's settlement workers in schools program, or the SWIS program, were trying the best that they could to help support these newcomers but identified that much more needed to be done.

So we hosted a meeting of multiple community stakeholders, which led to discussions on creating a centralized group to support displaced Ukrainian families in the region. Several groups were present at the meeting, including members of the city council, Northern Health, government agencies and, of course, the SWIS program, to mention a few. Also in attendance was one of the Ukrainian family members who brought her very personal experience to the table.

The meeting offered up an opportunity to find out what the community had and what the community needed to do. Once the community members of the region became aware of their need, they opened up their hearts and their homes.

Our office also hosted a very successful community Christmas toy drive for Ukrainian children. Hampers, newly purchased household items and grocery gift cards were also delivered to the office to support Ukrainian families.

Then discussions moved on to creating a society. I'm proud to say that the northeast immigrant services society has now been formed, comprised of some of the displaced Ukrainians in our community and supported by prominent members of our community. Although this society is in its infancy, I know that with the help of many, the society will support newcomers in our community while they settle and feel welcomed.

Many of these folks feel that through services and initiatives that create positive conditions in our community, it will mean success for newcomers, which will, in turn, foster a welcoming environment in Fort St. John — more importantly, to feel at home as best they can under the circumstances.

### Oral Questions

#### SURREY SCHOOL DISTRICT PORTABLE USE

**K. Falcon:** Once again I find myself standing in this Legislature pointing out the massive chasm between NDP promises and the results that we actually get. The Premier and this NDP government have utterly failed on their one signature promise they made to the parents of Surrey, the total eradication of Surrey school portables.

The NDP promised in 2017, and I'm going to quote here: "...a total removal of these portables over the course of the next four years." Well, here we are six years later. How are they doing? Well, in a truly remarkable twist, instead of eradicating the portables, they somehow managed to double the portables in Surrey.

Now, British Columbians have become all too familiar with grand promises that amount to nothing, but achieving the exact opposite of what they promised is a new level of incompetence even for them.

My question to the Premier is a simple one. Why, after promising to eliminate all school portables in Surrey, have

the NDP managed to double the number of portables in Surrey?

**Hon. D. Eby:** Thank you to the member for the question. Every parent of every kid in our province needs to know that their kid is going to school in a place that's safe, in a place that's modern and that's great to learn. That's our commitment to all parents in British Columbia, and we're continuing that important work.

It's no less true in Surrey than anywhere else in the province. That's why we have more than 2½ times the amount of capital money in our budget to deliver schools for British Columbians than the member did when he sat on this side of the House.

Specifically on the issue of Surrey, we have opened 10,000 new spaces for students. There are 16 new schools or additions that are complete or underway across Surrey. The member may remember flatlining the capital budget for education when he was Finance Minister. and for the four years before the last election, not building a single school in Surrey.

We are recovering from the legacy that he left, but we are doing that work...

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Shhh.

**Hon. D. Eby:** ...because the people of Surrey deserve it.  
[2:05 p.m.]

**Mr. Speaker:** Leader of the Official Opposition, supplemental.

**K. Falcon:** Please, we can't deal with any more recovery. My god. I mean, this is a classic example. We'll double the amount of money we spend to get double the worst results. I mean, it's unbelievable.

But as much as the Premier will try to duck and dodge, the bottom line is that he cannot ignore the fact they promised to eliminate portables within four years, and they somehow managed to double the number of portables in Surrey.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**K. Falcon:** But it gets even better. Stay tuned. It gets even better, because now, in a truly historic manner, they are going to introduce NDP double-decker portables. That's right — double-decker portables. Right now they are stacking portables on top of each other at Fleetwood Park Secondary School.

Here's a letter from the Surrey board of education sent to the minister yesterday, copied to all the Surrey MLAs. It

reads: “We have tried to advocate for funding privately and held meetings with you, the ministry and local MLAs.... Unfortunately, these meetings have not resulted in sufficient funding....”

Now, just picture this. All those NDP MLAs, including, by the way, the Surrey MLA who is the Minister of Education, have totally failed on the one signature promise they made to the parents and children in Surrey, and that is to deal with the issue of portables.

Again, a simple question to the Premier. It’s actually about portables. I say this on behalf of all the parents of Surrey. How on earth did the Premier manage to, instead of eliminating portables, double them and now double-decker them?

**Hon. D. Eby:** Our province has seen incredible growth. One of the reasons for this growth is people choosing to move here from other provinces and from other countries because of the economic opportunities here and because of remarkable programs, like our child care program, leading the way across the nation. That’s good news for us. We’re growing. We’re a successful province. But it brings challenges. Our infrastructure is facing major strains.

We committed almost \$100 million to Surrey specifically because that community is growing so quickly. They’re seeing the bulk of this growth. It’s good news for Surrey. It’s good news for B.C. But we’ve got to meet that need.

That’s why we have...

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, Members.

Shhh, Members.

Please continue.

**Hon. D. Eby:** ...literally the equivalent of 400 new classrooms, 10,000 new spaces, for students in Surrey, spaces that should have been built, frankly, should have been well underway when the members on that side of the House were on this side of the House. I don’t know....

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, Members.

Members will come to order.

**Hon. D. Eby:** That member is smiling. But I don’t know how you stand up and smile and ask that question when you didn’t build a single new school in Surrey and sold the land that the schools were supposed to be built on.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**Hon. D. Eby:** I’ll tell you this. The parents of Surrey weren’t smiling when he was sitting on this side of the House.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, let’s listen to each other, please.

**T. Halford:** Well, it’s pretty clear from that response that this Premier hasn’t even taken the time to read the letter that was sent to his minister yesterday. It is very clear from that response.

This is how Trustee Terry Allen describes the letter. The letter is to say: “Minister, provincial government, please look at Surrey’s request again, because you’re actually failing the students and parents in Surrey.” That is from a trustee.

The Education Minister, from Surrey, has failed. The member for Surrey-Cloverdale has failed. The member for Surrey-Fleetwood has failed. The member for Surrey-Guildford and the members for Surrey-Newton and Surrey-Whalley have all failed parents and teachers.

This failure in Surrey, this campaign promise that has been broken again and again, falls at the feet of this Premier. My question to the Premier today is: when will this Premier stop failing students and parents in Surrey by doubling up on portables?

[2:10 p.m.]

**Hon. R. Singh:** I really want to thank the member for the question. I’m really happy that you are concerned about education. While your leader was the Finance Minister, he froze education funding, and for the last four years in the last government, there was not a single school that was built in Surrey, and there was only one extension.

I’m very happy that we are talking about education, because...

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Shhh, Members. Members. Let’s....

**Hon. R. Singh:** ...we are doing things differently. We are investing in our future, and that’s what we are doing in Surrey. We are listening to the needs and the priorities of the Surrey communities, Surrey students...

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Shhh.

**Hon. R. Singh:** ...and we are investing in them.

Since 2017, we have invested half a billion dollars in capital investments in Surrey. That has opened six new schools...

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, let's hear the question. Members.

**Hon. R. Singh:** ...and many new expansions, and many more are coming.

We'll keep listening to the needs of the Surrey community, and we'll keep on working on that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Surrey–White Rock, supplemental.

**T. Halford:** Let me say it again. Here is where we are at now in Surrey under this Premier, this minister, this NDP government: double-decker portables. That is the vision for the NDP in Surrey.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Shhh. Members, please.

**T. Halford:** You know what? Here's what this Premier is doing. He's emptying prisons, and he's double-bunking students. That is this Premier's legacy in B.C. It's sad. Instead of eliminating portables....

Interjections.

**T. Halford:** The Premier laughs, and he thinks it's funny. He thinks it's funny that students will go their entire career in a portable.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**T. Halford:** The Premier finds this funny. I have students, I have kids that go to school in Surrey, constituents that do. The Premier should know. He campaigned on a promise. He has broken that promise. Not only has he broken it; he has doubled down on it. He's doubled down on it, and now we're getting double-decker portables.

Trustee Terry Allen says again: "Eliminating portables will never happen in my lifetime."

Instead of laughing, can this Premier get up in the House and admit he has absolutely failed Surrey — the parents, the students; and why is he doubling down on this failure and doubling up on portables?

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, let's hear the answer, please.

**Hon. R. Singh:** We are creating 10,000 new seats in Surrey, and that is equivalent to 400 new classrooms. We know that more than 250,000 people made British Colum-

bia their home, and many of them chose Surrey — and rightly so, as I did more than 20 years ago.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Shhh. Shhh.

**Hon. R. Singh:** Surrey is one of the best places to live here in British Columbia.

Last year, Mr. Speaker...

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**Hon. R. Singh:** ...we had over 1,700 new student seats open, compared to last year.

We will keep on working. We have a list of the schools that have opened. I would love to tell the member all the schools that have opened, all the seats that we have created. We'll keep on working with the board of education, listening to their needs and their priorities.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, Members.

#### POLICE ACTIONS AND PRESS FREEDOM FOR JOURNALISTS

**A. Olsen:** Three weeks ago the Vancouver police department restricted media from covering the sweeps of the Downtown Eastside. Traffic cameras were turned off. The media were barred from entering the area. The police chief cited privacy and safety concerns. It's part of a pattern of concerning police behaviour that seems to be increasing.

Last year media was restricted from covering the ongoing demonstrations on Wet'suwet'en territory, and journalists were unlawfully arrested. It also occurred at the demonstrations at Fairy Creek. Media restrictions placed by the RCMP were found to "interfere" with the important liberties of members of the media by Justice Thompson of the B.C. Supreme Court.

[2:15 p.m.]

A free press is necessary for a healthy democracy, but despite warnings from our highest court, police forces continue to restrict media and hope to get away with it.

My question is to the Solicitor General. What has he done to support the freedom of the press in incidents involving the police?

**Hon. M. Farnworth:** I appreciate the question from the member. What I can tell him is that, as he well knows, there are processes and procedures in place to guide and that are often ruled on when complaints are brought. There is a complaint process. Individuals can bring those

complaints forward, and they will be acted on. In some cases, they're determined in a court of law. A court and a judge make a ruling, and my expectation is that the police abide by those rulings.

I note some of the things that the member noted, particularly in Vancouver... It was out for about ten minutes. It was not anything malicious. It was just an outage.

But we have rules in place. I expect police to follow them. When they don't, there are complaint processes that are in place, statute-driven, that are able to deal with them.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member, supplemental.

OVERSIGHT OF POLICING AND  
IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICE ACT  
COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

**A. Olsen:** The public is seeing police forces growing increasingly authoritarian and out of the reach of independent oversight. The RCMP are not directly accountable to the communities they serve; they're accountable to Ottawa. The B.C. conservation service is a quasi police force. They're embedded within the provincial government, but don't have any policing oversight body.

The chief constable of the Vancouver police department bragged about how they don't answer to anybody. To quote the chief: "I don't report to any politician. I don't report to the city of Vancouver. I don't report to the province of B.C. or the federal government." So who are they accountable to? Police are meant to protect and serve the communities they represent. Instead, we've enabled the inflation of power, and the police forces boast about not having to report to anybody.

My question is again to the Solicitor General. A special committee of this House was tasked by him with reforming the Police Act, and delivering better accountability for police forces was one of our recommendations. What progress has he made to this recommendation?

**Hon. M. Farnworth:** I appreciate the question. First off, the police are accountable. They're accountable to the public, they're accountable to their communities, they're accountable to the province, they're accountable to the federal government, and there are mechanisms in place to ensure that. They have a very difficult job, as the member well knows, and I think all of us in this chamber know.

What I can also tell the member is that the work of the all-party committee... My ministry has been working very hard on those recommendations. There will be a phased approach in dealing with the recommendations in that committee.

The first phase will be dealing with governance and oversight issues — some of them identified in the all-party report, others identified by work that has gone on within my ministry. It is my expectation and my plan, as minister, to have legislation dealing with those partic-

ular issues ready for the fall session this year, when we come back in October.

GOVERNMENT ACTION ON  
REPRESENTATIVE FOR CHILDREN  
AND YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

**M. Bernier:** Since 2017, there has been a staggering 191 percent increase in critical injuries and deaths of children known to, or in the care of, this government. B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth has reported 528 lost lives and 7,362 gravely injured children.

In our Committee on Children and Youth, we've had to listen to the heartbreaking stories of this loss. The painful reality that we hear on this committee, though, sharply contradicts the repeated promises and the comments made by this Premier and his party when they were in opposition.

We need to understand. How can the Premier justify his government's total lack of action and the terrible outcomes described by the independent representative when it comes to the most vulnerable children and youth in our province?

**Hon. M. Dean:** Thank you to the member for the question. We are absolutely committed to making sure that every child is safe and happy and healthy, and is brought up with loving parents. We know the best outcomes for children and youth are for them to stay connected with their family, where it's safe, and for them to always stay connected to their community and to their culture as well. We are taking steps to change how services are delivered in British Columbia.

[2:20 p.m.]

We know that for far too long, Indigenous children and youth have been overrepresented in the child welfare system, and we're making significant changes in the system to make sure that we address that overrepresentation.

Members of this House know that we passed important legislation last year to support Indigenous nations exercising their jurisdiction, so nations will be delivering services for children, youth and families in their communities. The bill has just passed third reading that supports our work on youth transitions.

We know, again, that the outcomes for children and youth leaving government care are terrible outcomes. They're disproportionately represented in so many terrible statistics, including the superhighway to homelessness. We are implementing, for the first time in British Columbia, a suite of comprehensive supports that support young people to still have a home after the age of 19, to have access to rent supplements if they're in market rental. There will be income supplements, access to more education and more cultural supports.

There is a lot more work to do, but we have started the work. I'm hearing from children and youth and young

people saying that it's making a real difference in their lives. That's the work that we'll continue to do to help children and youth thrive.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for Peace River South, supplemental.

**M. Bernier:** You know what would have made a real difference? Actually, action from this government. Meanwhile, those are hollow words for 528 children — 528 children — that have died while under the responsibility of this government.

The independent Representative for Children and Youth points to factors such as the overdose crisis, mental health issues, violence, sexual exploitation. The NDP government's response, actually, has been shamefully inadequate. I read a quote right out of the report: "The outcome of this inaction," of this government, "is seen daily in the injuries, deaths and individual advocacy issues reported to the RCY."

From 2017 to 2021, the representative actually has provided 63 recommendations in ten reports. What's happened under this government? Nine recommendations, 14 percent, have actually been looked at and completed. That is not action. That is failure, and families and children are paying the price.

How does the Premier square his government's glaring inaction on ten reports, dozens of recommendations, compared to the promises that his government once made?

**Hon. M. Dean:** It is absolutely vital and we're absolutely committed to making sure that children across British Columbia have safe, happy and healthy lives with their families, with families who love and support them.

We agree with the representative that when it comes to her recommendations, the impacts of those changes on the ground need to be felt faster. Work is underway on all of the recommendations of the Representative for Children and Youth.

Rather than making cuts like under the previous government, our government has been investing every single year, in this ministry, in providing more services and delivering more access to services across British Columbia. We're absolutely determined to keep taking action. We are working on transforming the child welfare system.

We're making a difference in how services are accessed and how services are being delivered to children and youth to help them and to help their families, to help them stay together, because we know that that leads to the best outcomes for children and youth. We are taking action on the recommendations of the Representative for Children and Youth.

We passed really significant legislation last year. For the first time ever, young people transitioning from government care are able to access services to help them thrive. At

the same time, every single day we are working with children and youth and families.

**C. Oakes:** The truth is that the report clearly highlights that action has not been taken, contrary to what the minister just said. Only 14 percent of the recommendations of the Representative for Children and Youth have actually been completed.

Let us be clear. This is what the representative says on page 10 of the report. I'd like to quote: "Of the ten calls to collaborate with youth and young adults, only one" — only one — "has been completed. Most alarmingly," and the minister talks about the work with the Aboriginal communities, "none of the 14 calls to engage with Indigenous communities have been completed" — none.

[2:25 p.m.]

This minister can stand up and talk about all of the work that it's been doing. This report shows that action has not been taken. Every member of the Committee on Children and Youth, and there have been many members in this Legislature that have sat on this committee, have heard the painful stories detailed across multiple reports from the representative. Once again this government says one thing but fails to deliver outcomes.

How could the Premier and his NDP government have failed to do more than a mere 14 percent of the recommendations knowing the catastrophic consequences this inaction has on our most vulnerable children and youth?

**Hon. M. Dean:** Every single day my ministry is absolutely committed to making sure that we serve children, youth and families in British Columbia. We're doing that work every single day at the same time as responding to recommendations from the Representative for Children and Youth and making really significant changes to the whole of the child welfare system — to how children, youth and families are able to access services and be served.

I understand and agree with the representative that when it comes to her recommendations, we want the impacts to be felt faster on the ground, and many of our actions are already being felt on the ground. We have hundreds of young people transitioning from government care who are now receiving a \$600-a-month rent supplement if they're in market rental.

We raised the rate for caregivers. We raised the rates for foster carers and extended family carers by 47 percent because that rate had been frozen for ten years. And we have harmonized the rates so that there isn't an incentive to come into foster care, so that young people can stay connected to family and they can stay with extended family.

We're making different choices. We're investing in services. The budget for my ministry has gone up every single year since 2017. I hear from young people and I hear from families that they are feeling the difference, on the ground, of our investments in services, in supports for families and

in helping them stay safely together and stay connected to their family, community and culture.

**D. Davies:** Well, unfortunately, that is cold comfort for all the kids that are being impacted by the over-and-over failures of this government. The representative says on page 19 of the report that this government's inaction has denied children essential services, stating that they "will not see the impact of this important work during their childhood."

It's hard to believe that only 14 percent of the recommendations have been done — let that sink in; 14 percent — ignoring dozens and dozens of urgent recommendations across multiple reports that we've heard. No recognition or acknowledgment of the 528 deaths.

My question is to the Premier. How can the Premier possibly explain his government's inaction, complete failure to protect our most vulnerable children and youth?

**Hon. M. Dean:** It's an absolute tragedy when a child or a youth dies. My heart goes out to all the family and community who knew children and youth who have tragically passed away.

When we formed government in 2017, we inherited a very damaged and broken and under-resourced system serving children, youth and families. Since 2017, we have been investing in increasing services, increasing access to services, making sure that we're supporting children and youth to stay safely with their families. We know that children are going to thrive if we're able to keep them connected to their family, to their community and to their culture.

We have seen changes in practice, changes in policy, changes in legislation. Young people transitioning from government care now, for the first time ever, have a suite of supports and services so that they will be able to thrive and they don't dread their 19th birthday.

[2:30 p.m.]

We are acting on and work is already underway on all of the recommendations from the Representative for Children and Youth. The role of that office is very important, and together we will continue to make improvements in the system.

At the same time, we're taking other measures — changing legislation, changing investments, changing policy — to benefit children, youth and families. Every single day staff from my ministry are working to support children, youth and families and helping them thrive.

**S. Bond:** The fact of the matter is this government wasn't elected yesterday. They are a two-term, more-than-six-year government. The minister needs to haul out the report and take a look at the chart. Critical injuries have gone up every single year under this government's watch — every single year. They are not our words. They are the words of the independent representative.

Here are the facts for the minister. It's not one report.

Report after report after report told this government they needed to do more to protect children. Here's the bottom line: 14 percent of the recommendations. That's the record of this Premier and this government.

Of 110 child and youth deaths reported last year alone, a tragic 23 percent were substance use-related. Yet 89 percent of the representative's mental health recommendations have been ignored by this government. The Ministries of Health and Mental Health and Addictions were identified by the representative as the least responsive, and the excuses for delays were outright dismissed by the representative. Here's what she said. There was "inaction both before and after the pandemic." Not our words; the words of the representative.

By every single measure, this Premier and government have failed the vulnerable children in this province. Complete inaction over five years on 89 percent of the recommendations: that's the record of this government.

Will the Premier stand up today and provide answers to families in British Columbia on how they could fail so abysmally and completely ignore the representative's recommendations that would protect the most vulnerable children in this province?

**Hon. M. Dean:** Our ministry is absolutely committed to serving children, youth and families here in British Columbia. We have staff here today in the gallery. Every single day our staff is working hard to keep children and youth safely with their families and to make sure that children and youth are connected to their family, to their community and their culture. We know that is going to lead those children and youth to be able to thrive.

Work is already underway on all of the recommendations from the Representative for Children and Youth. Since 2017, we have been making changes. We've been making changes to the way that services are delivered, that services can be accessed. Rather than making cuts, like what happened under the previous government when the other side was in government, we have been investing in services to support children, youth and families every single year since 2017.

We have the lowest number of youth in care. It's the lowest it has been in 30 years, and we have the lowest number of Indigenous children and youth in care, the lowest in over 20 years.

We have changed legislation. We have changed policy. I have seen practice changes. I hear from young people and from families that their experience is different and that they are able to stay connected with their family and keep connections with their community as well.

There is more work to do, and we will continue to act on the recommendations of the Representative for Children and Youth. We will continue our work to change the system serving children and youth and their families. Every single day our staff will continue delivering those services



and supporting children and youth and their families to thrive.

[2:35 p.m.]

[End of question period.]

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

Leave granted.

### Introductions by Members

**K. Falcon:** Today in the gallery we are joined by Chris Sherry and a group of his friends. Chris purchased a prize at a fundraiser for Vancouver College's 100th anniversary, and that included a trip to this wonderful Legislature, lunch with the Leader of the Opposition and a trip back. I want to welcome them here in the gallery today.

In addition to Chris, we've got Darren Cannon, Jason Gordon, Tom Gautreau, Peter Edgar and Aaron Keay.

Will the House please make them welcome.

### Reports from Committees

#### CHILDREN AND YOUTH COMMITTEE

**J. Sims:** I have the honour today to present the first report of the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth for the fourth session of the 42nd parliament titled *Review of the Representative for Children and Youth Act*.

I move that the report be taken as read and received.

Motion approved.

**J. Sims:** I ask leave of the House to move a motion to adopt the report.

Leave granted.

**J. Sims:** I move that the report be adopted, and in doing so, I would like to make some very brief comments.

As members know, the Representative for Children and Youth Act establishes the Representative for Children and Youth as an independent officer of the Legislature with a mandate for oversight of British Columbia's child- and youth-serving system.

No doubt members will agree that the representative's work to support the needs of children, youth and young adults in B.C. is incredibly important. This report outlines the committee's recommendations, resulting from its review of the act, which is required to be undertaken every five years.

The committee began its review last year and, over the course of its consultation, heard from the representative, Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth; government officials; organizations that work with children and youth and young adults;

and members of the public who responded to our online survey. Many participants emphasized the critical work that the representative does, as well as the ongoing challenges faced by vulnerable children, youth and young adults as well as their families in our province.

Committee members recognized the importance of incorporating Indigenous perspectives in the act while also acknowledging that there are a number of areas that require additional examination. As such, the committee recommends that government undertake further meaningful consultation with Indigenous peoples on amending the act to align with UNDRIP.

The report identifies specific areas that this consultation should address, including changes to child welfare jurisdiction, consultation with and accountability to Indigenous communities, referencing the declaration in the act and updating language related to Indigenous peoples.

The committee also recommends targeted changes to address gaps in the representative's mandate to better support vulnerable children, youth and young adults. These changes include expanding part of the representative's mandate to include services for gender-diverse youth and services for children and youth with support needs beyond those provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

The committee also recommends allowing the representative to provide advocacy related to special education services for children who already receive other services from the representative. Other recommendations focus on modernizing the language and strengthening and clarifying a number of provisions in the act.

On behalf of the committee, thank you to all British Columbians who shared their perspectives and experiences with us. The committee would also like to thank the representative, Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth, and all her staff for their ongoing work to support children, youth and young adults.

[2:40 p.m.]

I also want to recognize the legislative staff who supported our work.

Thank you to Karan Riarh, Lisa Hill, Mary Heeg, Mary Newell and Jianding Bai from the Parliamentary Committees Office.

Thank you to all the staff in Hansard. You guys were amazing.

I appreciate the thoughtful and collaborative work of committee members past and present. Currently serving on the committee are the member for Peace River South, the member for North Island, the member for Maple Ridge–Mission, the member for Richmond–Steveston, the member for West Vancouver–Capilano, the member for Kelowna–Lake Country, the member for Chilliwack–Kent, the member for Nanaimo–North Cowichan and the member for Richmond–Queensborough.

I want to thank them and their continued commitment

to supporting the well-being of children, youth and young adults in B.C.

I would particularly like to recognize the Deputy Chair, the Member for Peace River South, for his contributions and leadership.

**M. Bernier:** I won't get into naming all of the people, as the Chair of the committee. I'll thank her for the work that she's done guiding us through the process and also just echo a lot of the thanks that she put forward when it comes to the Clerk of Committees office and the rest of the members that are part of this committee.

I think it's really important to make sure we highlight, again, and thank you, again, to all of the people who put in submissions. There were a lot of submissions that came forward from independent groups from around the province — stakeholders, shareholders that are directly affected by the representative's office and the ministry who wanted to ensure that they help strengthen the act for the representative going forward.

I know we heard a lot of that on the committee. We had some amazingly good deliberations to land at the 28 recommendations that we believe are really going to help strengthen the act for the representative.

Again, I want to end by thanking the representative personally, on behalf of the opposition and the entire committee. We know the hard work the representative, her office and all of her staff — what they do to try to help the children in the province of British Columbia by putting forward recommendations that will not only strengthen this act to help the representative but recommendations that come forward to try to strengthen what we do in this Legislature to protect children and youth in our province.

Thank you again to everybody involved with helping with this review for the Representative for Children and Youth Act.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, the question is adoption of the report.

Motion approved.

### Orders of the Day

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** In the main chamber, I call Committee of the Whole on Bill 18.

In committee room A, I call debate on the Committee of Supply for the Ministry of Health.

In committee room C, I call Committee of Supply on the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship.

[2:45 p.m.]

### Committee of the Whole House

#### BILL 18 — HAIDA NATION RECOGNITION ACT

The House in Committee of the Whole (Section B) on Bill 18; S. Chandra Herbert in the chair.

The committee met at 2:46 p.m.

**The Chair:** We are ready to proceed.

**Hon. M. Rankin:** It's a pleasure to be here on Committee of the Whole for Bill 18. I, perhaps, could introduce, before getting too far along, my talented staff that are here to assist me.

On my left is Becky Black, legal counsel, Ministry of Attorney General. On my right, Deputy Minister Tom McCarthy from the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. Behind me is Mr. Heinz Dyck, who has been the negotiator with the Haida for many years and who got us to this point today.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, this is about changing the legal structure to recognize the Council of the Haida Nation as the governing body of the Haida Nation for the Haida people.

This, I think, is due to the relationship the province has been able to develop with the Haida over the years and recognizing their inherent rights of governance and self-determination as recognized and affirmed both in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, but also, of course, in the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Perhaps with that, Mr. Chair, I'll take my seat, and we can proceed with the clause-by-clause.

On clause 1.

**M. Lee:** We are on limited time, as I understand from instruction from House Leaders here. I appreciate the ability and flexibility of the Third Party House Leader, as well, to give me the time that I have with the minister on this bill, which is short. So I appreciate it.

With that in mind, if we can keep our back-and-forth fairly precise and short. I know that we had fairly meaningful and thoughtful discussion at second reading by the minister, myself and the House Leader for the Third Party.

On clause 1 sub (a), can the minister explain the scope and extent of the "inherent rights of governance and self-determination" that are referred to in this clause?

[2:50 p.m.]

**Hon. M. Rankin:** To the member for Vancouver-Langara, I will do my very best, in light of the time constraints, to do what he quite properly asked, which is to

keep our answers short so we have enough time to do justice to the clause-by-clause analysis.

The member asks about the scope of inherent rights, as in clause 1. I think the answer to that is that these rights are deliberately not defined in this bill. These are not defined because, of course, they evolve with the jurisprudence as courts pour more meaning into the words in section 35 and define what inherent rights mean.

More importantly, perhaps, is these rights predate B.C.'s Legislature. These rights are those that predate contact, and it's an effort to ensure that we can move forward with the nation in defining together, through negotiations, the exact scope of that — what they mean in the here and now, in the province of British Columbia, in the country of Canada.

It is the Council of the Haida Nation that will be recognized as the holder of those rights, on behalf of the Haida Nation, and the governing body in respect of those rights.

**M. Lee:** On our second reading speeches, we acknowledged in detail, all three of the members here, how we got here, the significance of the Haida court decision by the Supreme Court of Canada, and the follow-on steps with the previous government and this government with the Haida Nation itself. I know that the minister is not suggesting, of course, that we go back to the courts to define what the inherent rights of governance and self-determination are for the Haida Nation, but there is a recognition that there is a determination to be made.

Can I ask, then, what the expectation is between the government of British Columbia and the Haida Nation in terms of to negotiate what the rights of governance and self-determination are pursuant to this recognition.

[2:55 p.m.]

**Hon. M. Rankin:** The member, I think, first of all, frames this question quite properly. It was certainly not our desire to go back to the courts. He references the litigation back, now, a generation ago that was brought by the Haida Nation to assert title in the territory. We have moved from that to the GayGahlda Changing Tide agreement, which provides a framework for the answer that the member seeks, the nature of which is to provide, through negotiation, the recognition of inherent title and what it means on the land.

For example, we are committed to trying to harmonize the Haida laws, which have existed for many, many, many years before contact, as well, with federal and provincial laws on Haida Gwaii. We hope, through the negotiations, to determine jurisdictions and management of Haida Gwaii together and to advance governance matters more generally.

I can give an example. When it comes to parks and protected areas, for example, there's a national park reserve on Haida Gwaii, and there are provincial protected areas. Giv-

en the importance, of course, that the Haida and all First Nations have recognized for land-based and resource matters in their territory, that will be a matter of great importance — natural resource management, land management and protected areas. It's those sorts of things where we will work together to meld our jurisdictions.

I point out that we've had that underway for many, many years in Haida Gwaii, under earlier legislation brought forward by an earlier government. This is, in a sense, a continuation of that dialogue about the inherent rights and what they mean to the people on the land.

**M. Lee:** I really do appreciate how we're trying to get through this. It's a very short time to cover a lot of ground in a very significant manner for both the Haida Nation and the province of B.C. and the significant body of work that's occurred.

The minister just referred to, of course, as we did in second reading, the Haida Gwaii Reconciliation Act, under the former Gordon Campbell-led B.C. Liberal government, of which our current Leader of the Official Opposition was certainly a member of the executive council. I know that in that legislation, of course, it specifically called for protected areas management plans, as we discussed in my second reading speech.

The changing tide agreement certainly does, as the minister presents, both with the federal government and the provincial government, the framework for reconciliation.... As we look at that table the way it was set under that agreement and what's called for in negotiation, can the minister clarify for us, then...? The entrance of that framework for negotiation is.... In terms of the recognition of the Council of the Haida Nation as the government of the Haida Nation, to what extent is that a necessary step in the furtherance of that framework for negotiation and reconciliation?

**Hon. M. Rankin:** Recognizing the member's desire to move quickly, I'll try my best. I can confirm that in the changing tide agreement is a recognition of the importance of the Council of the Haida Nation being recognized. It was one of the priorities indicated throughout our negotiations. That is why we are here with this step along the journey.

[3:00 p.m.]

**M. Lee:** With the short number of questions I can ask here in the short time we have.... I appreciate that there is a progression. Just to ask the minister....

Another way of asking the question, for clarity purposes, is this. We know, of course, under existing treaty agreements with the Nisga'a, the Tsawwassen, the Maa-nulth.... When you look at those agreements, there is....

When we talk about recognition of self-governance and self-determination, there are, enumerated in various

clauses, descriptions of what that scope of jurisdiction is. In the absence of that, this recognition act is taking the first step — I'm asking the minister to confirm this — to recognize the Council of the Haida Nation as the government of the Haida Nation, to recognize that the Haida Nation has an inherent right of governance and self-determination but then leave the determination of the scope of those rights of governance and self-determination, as we've been discussing, to negotiations.

First of all, I'd ask the minister to confirm that that is the correct way of describing this. Secondly, in the absence of this recognition, in the absence of Bill 18, what would we be left with? Does that materially impair the ability of the province of B.C. to negotiate and continue with what's called for under the agreement? I'm just trying to draw out the understanding of the purpose of this bill.

**Hon. M. Rankin:** The first step is to have this recognition of the Council of the Haida Nation. It's going to be defined through our other governance arrangements, which are contemplated in the framework agreement, as the member would know.

This is an important, incremental step along the way. I think it is important because it is providing a restructuring of our relationship with the Haida Nation. I think that's, at bottom, what we are trying to do through this incremental step.

There will be more to come, as the member has anticipated. Discussion on title is, of course, going to be something that we'll have to continue, as we've been trying to resolve our relationship, which started with litigation. But we cannot continue, the Haida have told us, with an Indian Act band or two bands. We cannot continue with a Society Act created under B.C. law.

We're trying to provide.... The Haida have insisted, properly, that we redefine and reconstruct that relationship. This bill is a step along the journey to do just that.

**M. Lee:** I think that is a very helpful explanation, from the minister, in terms of the objective and the purpose of this. I certainly can appreciate the importance of this recognition to the Haida Nation for the reasons the minister just said.

Having said that, recognizing that there has been a very long period of time, to say the least, for the Haida Nation and the peoples of the Haida Nation to get to where we are today....

[3:05 p.m.]

There is more work to be done, as contemplated under this framework agreement for reconciliation. In the interim, after the passage of this bill — if there is further intervention, let's say, that's required by the courts to make some determination — what will be the meaning of this recognition in the expectation of this minister? What is the meaning of this recognition, in itself, in the absence of further definition through negotiation?

**Hon. M. Rankin:** The member asked the question about how, if further court intervention is required.... What does this recognition legislation mean if it's enacted?

First and foremost, the litigant would be the Haida Nation as represented by the Council of the Haida Nation. I think that's a very important point. It would not be an individual Chief on behalf of the nation, or whatever, as in the past. It would be now, clearly, the Haida Nation as the litigant, as represented by the government we would be recognizing here.

Secondly, as the member would know, by recognizing that the Council of the Haida Nation has the powers of a natural person.... That means that contracts — which could be dealt with through the courts, of course — and other agreements would be in their name.

Thirdly, it would mean that the society, which had to be the de facto governing body, will be, ultimately, dissolved. This new entity, this legally recognized entity, would be, for all purposes, the representative of the Haida Nation.

**M. Lee:** At this point, I have to be very mindful of the time that I have left on this bill. But I do appreciate the minister's responses and the manner in which he has provided....

In terms of other First Nations in this province.... Can the minister provide any comment about what the meaning of this recognition act is to other nations that might seek a similar level of recognition? Are there any comments the minister can make, at this time, that will help and assist in considering this bill and how it may set a...? I guess precedent is the word for it, but there are other words that might describe this, given the significance of it. It's more than just a precedent — an example to other nations as to how they might seek this formal legal recognition by way of legislation.

[3:10 p.m.]

**Hon. M. Rankin:** I anticipated the member's question. It's a very important one.

Every situation is unique. We've been working with the Council of the Haida Nation for two decades, over 20 years, to get this right and get to this point in time. So that took a lot of work. We are at different places with other nations, as the member would know. The province has developed, over those years, a very strong relationship with the Council of the Haida Nation. This legislation represents an incremental step in legal recognition of Haida governance.

Now, I think it's important, when the member asks about other nations, that we recognize just how unique the Haida Nation is in this regard. They have had the Council of the Haida Nation as their nation-level Indigenous governing body, if you will, for over 40 years. It's a stable governance system with which we can work, and have worked, effectively. In 2003, over 20 years ago, the Haida Nation

adopted its constitution, which confirmed the role of the Council of the Haida Nation.

So there are ingredients to our successful recognition, should this bill be enacted, of the Haida nation that well might be applicable in other nations, but we are in different stages with the 200-plus nations of British Columbia in that regard.

**M. Lee:** Again, I appreciate the minister's anticipation of the question because I do think it was an important question to be asked.

I did refer at length, in my second reading speech — as well, the minister acknowledged it in his response — to the constitution of the Council of the Haida Nation, which is available on their website. I think it demonstrates not only the length of time in which they've governed themselves in respect of that constitution, but it does demonstrate as well the nature of how a nation looks at its own governance, including in the areas that are covered by the constitution.

Recognizing, of course, that we do acknowledge that it is for the Indigenous nations themselves to determine their governance, as we've seen with other nations in this province, is there an expectation, when we look at the model of governance that the Haida Nation has, that for this formal level of recognition...?

Again, appreciating the unique history of the Haida Nation, including the fact that on Haida Gwaii, as far as I understand it, there are no overlapping claims of note from other nations because of their unique geographic position.... That might be one indicator in terms of the unique nature of the Haida Nation itself, in respect of where other nations situate themselves geographically here in the province of B.C.

Is this to be a standard to be looked at by other nations when they look at formal recognition in the manner that this nation is receiving from this government, in this province?

[3:15 p.m.]

**Hon. M. Rankin:** I appreciate the member adding to the list of reasons why we are comfortable and anxious to proceed to this next step with the Haida. He added to the fact of the longevity of their governance arrangement the transparency of their governance arrangement — I think that's a very important point — and also the accountability that they've had to their members.

In his second reading speech, the member — and I won't take the time to repeat what he said — noted, I think accurately, the way in which hereditary and an elected governance work together, the respect and involvement of hereditary systems within elected systems, the two bands and how those bands from Old Massett and Skidegate are represented in the Council of the Haida Nation, and so forth. That integrated system is, of course, one that's stable

and accountable and one which we are anxious to continue to work with.

The member, used the word "overlap," and I think that's definitely a fact. I don't deny what he said, but I think that's of more relevance in the issue of Aboriginal title than it is with governance.

**M. Lee:** That concludes my questions with the time that I have been allocated. I appreciate the ability of the minister to rapidly respond. I look forward to further discussion of this as we go in other bills and other opportunities.

Thanks again, Mr. Chair, and through you to the minister and his team.

Clauses 1 to 5 inclusive approved.

Title approved.

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

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 3:17 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

### Reporting of Bills

#### BILL 18 — HAIDA NATION RECOGNITION ACT

Bill 18, Haida Nation Recognition Act, reported complete without amendments, to be considered at the next sitting of the House after today.

**Hon. G. Heyman:** I call Committee of the Whole on Bill 19.

### Committee of the Whole House

#### BILL 19 — MONEY SERVICES BUSINESS ACT

The House in Committee of the Whole on Bill 19; S. Chandra Herbert in the chair.

The committee met at 3:18 p.m.

**The Chair:** All right, Members. We'll take a short recess to have the appropriate parties come to the appropriate place.

The committee recessed from 3:19 p.m. to 3:22 p.m.

[S. Chandra Herbert in the chair.]

**The Chair:** We are here for committee stage of Bill 19, Money Services Businesses Act.

**Hon. K. Conroy:** I just want to say I'm looking forward to the debate with the member. With me I have Joey Primeau, the senior executive director of the strategic policy and support, policy and legislation division, and Christian Nordin, the senior policy advisor, financial and corporate sector policy branch, strategic policy and support, policy and legislation division.

On clause 1.

**P. Milobar:** I only have a few sections' worth of questions on this bill. Just to start off, I'm wondering if the minister can provide us with a timeline of when this bill was first envisioned, started to be worked on and got us to where we are today — that timeline.

[3:25 p.m.]

**Hon. K. Conroy:** I've got all the dates for the member. It started after the first German report came out. The exploratory on starting this bill, that was in March 2018. More significant work started after the Maloney report came out. That was in March 2019. There was a series of consultation that then happened from March 6 through to April 30 of 2020. Public consultation with a number of stakeholders was done.

Then the Cullen commission work was ongoing. The work on the legislation continued while the Cullen commission was ongoing, but the legislation wasn't finalized until after the Cullen report was released, which was in June of 2022, because they wanted to make sure that the findings from the Cullen report were incorporated into the legislation.

Clauses 1 to 4 inclusive approved.

On clause 5.

**P. Milobar:** This section is around the registration requirements and registration required specifically. "A person must not carry on the business of providing money services unless the person is (a) registered under this Part as a registered money services business to carry on the business of providing those money services, or (b) exempted by section 6 or the regulations from the requirement to be registered under this Part."

That all is fairly straightforward, and I get that that's setting out the framework for the ultimate registration process that is the purpose of this bill, really. I guess the question ties into, though, that this bill doesn't become law until the orders-in-council are signed off on — basically, the regulations that go with this bill have been developed. That's why I asked around the timeline of the bill development.

Although this bill.... I can understand why you would maybe wait at that point to make sure it is synced with the Cullen commission report. It was certainly being worked on long before the Cullen commission was even contemplated in terms of the money laundering.

[3:30 p.m.]

It has been, I guess, a piece of the tools that law enforcement has needed and known for quite some time in terms of regulating money services businesses, and the government wanted to have eyes on as well. If you think 2018 to 2023 now, that's a five-year window of time to get us to where we are today.

I guess the question is.... The next step of this will be having those regulations developed so that people will actually have to register. What is the timeline, and how quickly will those regulations be in place once this bill goes through third reading?

**Hon. K. Conroy:** We don't have a strict timeline for the regulations. The regulations will be developed in collaboration with the Financial Services Authority. We need to understand how they want to design the systems, because they will be the administrator of the process.

Clauses 5 to 10 inclusive approved.

On clause 11.

**P. Milobar:** This is the section that deals.... Clause 10 dealt with how to make an application for registration, and this clause refers to 10, and it says: "The superintendent may, to the extent the superintendent considers necessary for the evaluation of an application under section 10, (a) conduct an investigation, or (b) require the applicant to provide the superintendent with additional information, documents or verification."

I'm wondering. How does the conducting of an investigation or requiring more information interlay...? I'm assuming the idea here is that you've submitted your paperwork, as per the rules in clause 10, and the superintendent has more questions. Maybe it's around some of your practices or things of that nature.

How does it affect somebody if somebody is in the middle of court proceedings? Is it that it's a conviction? Or is it that they've only been alleged but they haven't actually gone to court yet, or that charges haven't actually been laid?

I ask that question in the backdrop of E-Nationalize. My understanding of that case was that although they couldn't make any money-laundering conviction stick, the best they might have been able to get them for was basically something very similar to this in terms of money services, and he didn't have a registration, or he didn't have a licence. The people involved in E-Nationalize would have been under investigation. They would have been at the courts, but they weren't actually convicted of anything.

[3:35 p.m.]

Would that actually prohibit them from being registered while they're going through all of that process where they haven't actually been found officially guilty of anything yet? Or is it still open-ended, and they would be given a licence up until an actual conviction happens?

**Hon. K. Conroy:** This is actually covered in section 13, but I can give the member the answer now, if the Chair is okay with that and the member is okay with that, and then we'll just skip it when we get there. Under section 13, the superintendent can determine to register the applicant, but they can also refuse to register the applicant if, in the superintendent's opinion, the applicant is unsuitable.

As well, section 13 establishes that the superintendent may refuse to register an applicant if, in the opinion of the superintendent, the applicant, as I said, is unsuitable to be registered. Or it also lists things like "the applicant, an agent of the applicant or an associate of the applicant or agent...reveals the applicant to be unfit to be registered" because of any of the following: they had a registration or licence refused, suspended or cancelled under real estate, insurance, mortgage services or securities legislation of B.C. or another jurisdiction, or they have been disciplined by a professional body or convicted of an offence.

Again, if the superintendent feels that they are unsuitable, the superintendent has the ability to refuse to register an applicant.

**P. Milobar:** Just for the minister's knowledge, I appreciate that into 13. I do only have other questions on 22 as well. So if the minister is okay with me toggling between 11 and 13 on the same topic, then I'll just continue on here for a second, based on that answer. Or if the Chair would like, I guess we can, maybe for ease, just vote on 11 and 12, and then I'll ask on 13.

Clauses 11 and 12 approved.

On clause 13.

**P. Milobar:** I guess, based on that answer, though, it sounds as if... Again, this could be somebody's livelihood at stake, on whether or not they get registered or not. Accusations are one thing. Investigations are another thing, as we have seen, especially in the money-laundering sphere. All governments of all political stripes, provincial and national, have discovered, over the last 15 years or so, just how hard it is to get a conviction.

[3:40 p.m.]

I fully support trying to do things to keep getting stuff in place to minimize and try to address that. That's not a shot at anything. This is what we have to keep trying to do as governments. I'm just trying to get clear. Again, the most high-profile collapse that just happened.... The Premier

tried interceding directly to try to get that case appealed. Even that appeal was rejected by the special review.

Given that that individual in that case wasn't actually convicted of anything.... When you read 13, the only time it says that that would be rejected is in (2)(a)(iv): "been convicted of an offence...." I'm just wondering how a superintendent would have that much latitude in a jurisdiction, by law, that is you're innocent until proven guilty, to potentially impact somebody's livelihood.

I'm just trying to get a sense of how this will meaningfully change the ball game for somebody that may or may not be of the most.... They may very well be under investigation, could be under investigation for very good reasons. But there's a big difference between that and, as we've seen in this sphere, proof to the point of conviction. I'm just trying to get how this section actually provides that much strength to the superintendent that they essentially can just make a ruling based on what they feel versus what has been proven. Could we get some more clarification on that?

**Hon. K. Conroy:** We can't say how it will apply to any specific case, because we can't assume how the superintendent will make a decision. It is somewhat at their discretion. As I said, the superintendent can determine the suitability.

[3:45 p.m.]

I think in what the member was suggesting or inferring.... There is a clause in section 13: "If the superintendent refuses to register an applicant or amend an applicant's registration, the superintendent must (a) give the applicant written notice of the refusal and the reasons for it." They also have to "advise the applicant of the right to appeal under Division 7 [Appeals to Financial Services Tribunal] of Part 3." If a person doesn't agree with the superintendent's decision, they have a right of appeal.

Clauses 13 to 21 inclusive approved.

On clause 22.

**P. Milobar:** I don't want to give the impression to the minister that I'm only interested in convictions here, but this is meant to be a bill to help crack down and provide a tool for regulation as well as law enforcement.

I'm just trying to get a sense on this part here, on 22(2)(4) again. It says: "been convicted of an offence under an enactment of British Columbia or a law of another jurisdiction." Is that conviction just a financial conviction? Or is it any type of actual criminal conviction?

**Hon. K. Conroy:** It's any conviction.

Clauses 22 to 33 inclusive approved.

On clause 34.

**P. Milobar:** I'm just wondering, in terms of the maximum amount of the administrative penalty under subsection (1) being \$100,000, given the dollar values that we could be talking about, especially if you're trying to crack down on substantial potential money-laundering operations through money services businesses.... How did the \$100,000 come to be? How was it arrived at, and is there not a worry that that starts to be viewed as simply a cost of doing business?

If I'm operating in a sphere where I have to register, with the rest of this bill, and then I get caught and get my registration pulled, or I'm acting untoward within the rules, I have an administrative penalty for \$100,000. If I go to reapply, I'm likely not going to get reregistered. That's understood. But it seems that you could still operate without that registration and just get tagged for another \$100,000. I think somewhere else it goes up to \$200,000.

I'm wondering. Making sure how airtight this is in terms of it just not viewed as the cost of doing business. With this bill, it's now \$100,000 with or without a registration number, as a money service business.

[3:50 p.m.]

**Hon. K. Conroy:** If they continue to act untoward, and they lose their registration, then, yes, they would get fined \$100,000. But if they continue to provide money services, if they continue to operate, they then can go to jail. The superintendent can use their powers to have them charged, and they can go to jail.

So it is significant. You can't just keep doing it and keep getting fined \$100,000. The reason for \$100,000 is that it's also the same fine that's used under the Real Estate Services Act and the Mortgage Services Act. It aligns with the administrative penalties in other areas that the FSA administers.

Clauses 34 to 66 inclusive approved.

Title approved.

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

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 3:52 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

### Report and Third Reading of Bills

#### BILL 19 — MONEY SERVICES BUSINESSES ACT

Bill 19, Money Services Businesses Act, reported

complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

**Hon. G. Heyman:** I call Committee of the Whole on Bill 20.

### Committee of the Whole House

#### BILL 20 — BUSINESS CORPORATIONS AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

The House in Committee of the Whole (Section B) on Bill 20; J. Tegart in the chair.

The committee met at 3:54 p.m.

**The Chair:** The committee will take a short recess while we get people in place.

The committee recessed from 3:54 p.m. to 3:55 p.m.

[J. Tegart in the chair.]

**The Chair:** I'll call the committee to order. We're dealing with Bill 20, Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2023.

Clauses 1 and 2 approved.

On clause 3.

**P. Milobar:** I only have a few questions on this bill, as well, just for the minister's knowledge. The last bill was around convicted or not convicted and things of that nature. This will be much more around information, of people's more sensitive information gathering.

Clause 3 is amending section 119.2 and adding the following paragraphs.... It's (d.1) that is particularly.... In this day and age of people trying to protect areas of identity, social insurance numbers are, obviously, a key part of that.

With all of the other layers being added with this bill, (a) why a social insurance number, and (b) who will have access? Will it be in a siloed database, or will it be something that, depending on who's filling in the request for information, if they don't fill in the right field and block something out, would automatically be sent off to somebody requesting information on the corporation's ownership?

[4:00 p.m.]

**Hon. K. Conroy:** Before I start, I'm going to introduce my staff. Joey Primeau is the senior executive director, policy and legislation division; Chad Vandermolen is the director, financial and corporate sector, policy branch; and Samar Demontigny is the legislative analyst for the finan-



cial and corporate sector, policy branch. They're all with the policy and legislation division.

To your question, Member. Unique identifiers, like the social insurance number, are taken because it identifies a person. So if there's somebody with the same name, they can make sure that they are identified as that individual. There's not a case of mistaken identity. That's why the social insurance number is used.

Also, the security is on a tiered access system. So only law enforcement, tax authorities and certain regulators — for example, FINTRAC or FSA — can actually access the information. There's a restriction on use by private companies or by the registrar to actually utilize this information. That's listed under division 3, section 119.62.

Clauses 3 to 10 approved.

On clause 11.

**P. Milobar:** And 11 seems to be the meatier part of this bill, actually, in terms of the various subsections within it. It's around the registrar's transparency register, search and inspection and things like that.

On 399.44, this is where the public, it appears, would have a right to access information from this registry. I guess the question I would have is.... Again, in a day and age of identity theft and things of that nature, can the minister explain why in (a) it's both the individual's full name and year of birth?

It just seems to be trying to tie many different touchpoints of identity. I get that the concept of a transparency registry is to have transparency for the public so they can understand who owns. But at a certain point, two people with the same name, with all of the other touchpoints like whether or not they are a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident.... If it's not a Canadian citizen, every country or state in which the individual is a citizen.... I mean, there are a lot of other touchpoints in there, as opposed to getting in some of those more personalized identity pieces. So why the need for year of birth?

[4:05 p.m.]

**Hon. K. Conroy:** Staff consulted with the information and privacy commission, and they felt that this provided the public with enough information to protect individuals and the minimum that was necessary to avoid confusion or avoid mistaken identity. The office said that they thought this was a balanced approach. The staff looked at other jurisdictions. The U.K. had actually added in the birth month as well as the birth year, but we just went with the birth year because we felt that was enough information.

**P. Milobar:** On 399.48(a)(ii), so this is about search and inspection for law enforcement purposes: "from which a law enforcement proceeding is likely to result." When I

read this part of the clause, it appears that if law enforcement feels that they might have an investigation that they want to have going, they get full access to the information. It seems contrary.... And again, I am not a lawyer. I don't even pretend to play one on TV.

My rudimentary understanding, though, is that typically, things like this would require.... That's partly what takes so long on drug cases and things of that nature. It's the amount of time it takes for them to get approval for gathering of certain information from data sets, in terms of court sign-off and warrants and things of that nature.

Is this clause saying that law enforcement would no longer need warrants to gain access to this information? The wording "from which a law enforcement proceeding is likely to result" is pretty open-ended. There are all sorts of investigations that never proceed to charges.

[4:10 p.m.]

The police can start an investigation. It doesn't mean they've necessarily consulted with the Crown, is my understanding, even. They gather their evidence, then they take it to the Crown to see about proceeding. But certain pieces of that information-gathering to get to that stage have already had to be vetted by way of getting a warrant.

Is this that no warrants are necessary or is there a wording error that needs to be corrected? Again, expecting that some of these are going to get challenged in court at some time, just trying to get on the record what exactly the intention is.

**Hon. K. Conroy:** The legislation doesn't change the powers and authorities with respect to police authorities, but it is still a matter for the courts to decide. It gives them access to the information, but it doesn't change how they act under the law. If the law determines they need a warrant, they need a warrant.

One of the policy objectives that this beneficial ownership policy does is facilitates efficient access of the information without actually requiring physical inspection of corporate offices, for instance. They can get the information here.

Clauses 11 to 13 inclusive approved.

On clause 14.

**P. Milobar:** I'm hoping the minister will humour me here. This is in the area of my last question. Keep in mind, I did not write this bill, so I have no choice but to ask a question that intersects with about three different areas of this bill moving forward. I'll try to walk your staff through it as well so you can follow the breadcrumb trail, because imagine me trying to read it for the first time.

[4:15 p.m.]

In clause 14, it says: "No appeal lies in respect of a decision of the minister under section...424.29." So if you jump forward to clause 18, 424.29 is there, and it's talking

about “a reasonable period of time after receiving a written notice of appeal...the minister must confirm, vary or rescind the contravention” as applicable. An appeal under this section may be conducted in writing. Then it says: “Promptly after making a decision...the minister must give the person...” So it doesn’t say, really, what promptly means. That can be widely open to interpretation.

That’s not the biggest concern. In 14, it makes it clear that there’s no appeal that lies in respect to the minister’s decision, especially under the sections. Then in the section it references, not only does it say that; it says: “(d) the date by which an application for judicial review, if pursued, must be commenced.” So that’s in 424.29.

Further down, in for 424.32, it says: “If a person makes an application for judicial review” for the minister under section 424.29.

There are two or three different times that 424.29 gets referenced as a space to go for an appeal or a judicial review. Yet in 14, it makes it very clear, well ahead of that, no appeal lies in respect of a decision of the minister.

Can the minister explain how in one section people are being told there is no appeal of the minister’s decision, yet if you jump forward a couple of clauses, there are two or three different ways to actually appeal that minister’s decision?

[4:20 p.m.]

**Hon. K. Conroy:** I am not a lawyer either. Judicial reviews typically deal with the decisions of administrative decision-makers, while appeals typically deal with the decision of a court. As this process requires an administrative decision, it is best to deal with it through a judicial review rather than an appeal.

A person can seek judicial review but not an appeal. The different rules and procedures apply to the court process, so different standards. The courts have more latitude on an appeal than a judicial review. So the intent was to provide a limited review of the decision, as opposed to a broad appeal.

Clauses 14 to 24 inclusive approved.

Title approved.

**Hon. K. Conroy:** I move that the committee rise and report the bill complete without amendments.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 4:23 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

### Report and Third Reading of Bills

#### BILL 20 — BUSINESS CORPORATIONS AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

Bill 20, Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2023, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

[4:25 p.m.]

**Hon. L. Beare:** I call Committee of the Whole, Bill 22, Strata Property Amendment Act.

#### Committee of the Whole House

#### BILL 22 — STRATA PROPERTY AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

The House in Committee of the Whole (Section B) on Bill 22; J. Tegart in the chair.

The committee met at 4:26 p.m.

Clause 1 approved.

On clause 2.

**M. Bernier:** I’ll just say thank you to the minister again. Good to see him, and thank you to his staff.

We won’t have a lot of questions on this but obviously a few details that we just want to iron out. I think the minister may or may not have heard some of my commentary at second reading.

Maybe we’ll start here in clause 2 — the amendment that’s being put here. Can the minister just explain what the intention is behind this section and the changes here?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The purpose of it is to require strata corporations to retain copies of the electrical planning reports and other reports related to EV-charging infrastructure. The significance is that this change will help ensure that the strata corporations retain important information needed for the consideration and management of EV-charging infrastructure.

**M. Bernier:** Just knowing a little bit about this.... Can the minister explain, then, is there going to be pre-assessment done — requirements of stratas, of what the existing hydro infrastructure has and then how that will be changed — as infrastructure for EV vehicles is added? Is there going to be a benchmark? Are there going to be changes?

Then with that, the intention of having and keeping this, is this going to be accessible to strata members? As the minister knows, when somebody owns — we’re talk-

ing ownership here — a strata and they go to sell it, a lot of times realtors and others require a lot of documentation. Not only the AGM minutes and the capital infrastructure, but also this will be a requirement, I'm assuming. So will that be accessible? And how will that transition take place?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The report is about setting benchmarks — the capacity, what the usage is — and this report could be disclosed to new buyers if requested. It's not something that would be mandatory, but if it's requested, yes, it would be available for anyone looking to potentially buy a new unit.

[4:30 p.m.]

Clause 2 approved.

On clause 3.

**M. Bernier:** Thank you to the minister. How did we arrive at a 50 percent threshold? How was that number chosen? Why is the government wanting to make that change when stratas in a lot of areas have 75, sometimes 80, different percentages used for passing at the strata level? Why is the government trying to impose a change like this?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The member is correct. You can have unanimous, three-quarter and majority. We've chosen majority. It helps remove some barriers and makes it easier for those who want to have that infrastructure but still requires a majority of strata members to vote in favour of heading in that direction.

We did consult widely with stakeholders, both organizations that represent strata corporations but also advocates who were wanting to see more EV capacity being available to them. From most consultations.... The majority was what everyone had suggested.

**M. Bernier:** Maybe the minister.... I'll just try to give an example and try to understand the process here, how government landed on this 50 percent. We did hear this government and the Premier talk about right-to-charge legislation, which obviously this isn't. So I bring it back to just trying to understand how this will play out.

I'll use an example. If I'm in a strata.... It's a small townhouse complex of, let's say, four units. I want to install an electric charging system in my one unit. There are only four of us. The other three vote against it, for whatever reason. Does that mean, even though I have an electric vehicle, that because three out of four voted against me having an electric-vehicle-charging station, now I'm stuck not being able to implement that?

Maybe the minister can walk through how that process could be managed.

[4:35 p.m.]

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** We're talking about common areas. I think there's a whole host of things that impact all the owners in the building. Safety codes would be one, costs related to it, making sure that the work is done through approved contractors, etc.

[S. Chandra Herbert in the chair.]

When you've got a building with ten strata owners, for example.... I think it's important, if it's a common area, that a majority of the strata corp owners understand the direction it is going and then understand all the things that are being put in place to mitigate the risks to the others.

**M. Bernier:** Maybe I should ask this, then. This government put a policy forward and an announcement that all vehicles sold by 2030 have to be electric vehicles. The assumption, then, would be that pretty well everybody who has a vehicle in a strata is going to require a charging system.

How does the minister square that? In the example we just talked about.... He's saying a common area, and everybody has to approve it. Wouldn't we want to be getting ahead of that curve, if the government actually intends on following through with their policy direction that they're trying to achieve here in the province of British Columbia?

Again, I go back to.... If it's 50 percent in those examples, we're not exactly going to meet the desired outcome that this government's intention was on the right-to-charge legislation.

Maybe the minister can just explain, then? Are there timelines on this? Is there a timeline and parameters around when stratas can or cannot approve this and the 50 percent? Is the government going to come back with more changes to allow for greater charging infrastructure next year? Is this just a start? How do we see this playing out over the next few years?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** Thanks to the member for the question. I think what's important to note here is the strata corporation cannot unreasonably refuse a residential strata owner's request for the installation of an EVC on a user-pay basis when certain criteria are met. When there are significant changes required to common area space, then a majority vote would be required.

[4:40 p.m.]

If, for example, there is a row of townhouses, the person has access to power just outside of their space and it doesn't require significant changes, then it wouldn't require the 50 percent vote. The requirement is if the strata corp feels that the change is significant enough that it will have impacts on the common area, then the strata vote comes in.

**M. Bernier:** I appreciate a little bit of that clarification, but it sounds like, through that answer, there is still a

lot of onus, I guess, on the strata for the determination of what's considered an easy plug-and-play system for an electric vehicle or whether it's infrastructure that's going to be required.

It sounds through that.... We talked about it in clause 2, a little bit about the electrical requirements. These all kind of do bridge together, I believe, the way I'm trying to understand it, which maybe would actually play into some of the decision-making from a strata council on whether they would require the 50 percent majority.

Ontario, when I looked into this, has a law that actually, when they were looking at this.... The stratas or condo boards are prohibited from rejecting an owner's application to install electric charging systems within the condo or strata property. That's how they do it in Ontario.

By the answer I just received from the minister, it sounded quite similar, so were similar provisions to Ontario looked at? Through this process, we're still saying that 50 percent is kind of a criteria, and it's leaving it up to, like I say, the strata to determine a lot of this, whereas in Ontario, it sounds like they can't prohibit.

Maybe the minister can just explain: was that Ontario model looked at when they were trying to put this together here?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** Thanks to the member. I think these are good questions. We certainly have been watching what has happened in Ontario. There are some states across the U.S. and some areas within Australia that have passed some, actually, similar pieces to what we've done.

I think it's important to note that that this type of legislation is new. There's a lot of data collection needed. There are still lessons to be learned about how we can move forward. A lot more details will come through in regulation, because I suspect the member is going to ask that. The member, I think, alluded to this question earlier as well: does this mean that there will be future changes to this?

I can say that, given that this is a new space — it's an emerging space, and a lot of jurisdictions are trying to sort out how to move forward — it is likely that there will be future changes associated with this. Again, we're going to continue to learn to see where jurisdictions are, how this conversation continues to evolve, but the information here was built on learning from other jurisdictions.

**M. Bernier:** I'll get to some more detailed questions, maybe, on power requirements when we get to it. I believe it's clause 7. I just want to ask the minister: when we talk about the requirements and the 50 percent, which is relevant to clause 3, are most...? I shouldn't say "most."

To quantify it correctly, many stratas are in a situation where there would be large or largish requirements to have the electrical infrastructure requirements. They would have to be trenched in. There would have to be possible upgrades to the facility. So there is typically, I

would argue, in most situations, a lot of work that has to have taken place.

[4:45 p.m.]

Now in the Ontario model, as I talked about, they can't refuse. The minister said that in situations like what I've just described — which I would argue is probably a majority, without all the data in front of me — that would still require 50 percent.

I guess my question to that is: is there an appeal process that can take place? We are going to have.... It sounds like we're putting a lot of onus back on stratas. We've seen a lot of changes in this House over the last little bit reflecting stratas, so of course, I'm hearing from a lot of them that they feel like they're being targeted. A lot of implementation regulation changes from government are targeting stratas specifically, understanding some of the rules that we have to deal with here on this specific topic. But through that process, is there an appeal process?

I'll use my example, again, of one out of four. So three people say no; one says yes. Is it a lost cause? The person has no choice but to say: "I can't plug in my electrical vehicle. I have to move." Do they have to appeal to the strata for reconsideration? Is there another body within government somebody can appeal to? Maybe the minister can just walk me through that.

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I think if, in the example the member shared, there was a dispute, then the individual strata owner could go through the CRT.

Clause 3 approved.

On clause 4.

**M. Bernier:** I do have a few questions here on clause 4 as well. This is really referring to the parking — parking stalls, parking privileges — a little bit bridging from some of the conversation we just had, as well.

What are the practical provisions of how this section here is really going to play out? I'm just trying to understand, again, what the thought process on section 4 is, the requirement here, and what the intention is for the minister on this section.

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The purpose is to allow strata corporations to grant a permission or privilege in relation to a parking stall with access to EV charging for a period of more than one year, if any such period is set out in regulations. The significance of this is that this change provides regulatory authority to allow strata corps to allocate parking stalls for longer than one year when an owner pays to install EV charging infrastructure at their allocated parking stall.

Without this change, owners who pay for the installation of EV charging at their designated parking stall would be at risk of losing access to the charging equipment. This

would deter owners from investing in the EV infrastructure.

**M. Bernier:** Can extended parking assignments only take place if an electric vehicle charging system has been installed? Is that the only time that we can extend that?

[4:50 p.m.]

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** A good question from the member. The intention is around EV infrastructure, but it is a prescribed class that could be used for other purposes.

Clauses 4 to 6 inclusive approved.

On clause 7.

**M. Bernier:** I guess a couple of quick questions on this, as we talked about the requirements that are going to be seen across the province when we talk about electrification, specifically into our stratas. Many stratas were built well before this discussion ever came about. What conversations has the government had with B.C. Hydro? How are they going to fit into this as a partnership that will be required to work with stratas?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** B.C. Hydro is obviously well aware of our zero emissions act and what that means for B.C. Hydro, especially as we see more electric vehicles come online. When the process is happening, yes, the strata corp. or the individual person who is getting that system, the infrastructure, in their space will still have to contact B.C. Hydro.

**M. Bernier:** I just want to flag that, obviously, this is going to be a huge cost. It could be cost-prohibitive, a cost barrier for many stratas, knowing how much it costs to install not just the charging system but either underground or overhead infrastructure requirements, depending on how that strata was built. Obviously, very few are put in with three-phase or that kind of level of power. We know that this could be a hugely expensive issue, so I just want to flag that.

My last question on this section. There are some current grants that are given. Does the minister know....? This is for putting in charging stations, those grants I'm referring to in this section. Is the minister willing to commit to maintaining the current grant levels for charging infrastructure, or does he see that changing over the next year or two?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I appreciate the member's question. I'm sure the member can appreciate that it's the Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation Ministry that handles this. But he had to try, so I appreciate his question.

Clauses 7 to 15 inclusive approved.

Title approved.

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

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 4:54 p.m.

The House resumed; J. Tegart in the chair.

[4:55 p.m.]

### Report and Third Reading of Bills

#### BILL 22 — STRATA PROPERTY AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

Bill 22, Strata Property Amendment Act, 2023, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

**Hon. L. Beare:** I call Committee of the Whole, Bill 26, Municipalities Enabling and Validating Act.

### Committee of the Whole House

#### BILL 26 — MUNICIPALITIES ENABLING AND VALIDATING (No. 5) AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

The House in Committee of the Whole (Section B) on Bill 26; S. Chandra Herbert in the chair.

The committee met at 4:58 p.m.

**The Chair:** I call the committee to order. We're here with Bill 26, the Municipalities Enabling and Validating (No. 5) Amendment Act, 2023.

On clause 1.

**M. de Jong:** Welcome to the minister and his team of staff. I hope from the conversation, the discussion we had at second reading that the minister and his staff got a sense of the lines of questioning and the areas of interest that the opposition will have with respect to this bill.

In order to perhaps help organize and expedite this, I can advise the minister that what we'd like to do.... Given the composition of the bill, we think all of our questions are going to be contained within section 2 of the bill. I should say also that our colleague from West Vancouver-Capilano would normally be engaged in this exercise but is indisposed, is ailing today, so the minister gets three for the price of one.

[5:00 p.m.]

In the proceedings today, we'll begin with the member for Surrey South, who will pose some questions in the area that we indicated earlier about the nature of the project that is the subject of this bill before the House.

Hopefully, that's helpful in terms of providing some indication of the approach we hope to take.

Clause 1 approved.

On clause 2.

**E. Sturko:** Just to be clear, I will have a number of questions that have to do with the type of services and the type of facility that is scheduled to be built in Vancouver.

I've heard from a lot of constituents. Frankly, I've heard from a lot of different people from all over the Lower Mainland, Metro Vancouver area, who have concerns about a lot of proposals with supportive housing. People, time and again, wanted me to be clear that they don't want to be a NIMBY, if that's the term that can be used. It's a "not in my backyard" type of person. What people really want is to see this government step up to provide housing that actually has the adequate supports that people need.

The majority of those, I would say, who did contact my office and the offices of my colleagues expressed their concerns with the fact that there are, time and time again, examples that we've seen where people have been warehoused or put into supportive housing, where adequate supports weren't there. It led to not only problems for the individuals that were residing in those supportive housing units but also for the community at large — increases in street disorder, open use of illicit and hard drugs, crime, people with safety concerns and then, of course, concerns of warehousing people without adequate social supports.

The bottom line is that people have no confidence that this government is going to be able to deliver the supports that residents, both inside this housing development and outside in the neighbouring community, will actually need to make this a success.

It is an extraordinary measure for the government to step in, in this way. I can certainly understand the spirit with which the government is acting, wanting to make sure that there are places for people to go when they need them. But I don't believe that the concerns of area residents have necessarily been heard. All the information was not necessarily available at the public hearing. The information that we might be able to garner today will help, at least in this circumstance, to give people — perhaps, if you're willing, Minister — some clarity and peace of mind with regard to this housing development.

What's happening here in this discussion, I think, is the questions that many of the people in this community have. Unfortunately, if this bill is passed, they might not be able to have the opportunity to ask those questions. Therefore, this is why I am engaged in this line of questioning.

A study in the *B.C. Medical Journal* found that 72 per-

cent of supportive housing tenants said that they felt their health needs had gone unmet. How is this acceptable?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I can't comment on the report the member refers to or the number the member refers to. I don't have access to it.

Maybe I'll take a step back. There's a few comments the member made.... First, she says that many people contacted her and said that they are not defined as a NIMBY. That's great to hear that people said that.

What I can share with the member is that it's often that local governments and community advocates do hear that: "not in my backyard." The member from Kamloops was talking about his experience as a mayor yesterday, and how there were lineups of people saying: "We need housing, but not in my backyard." I'm sure many people and local governments can share their experiences.

[5:05 p.m.]

Surely the member and I can agree that people will be safer in housing than they will be in a park. We have members in Vanier Park right now, sleeping in campers, and people in encampments in the neighbourhood. Surely we can agree that having people under shelter is safer than leaving them on the street or leaving them in parks. If we can't, then we can debate that for whatever time is needed.

What I can share with the member is that there was extensive consultation and extensive discussion — six days, in fact. A lot of information was provided. Public hearings happened from B.C. Housing's perspective.

I'll try my best to answer the member's questions. I think I can share with the member that the site will have 129 units; 50 percent of them are affordable units — affordable for seniors and for young families. Then 50 percent of them are actually what we deem supportive-affordable. It's a mix. It's not all supportive housing. It's a mixture in the building, which we know is healthy for communities.

The project will have supports for mental health care; medical care; education and training for individuals that need it; life skills training; and, if needed, substance use services supports. There's a whole host of supports.

Now, I appreciate that this is politics. It's easy to characterize every single supportive housing as the worst thing ever — that people don't get any supports. I get it. This is politics. But we hopefully can agree, not in this chamber, that that's not the case and that there are a lot of people who get into supportive housing who get what they need and are able to be successful in getting stability in their lives and sometimes moving to market rent or reconnecting with families.

I've talked to many people who've come through supportive housing that have had that opportunity. In fact, I met with people who have gone from encampments to shelters to supportive housing to market rental, getting skills and training to be able to go back and support others who are having challenges. I certainly hope those that are

watching don't think from the line of questioning that the term warehousing, which gets used very casually, is exactly what's going on. People are getting supports. People are getting help.

I appreciate that some people have complex needs, and it's not a clean line for them to go from encampments, sleeping in a park or just struggling to market rental housing and having everything perfectly lined up. Sometimes it goes down. Sometimes it goes up. But I do have confidence that when we provide housing and the supports people need, they can find a way out of their circumstances. We've seen it. It's been successful. It's been successful here in British Columbia. Some people need additional supports, and we're going to continue to support them.

**E. Sturko:** I would say that it's not politics; it's actually reality. It's life. It's what people are experiencing. I would say that it's the failures that have put people in a position of not being able to trust that the adequate supports are going to be there. It's based on people's experience.

I can hear the minister talking about that he's had experience meeting people that were very successful, who have gone from tent encampments right through to market and found success, which is fantastic, because obviously that's our ultimate goal. Unfortunately, time and time again, we're hearing from individuals where the proper supports have not been in place. I've seen it firsthand, in fact, in a lot of the outreach work I have done.

I was just a couple weeks ago, in fact, visiting in New West and saw some individuals who had been put into a shelter there with inadequate supports. We've seen an increase in crime in that area. We have seen, as a result of inadequate supports for individuals in that situation, a lot of street disorder and a lot of crime that's taken place. It's greatly impacted and affected business people in that area. I can understand why people in this area have a lot of concerns. Because frankly, the government does not have a very good track record in terms of being able to provide adequate supports.

[5:10 p.m.]

I don't think, even, that a person has to necessarily watch the news. You just have to walk in some of the neighborhoods where some of the worst I'm going to call so-called supportive housing is to see that people who have not received adequate supports from this government have not only been left to languish but also are now living in unfit circumstances as a result of damage that's been caused by having inadequate supports in mental health, social and behavioural services that people need.

It's not about people saying, "Not in my backyard," and that we don't want to help people. We want to help people in our backyard. What we don't want is this government creating a situation where people are housed without the proper supports, which they have, time and again. I've actually brought many examples. But for the interests of time, I'm going to ask my next question.

Respectfully, the Canadian Mental Health Association CEO, Mike Gawliuk, says that "supportive housing staff aren't qualified to handle tenants' health care concerns, and the CMHA needs to rely on health authorities and health care services at the supportive housing complexes." How is this acceptable?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I'm happy to talk about this for days. But I have to say.... The member says that this is not politics. It's clearly politics.

Every time the member gets up, it's about driving fear in communities about supportive housing, about homeless populations, every time, every question, any time there's an opportunity. There's a narrative that is trying to be built, which, perhaps, is seen as a political winner. I appreciate that the member says that she saw a couple of people in New Westminster and draws an assertion that that's how it is for everybody. That is false. That's absolutely false.

I was recently in Vernon. I got a chance to walk through, talk to people. Yes, there are some people that the system doesn't work for. Yes, of course. We have to find ways to find supports for every individual, for their unique needs, of course. I think that's understood. But the mayor there said that a 67 percent reduction in bylaw calls is because of the housing that was in the community.

So it works in communities. Yes, every single individual has unique needs. Yes, every individual has.... Some supports work for them. Then you have to find ways to adjust accordingly. But to suggest that this is a situation for every single supportive home, every individual, is just utterly wrong.

I appreciate that it's playing to an audience. If the member has questions more specific, I'm happy to do this. But if it's going to be political rhetoric, then we're going to be doing this for days. I'm happy to do it for days.

I'll scale that down a little bit just to say to the member that part of this initial project.... There were public hearings. Part of the feedback of the initial hearing or initial consultation.... The amount of units was actually reduced back to a smaller amount, given feedback, given what people were suggesting.

So there were adjustments made to the project, according to what people had said.

**E. Sturko:** It's almost insulting to hear the minister.... He goes on and talks about how I'm driving fear, that I'm just politicking. The reality is what I'm doing is called advocating for people who don't feel they're going to have their voices heard as a result of this bill and that their only opportunity now is to pass on their concerns and questions to me.

This is my job as a member of this place here, this Legislative Assembly, to ask these questions. Yet then the minister stands up and — I'm going to guess that was about two minutes — never answers the question that was actually asked to him. He says he can do this for days.

Unfortunately, we don't have days. So if you wanted to....

Interjections.

**The Chair:** Members.

**E. Sturko:** If you wanted to put people's minds at ease and stop me from, as the minister says, fearmongering, well, then, set people's minds at ease. Answer the questions that I'm asking.

So I'm going to ask: can the minister respond to CEO Mike Gawliuk's claim that: "In a perfect world, in my buildings, I'd want to have a full range of health care services and supports that could address all needs"?

Why, Minister, isn't this a reality?

**The Chair:** Through the Chair.

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The supports are there. This is what I said in the first answer. I can say it again. There will be mental health care supports; medical care supports; education and training; if needed, reconnecting to culture; life skills training; substance use supports.

[5:15 p.m.]

Additional help, whether it's accessing income assistance, disability benefits, pensions, finding IDs, setting up bank accounts. So yes, if the member wants me to help ease some of the concerns, I can confirm for the member that all of these supports will be there for those individuals that need it.

**M. Lee:** I just want to correct and give the minister an opportunity to correct his statement.

The minister, in response to the previous question, said there were adjustments made in view of the public process. What I see here on the record is the original proposal was for a 13-storey building for 140 supportive social housing units, however that's defined — I know that the member for Surrey South was trying to get clarity around that — and that on or about May 3, 2022, the applicant amended the rezoning application to reduce the number of units from 140 to 129. Of course, we know the public hearings, though, took place in June and July.

Can the minister just confirm the statement that those changes were made as a result of the public commentary? It seems to me, on the record, it was made before the public hearings were held.

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The changes were made through the initial consultation with the community, and B.C. Housing heard clearly from folks that there were concerns on the numbers, and the adjustment was made.

**E. Sturko:** The reality is that in his responses, this minister really is invalidating real feelings of community

members. People wouldn't feel afraid of this development. They wouldn't feel uneasy, unsure. They wouldn't be in opposition to this if the proper supports had been provided in other projects they had been promised in other areas. They said the same thing about their supportive housing in Nanaimo.

This is an opportunity for the minister to add some detail. How many full-time nurses will be stationed on site?

[5:20 p.m.]

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I'm just going to need a couple of minutes for the team to get the information from the not-for-profit provider that will be working on site.

I can share with the member that there will be a community advisory committee also set up. The committee that will be set up.... The membership will include B.C. Housing, the operator, Vancouver Coastal Health, Vancouver police department, local community organizations and neighbours. Maybe in the next five or ten minutes, I'll get the member a more detailed answer on the question that she had.

**E. Sturko:** That's pretty important, I think, in terms of providing some peace of mind for people in the neighbourhood to know. When the minister said he could go on for days, I didn't know that he meant his deliberations. I figured that since he was so confident, actually, in his ability to assure the public and tell them all about the services that were going to be provided, he would have that information readily available about the nurses.

Perhaps when that information does become available, in the next couple of minutes, they'll be able to also tell us what the hours for those nurses will be. Will it be 24-hour-a-day services? I don't think the advisory committee is going to be there at two o'clock in the morning, when somebody is having a crisis or needing to have some services related to complex mental health or concurrent addictions issues or any other social or behavioural issue they might have as a result of their needs they have in the community.

While we're waiting for that important information, maybe we could have a little bit of information on.... Will this facility house decamped individuals from the Downtown Eastside?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** Not everybody in this place is as gifted as the member across the way. Some of us have to rely on our staff, but we can only dream to aspire to that.

My team is going to get me the detailed information....

**The Chair:** Members. Members, let's just focus on the work. I understand there are passions on both sides involved here. If we can respect each other as hon. members, it will help us do the work in a better way.



**Hon. R. Kahlon:** My team is getting the contract, so I can be as specific as I can for the member.

[5:25 p.m.]

I can share with the member that when the member talks about someone who is needing supports, as I said, the advisory committee has people from the neighbourhood, has people from police, from Coastal Health, who help identify any challenges that may arise and find ways to mitigate them.

Now, I can't tell you if there are going to be people from the Downtown Eastside. I can tell you that there are people in the neighbourhood that need housing right now. I can tell you there are people in Vanier Park. I can tell you there are people on our affordable housing list registry that need housing from the neighbourhood.

I can't tell the member exactly who the person is going to be, but I can say to the member and anyone watching that we don't need to be afraid of people. If the notion is that somebody from the Downtown Eastside who may need housing is going to scare people, I certainly hope that's not the case.

B.C. Housing will work with the not-for-profit provider to find folks who are from the neighbourhood who need housing, because all the challenges and all the people who need supports are not all in the Downtown Eastside. There are people in all communities that need supports.

**E. Sturko:** How many mental health professionals will be stationed on site?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** We're just finalizing the contract with a not-for-profit provider for the on-site support. The member is asking about in-reach support. That is something that the contractor is finalizing with Vancouver Coastal right now.

**E. Sturko:** Has the government set out any specific guidelines?

To clarify, maybe you can define for the record what in-reach services are, because from my understanding, in-reach is not on site. What I was looking for was information about on-site services.

Still waiting for that number of full-time nurses to be stationed on site and health professionals, mental health professionals, on site.

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** Those supports that are catered to individuals are brought in from Vancouver Coastal. Those discussions between the not-for-profit provider and Vancouver Coastal are happening now. When we have more information, we'll be able to share it with the public.

**E. Sturko:** So really, the truth of the matter is it's not known by this government what those services will look like or what they'll be.

There is no actual assurance, other than "discussions are

taking place," that any of this is actually set up, because you don't have that information readily available — something I can ask and it could be answered for the public on the record at this time. How will the public be able to access this information if not now? The reality is that the government doesn't have proper supports set up for this project.

The Premier said one year ago that 15 percent of people in supportive housing sites end up causing disruptions in the neighbourhood. Is that estimate still the same?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I can only comment on the bill in front of us. But I can say to the member that we're talking about construction starting this fall. We're not saying the facility will open this fall. We're going to start construction this fall. So there's time for the not-for-profit to partner with Vancouver Coastal, identify the needs of individuals and build those supports.

Again, the community will be getting access to information. The community advisory committee will be set up. Part of that will be membership, including B.C. Housing, the building operator, Vancouver Coastal Health, the police department and local community organizations and neighbours. So people will be able to get access to information when those contracts are in place.

[5:30 p.m.]

[J. Tegart in the chair.]

**E. Sturko:** Let me just take a moment to talk about timelines. There was a little addition, a little expansion, a special project dealing with mental health, actually, in my own community. Peace Arch Hospital, to be precise, had an expansion — mental health and addictions. That project actually started.... It was in the budgeting, and it was in the process for getting done, actually, even under the previous B.C. Liberal government. That's a long time.

It just actually opened. Well, sorry; it didn't open. It still hasn't opened. It was slated to open, I should say, August of 2022, and those services were supposed to be provided to individuals suffering from mental health and addictions issues in our community, which sorely needed the money for that project, the majority of it raised by community members through the Peace Arch Hospital Foundation.

It's still not open. You know why? Because there's no staff to work it. They didn't develop an HR plan for it. They didn't have adequate people so that they could open it on time.

So when the minister stands up to give his answer, I'm not satisfied with "Hey, know what? Don't worry about it. We don't know how many specialists are going to work here. We don't know how many nurses. We don't know how many mental health professionals will work here. Because guess what? It's okay, it's not being built yet." Well, you know what? The Peace Arch Hospital was being built for almost five years, and when it was supposed to open in August, they didn't have the staff that they needed.

Maybe the minister can go on the record and talk about how they're going to ensure.... And yes, I do understand that the construction is starting this fall. How will you ensure that the proper supports are in place, the HR strategy to ensure the proper mental health and addictions specialists, the proper amount of nurses, full-time, that might be stationed on site? How will that plan be formed? What is the anticipated number, and how will that take place to ensure that once people are ready to move in, that will be completed?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** Government is always working to train up people to increase the amount of health care professionals that we have. I know that this isn't specific to this legislation, but I'm happy to say that there has been a health resource plan that's been made public — significant dollars to help attract and train more health care professionals.

Maybe that's a place where the member and I can agree. We need more skilled professionals. The plan is in place to train those professionals so that we can have them available not only here but in sites across this province.

This type of housing is not new. This type of housing was built also by the previous government. My critic across the way and I canvassed this at great length, specifically the Pandora project here in Victoria where, at the time, there was an encampment. People were all collectively moved in. We talked about what that looked like, the challenges that came from it.

Governments have all tried to ensure that people have housing and have the supports, but we have a human resource plan that's been made public, which is there to enforce, to help train the professionals that we're going need not just on this site but sites across the province.

**E. Sturko:** This type of supportive housing isn't new, and we've seen a lot of unsafe conditions, particularly under the oversight of B.C. Housing and this government.

What about the Victoria PD police chief's comments that: "Many of these supportive housing units and locations are not safe. We're seeing a trend that we need to address...." That's a quote. What's being done to address safety at supportive housing sites?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I'm glad the member asked that question. The chief was talking about the Pandora site. The member wasn't here at the time, but I can give a little history.

[5:35 p.m.]

The government at the time, the Minister Responsible for Housing at the time, had an encampment in Victoria. A decision was made, and I support the decision. Any time a government decides to help house people, I think it's a positive one. But the decision was made to take all the people in the encampment and move them into a location.

Now, we've learned a lot from that experience, other

experiences, and we continue to learn. But the lesson we learned there was that you must find ways to assess people and make sure that they have the right type of housing.

In that situation, we had all those people move into that site. There was no assessment done. We have tenants there, and we have challenges there. In particular, when the contract was signed, it came with some additional challenges for us in that the provider is not able, because of a court ruling, to limit who goes in and who goes out because of the way the contract was structured at that time. The police chief was talking about that specific site.

The police chief, who I met with multiple times, also highlighted the need for this type of housing to be built in a purposeful way. The challenges sometimes come from a site that's not designed for this type of housing and using that to house people. Here we're talking about building a new building that is designed for this type of housing.

We will continue to work with the city of Victoria on the supportive housing where there are challenges. I think that the member will be happy to hear that the police chief also confirmed that this type of housing is safer than having people in the streets, in the parks and encampments, which is positive.

**E. Sturko:** To the minister, can you talk to me a little bit about who is the target population for this building, and not just the supportive housing but all aspects of this building?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The member asked about two parts: how do we identify people for the supportive housing, and then how do we identify those people needing affordable units overall?

B.C. Housing has a registry of those who need some form of subsidized housing. It's seniors, people with disabilities, young families and those who are having challenges finding accommodation that fits within their pay range. Half the units will be for individuals that come from that registry. Often it's people that are already in the neighbourhood. Especially if it's a young family, you want less disruption, so it can be a young family that can move into that site.

The supportive housing is through a community access table, so we have not-for-profits, a whole host of stakeholders at one table. What they do is they assess individuals, and they assess what kinds of needs they have and where they can be better situated. So there are two streams: B.C. Housing registry for half the units, and the coordinated access tables that help identify individuals that would be a good fit.

Again, it's a lesson that was learned from the 2016 example, which was making sure that we can have not too many folks in one site that have more challenges — having some individuals but then having a mix, which means that everyone can be more successful and the community can be more successful as well.

**E. Sturko:** Has B.C. Housing engaged with St. Augustine School across the street from this facility, and do they support this project?

[5:40 p.m.]

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** B.C. Housing informs me that yes, they were consulted. I think, with consultation, it's fair to say that when you engage with individuals, organizations, not everyone is supportive of a particular decision. Some are, and some are not. But they certainly were engaged.

**E. Sturko:** I can surmise, basically, from that that they're not supportive.

Has the Minister of Education been engaged on this project?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I'd just advised the member that B.C. Housing, as the proponent taking this forward, engaged with the school.

**E. Sturko:** Has any discussion taken place about what types of procedures or protocols are in place in the event that a disruption involving the school related to the housing project occurs?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** That's some of the work that happens at the community advisory committee that has representatives from B.C. Housing, the building operator, Vancouver Coastal Health, the Vancouver police department, local community organizations and neighbours. I suspect, under community organizations, that the school could be a partner in that.

**E. Sturko:** So far, this government has refused to ban the consumption of drugs in parks and playgrounds. But there is a ban in place on using illicit substances on school grounds, even with our decriminalization that has come into effect in British Columbia. Who will be responsible for enforcing this policy as it relates to the Arbutus project?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** It will be no different here than anywhere else in the province. I appreciate the member highlighting that using hard drugs on school grounds is against the law, and if that were to be the case, they would be policed.

I think it's important to mention at this point that this will not be the first supportive housing project in B.C. that is near a school, that's near a park, that's near a community centre. We have ways to work with local partners to ensure that those communication lines are available for any issues that arise.

**E. Sturko:** Is the minister saying that they're planning on putting more supportive housing units near community centres and schools?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** No. What I said to the member is that there are 210 provincially funded sites which operate within 500 metres of schools in this province already.

**E. Sturko:** You know, I would like to offer perhaps another opportunity. I'll ask again, because the minister had indicated that his staff was working on getting some numbers, and I really wouldn't feel comfortable ending my line of questioning without getting a little bit more clarification for the people of the Arbutus neighbourhood, a little bit more about what the services are going to be. And I think....

Like I had indicated earlier when I started asking the minister questions, we don't want this to define people in this neighbourhood as "not in my backyard," because they have said that they want to help people.

[5:45 p.m.]

What they don't want is to have another NDP government failure to provide adequate supports to people who need help to be able to be successful in the community. They want to have a successful community. They want to have safety. They want to be able to continue to feel safe in their communities. Have you received the information on how many full-time nurses will be stationed on site, and will this service be available 24 hours a day?

I want to make sure that we get a little bit more fulsome information than was provided before. I do have some information. The former Minister of Housing had claimed that 24-7 supports consisted of offering someone a cup of tea, maybe giving a cup of tea to a person in crisis. The reality is that that's exactly the kind of statement and kind of response that leads people to be afraid of accepting supportive housing in their neighbourhood. They're afraid that it's going to just end up being a cup of tea and not the 24-hour health care supports and mental health supports that the people who are being put into these housing situations actually need.

Please provide more clarification on what health care services will be available to people living in this project.

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I thought I had. I'll just do it again. The project construction only starts this September. The work with the contractor — the not-for-profit that will be selected and working with Health and others — still has to happen.

I have shared with the member that there will be mental health support; medical care; education and training; abilities for reconnecting to culture, if that's needed; life skills training; substance use service supports, if needed; and all the other supports that are needed. I think it's important to note also that people with complex care needs will not be on the site. This is not going to be a complex care site. This is a supportive housing site, half supportive and half affordable units for people who need affordable units.

**E. Sturko:** Then perhaps define for me what is complex

care and what is supportive care. That way, people might have a little bit more information. What types of services will the individuals specifically living in this housing complex....? What are they going to need?

I understand that the minister is listing off all the hypothetical things that will exist. It's easy to make promises on paper, but we've seen time and again that these things often are little more than the paper that they're written on. The promises don't come true. So let's have perhaps....

To the minister, can you please tell us what the difference between complex care and supportive care will be? And what will those services be specifically with regard to the Arbutus project?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The opposition critic and I talked about this at great lengths during estimates, 15 hours of it last week. What I'll share with the member is that the remarks and the details are there. I'm happy to have my team send the member the transcripts of that conversation so that, in the interest of time, she'll have the breadth of that exchange.

But I would say that individuals who have intensive clinical support needs will not be on the site. That's an important piece, I think, for people to know. Those that need that type of clinical support, who have additional needs beyond just needing housing and supports around getting their life together and being able to get that stability in their life.... Those complex needs will not be on the site.

**E. Sturko:** Okay. So confirming for the record.... I'll just have you confirm this, then, Minister. You are confirming that people that don't have clinical needs will not be a part of this housing. Is addiction a clinical need? Will they have clinical needs related to their addiction? Mental health clinical needs? People that have clinical needs with regard to mental health issues — they won't be housed in this housing project then?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** What I've said is that this will not be a complex care site. There will not be individuals who have what we define under complex care at this site. But what we will have is mental health care support, medical support for individuals, education and training.

[5:50 p.m.]

Those that need it will be able to have support to reconnect with culture, life skills training, in some cases, supports such as getting the medical card, getting an account set up, getting ID and those kinds of supports. All those supports will be on site, but this won't be a complex care site.

**E. Sturko:** Just one more from me.

To the minister: can you please tell me, will staff be supervising drug consumption on site, or will residents be permitted to use alone in their rooms?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** Yes, I can confirm that there will be no public safe injection site at this location.

**M. de Jong:** The clause we're on, clause 2, will create what will become section 7 of the original piece of legislation that adds a section 7 pertaining to this project. That includes what will then be subsection 7(2).

I'm now looking at that piece of the legislation before us, what will become subclause 7(2). What does sub 7(2) do?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** This will be validating the bylaw that was passed in July 2022. It validates the previous public hearing process conducted by the city in relation to the Arbutus project.

[5:55 p.m.]

It deems the rezoning bylaw previously approved in principle by the Vancouver city council to be validly adopted, provides for powers and duties to be exercised as if the bylaw had been adopted by council under the Vancouver Charter and authorizes the council to enter into a specified housing agreement without the need to adopt a bylaw.

**M. de Jong:** Well, to be fair, it does one other thing. I'm going to say to the minister that this is where he may have detected an element of testiness on the part of the member for Vancouver-Langara and I, because it includes a pretty extraordinary provision. It deems those things to occur, notwithstanding a contrary decision by a court. Now, surely that is significant. Why wouldn't the minister acknowledge that, or has that become such an ordinary practice?

Now, I'm going to say, fairly, it's not the first time a provision like this has been used, but it is still extraordinary. So am I correct that all of those things that the minister has mentioned are deemed to have occurred, and a decision by a court that determines otherwise is...? The effect of the subsection is to render that court decision of no effect. Is that correct?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I think the member used the word "extraordinary" yesterday in his remarks. And I would refer to the member's comments where he referred to when he was the Minister of Attorney General in 2009, when they used section 16, 2009 amendments to the University Act, which did something similar — different, obviously, context but pre-emptively used legislation to perhaps have a similar type of outcome but obviously has different context.

If the member is asking me if it's extraordinary, I would agree that this is, but I would also say, to my earlier comments, that we are in a housing crisis. We've got people living in encampments. We have people living in a park — in Vanier Park.

We've gone through extensive consultation. Council made a decision. The new council says that we need to get this housing built. So I think it's upon all of us to find ways

to get this type of housing built, and that's what we're doing here.

**M. de Jong:** Well, two things. The minister and the government will have their rationale, and they have their opportunity to advance their rationale for including the provision. What I take a little bit of exception to, though, is the reluctance that the government and the minister have had to acknowledging the provision.

[6:00 p.m.]

Second question that flows from this: will the minister acknowledge that this is not speculative? There is, in fact, a court case now before the courts that is challenging both the public hearing process and the resulting bylaw. Is that correct?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I can't speak to what the court may or may not do. I can say that the city of Vancouver has asked us to move forward so we can get critically important housing built as fast as possible.

**M. de Jong:** I just asked if there was a court case. I'll ask it again. Is there a court case?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** There is a court case challenging the public hearing.

[6:05 p.m.]

**M. de Jong:** Perfect. That's what I wanted to establish on the record, and the minister began to answer what was going to be my next question. What is the nature of that court case, and what is the concern that has prompted the government to table this piece of legislation and, in particular, what will become 7(2)?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The proposed legislative amendments are intended only to ensure that bylaws, in relation to the public hearing associated with the Arbutus project, and the zoning amendment bylaw, in relation to the Arbutus project, are deemed to have been validly adopted, notwithstanding any decision of the court in relation to these matters specifically.

**M. de Jong:** Thank you. That's helpful. We can read the provision. What is the relief being sought in the court case that has given rise to this legislation?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** By legislation, we're saying that the public hearing was valid.

**M. de Jong:** With the greatest respect, that wasn't the question. The legislation refers to judicial decisions. That is there, as the minister has already acknowledged, for a purpose. There is a matter before the courts, as the minister has acknowledged. What is the relief being sought in that court case that this legislation seeks to overrule?

[6:10 p.m.]

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The relief that they are seeking is that the public hearing wasn't adequately held.

**M. de Jong:** Okay. That, too, is helpful. I just wanted to establish that on the record. The effect of this.... None of us here know what the outcome of that action and that application would be. Am I correct that this provision, which we're now examining, doesn't end that action? The litigants in that action are entitled and the court is entitled to continue to hear that application. Isn't that correct?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The team here advises me — I think this might be important for the context of where the member is going — that MEVA is typically used to enable or validate an action by local government and can be used retroactively to adopt local government bylaws.

[6:15 p.m.]

MEVA has been used for this purpose many times, including by the previous government. For example, there was an analogous use of MEVA in 2004 in relation to a court decision that was preventing a hotel development, the Nita Lake Lodge, while this rendered an existing court decision moot, and the implications were analogous. The use of MEVA was supported by local government at the time, which is Whistler.

**M. de Jong:** All I — and, in a moment, the member for Vancouver-Langara — am trying to do is to establish the effect of the legislation before us in the context of a project that has attracted a strong measure of public interest. That's all we're trying to do.

To that end, I'm hoping that the minister will confirm what I think is the case: that the government has introduced this legislation, knowing that there is existing litigation taking place. The parties to that litigation are going to litigate. One of them.... The petitioners are seeking a declaration that the enabling bylaw is invalid.

What the government has decided to do is introduce a piece of legislation that it hopes will render that decision from the court meaningless. It seems clear that that is the intention. Notwithstanding the fact that the litigants and the petitioners are exercising their right to have this matter addressed and have the procedural matter addressed in court, the government's intention and the government's hope is that passage of this legislation will render a decision in that court case meaningless and irrelevant. Is that correct?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The intent is to introduce a new law that the court has to consider if the petition continues.

**M. de Jong:** I think I'm going to cede to my colleague from Vancouver-Langara. That's a very interesting state-

ment that the minister has said, and I think my colleague is going to pursue that.

I simply want to pose this question.... By virtue of the legislation, it seems now conceivable, because none of us know what the decision of the court will be, that we could end up in a circumstance where the court determines that the subject bylaw is invalid, for whatever reason it determines. That, then, stands face to face with a piece of legislation.

[6:20 p.m.]

Notwithstanding that the court says the bylaw is invalid and that the project can't proceed on that basis, the government and the legislation say: "It doesn't matter. The project is going to proceed, and we'll proceed on that basis." That is the intent.

The intent is to contemplate a circumstance where the court says that there is a flawed process in place, and the bylaw is invalid. The legislation that the government has introduced is saying: "That doesn't matter. It's proceeding anyway." Have I summarized that accurately?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The intent here is to proceed to get this critically important supportive housing built. The city has asked us to take steps to ensure that we can get this housing built. That's what the intent is.

**M. Lee:** I just wanted to, again, correct the record that what the applicants are applying for is that the decision must be quashed and the rezoning bylaw be referred back for a new public hearing. We can have a situation where a court does render a decision that orders that the rezoning bylaw be referred back to a new public hearing. That can be the decision of the court. What this government is saying is: "Well, it doesn't matter. We're driving on."

This power that this government is exercising not only.... Well, it's basically quashing the citizens' rights, as we said in second reading.

I'd ask what message is this sending to all those other communities that also need affordable housing, supportive housing in their communities, as to how this government is prepared to disrespect the public hearing process when there are serious challenges with how that public hearing process was conducted by the city of Vancouver, for reasons we've laid out in second reading speeches here, and drive through that.

Put aside even a court of this land calling for a new public hearing, reaching that decision and saying: "It doesn't matter. We don't care about whether due process has been followed, procedural fairness at a public hearing. We don't care about what the public says. We don't care about understanding and transparency." Is that what this minister is saying for this project on Arbutus housing and every other project that B.C. Housing is working to build in other communities in this province?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** Welcome to the member asking ques-

tions. I think it's important to remind this House that we are in a housing crisis. We have people, unfortunately, sleeping in parks, in encampments in the neighbourhood. So the message that we always send to communities is that we need housing. We need to build it fast.

In this case, I have extensively laid out the consultation that happened, the engagement that happened with the community, the public hearings, a decision by local government. A new local government comes in and says: "Yes, I know the previous administration felt this way. We also feel this way."

The message that I always say to local governments is that we need housing. We need it fast. We need people to be supported as fast as we can. I can say also, beyond this, that there's a real frustration, and the member surely has heard this frustration, whether it's private sector, not-for-profit or others, that we often take too long to make decisions.

Here, a decision was made. Another council came in and said, "We actually support the previous council's decision," which, when governments change, doesn't really happen very often. They've asked us to take steps to ensure that the housing gets built.

[6:25 p.m.]

**M. Lee:** I appreciate that the government changed in the city of Vancouver. When you look at the transcripts and what's been filed in the courts on the public record, the same council members that were part of the previous city council raised the same concerns during the public hearings about how they were constrained in their ability to ask questions by the former mayor of Vancouver. The former mayor of Vancouver was endorsed by the Premier in the lead-up to this to this election in Vancouver.

When we look at the record of what unfolded here, we know that the Premier, today, was the Minister Responsible for Housing at the front end, all up until, well, let's say, the first four days of the six-day public hearing, until he stepped aside on July 22, by my understanding, of 2022. The Premier was responsible for B.C. Housing up until that day, through the first four days of this public hearing.

The Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation assumed the responsibility, I believe, on that day, on July 22, and he continued on to have that responsibility with B.C. Housing. Now we have the current minister responsible for B.C. Housing. We have three separate ministers of this government. B.C. Housing is a proponent for this project. We have the government of the day, in response to an application to court to challenge the public process, in terms of how it was conducted in an unfair way, stepping over that judicial review process in order to move forward with the project that they're a proponent on.

Does the minister not see that that poses a serious conflict in the performance of his duties in respect of this legislation that's being introduced here?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I'll just have to reiterate what I've said already to the member, which is that we're in a housing crisis. We have people sleeping in parks, in fact in a park nearby. Can't get housing. We have people on the registry that need supportive housing. We have a significant increase in people coming to this province, which is good. We need that. But we need to have housing.

We want to make sure that we can get housing built as fast as possible. When there are decisions made, we need to get to work. We need to get to building, and that's what we're going to continue to do in communities throughout this province.

Now, when it comes to this, this is specific, in the sense that we had public hearings. We had six days of them. We had lots of engagement with local communities. We had a decision made by a local government. A new local government comes in. They also emphasize the need for it. They've written to us.

We need to build housing. We're in a housing crisis.

**M. Lee:** This is where the administration of justice in our province starts to break down, when a government disrespects that need. We know that, in terms of procedural fairness, when we talk about judicial review, that is something that ought to be a foundational democratic principle. It's foundational to how we govern ourselves in this province.

When the minister earlier responded to the member for Abbotsford West to suggest that the court would consider the passage of this legislation, I'd like to give the minister an opportunity to clarify what he meant by that, because we know the courts are independent of this legislative body. Can the minister clarify what he meant by that statement?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I'll say this again, which is: the court can continue to consider the petition.

[6:30 p.m.]

**M. Lee:** I believe what the minister might have intended to say.... I'll just ask it this way. The minister is confirming that what is contemplated in this bill is that the court can continue to consider the application, but despite any decision that they might render, which is the lead-in that the member for Abbotsford West focused on, spent some time with the minister on....

Regardless of that, whether that comes into effect before or after this section comes into force, the following will occur. All the necessary approvals to move forward with the Arbutus project will be approved by this piece of legislation. Effectively, what this government is saying to the court is: "It doesn't matter what you think. It doesn't matter what you decide. It's going to have no effect, because there is no need for another new public hearing. There is no need for another new public hearing that actually provides procedural fairness to the citizens of Vancouver."

Is that what the minister intended when he said that he expects the court will consider this piece of the passage of this legislation, which effectively will mean to the court: "It doesn't matter what you decide. We've already decided for you"?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I'll just read to the member what's in the legislation, subsection 7(2), which is: "Despite section 566...of the Vancouver Charter, despite the City of Vancouver's Procedure By-law No. 12577 and despite any decision of a court to the contrary made before or after this section comes into force...."

**M. Lee:** I appreciate the minister reading verbatim the section of the bill, which I certainly have read. I take from his response that he's not prepared to engage on the question. I would assert, as I have, that effectively, as the member for Abbotsford West and myself have put to this government, this legislation will nullify the decision of any court because of the nature of what follows in clause 2.

Let me ask the minister: on what basis is this Legislative Assembly being asked to approve clause 7(2)(a), that the public hearing "is conclusively deemed to have been validly held"? On what basis are we being asked to approve that?

[6:35 p.m.]

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** On the basis that.... Early engagement on this started in 2021. During the early engagement, B.C. Housing held four virtual meetings with community groups and organizations, held four 90-minute in-depth neighbourhood dialogues with 52 neighbours and provided four weeks of public comment period, with materials presenting the proposal on the website. Then, with the city, over 30 hours, over six days of public hearings. All of this is the basis of what we're proposing here today.

**M. Lee:** I appreciate the mention that the minister provided in terms of the online consultations that were going on dating back to the May period of 2021 and before. I think, as the minister clarified his earlier statement, it was out of those earlier so-called consultations that the proponents decided to reduce the number of units from 140 to 129.

But the focus of the court application is not the earlier online consultations. It's on the formal public hearing on the rezoning bylaw. It is that rezoning bylaw that was being conducted, and should be conducted, in accordance with section 566 of the Vancouver Charter and the city of Vancouver's procedure bylaw No. 12577, which is referred to in this clause 7(2).

Again, can the minister explain to this House on what basis members of this House are being asked to approve this bill about that specific public hearing that was held on June 28, 29, 30 of 2022 and on July 14, 25 and 26 of

2022? It is that specific formal public hearing that is the basis of the application to court to challenge how that procedure was unfair.

[6:40 p.m.]

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** The six days of public hearings were adequate when weighed against the critical need for housing.

**M. Lee:** There's a lot to unpack in that statement, but I would again caution this government in terms of what it's moving forward with here. We know that this Premier, as I've said in my second reading speech, has seen many of his legislative instruments, including an ICBC reform, be found to be unconstitutional.

My concern for this government is it's proceeding down a road that may see the same result for this government. I'd say to the minister that when you put the end result ahead of how you get there, you're gutting the ability of the public to engage in a proper process that is dictated by the Vancouver Charter and the city of Vancouver procedure bylaw.

You're also gutting the ability of the courts of our lands to review what happened with that public hearing. There have been serious questions relating to the MOU with B.C. Housing that was not provided to the public, not provided to city council members that were muzzled, restricted from asking any questions relating to the operation of this facility.

Today, here in this House, in answer to questions from our colleague, the member for Surrey South, my understanding seems to be that there's new information coming out here that wasn't present during the hearing. Certainly, it wasn't present in the way the sequence of a public hearing is conducted, and that is a concern.

With all that in mind, I ask the minister: is he not concerned that the action that the government is taking here with this bill, if pursued, may prove to be unconstitutional?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** Thanks to the member for his comments and his question. What I'm concerned about is people not having housing in this province. What I'm concerned about is people sleeping in a park near a project that can't get built and is desperately needed in our community. These are the things that I'm concerned about. These are the things that keep me up at night.

I know this is a concern for everybody in this House. We all want to see housing get built for people so they're not sleeping in parks, so some of our seniors can have dignified living. That's my biggest concern right now.

**M. Lee:** Obviously, we don't disagree with that concern. We also see, of course, the need for affordable housing, supportive housing for those who are without any shelter or homes. We understand that.

Again, I caution this government in terms of its

approach, because when you take this step, you undermine the total administration of justice in our province, and people lose confidence in government as to how we proceed.

[6:45 p.m.]

We need to increase understanding. Certainly, we need compassion. But what is occurring here today, in the answers that this minister has provided, does not give myself or members of our opposition any confidence in the way this government is proceeding to, again, quash the rights of citizens of Vancouver to ensure that they had a proper public process.

Again, the Judicial Review Procedure Act is for that purpose. It's to give that independent review of how a statutory power is being exercised here by the city of Vancouver but now backed up by this government, a government that is also responsible for this project, a government that was putting forward, ramming through, this project through that public hearing process, restricting the information that was being shared, restricting the ability of the mayor, which got corrected by their own legal counsel, as to what could be shared within that public hearing process.

That whole process turned out to be — the sequence, even — unfair. The voices of the citizens to make submissions were restricted. Their understanding, certainly, was restricted. How do I know that? Well, we know that the city of Vancouver, in subsequent processes, provided the MOU up front in their package. That was not done here.

When we have a government that is prepared to ram through a project, despite the need for proper process, that's a real concern. That's when our democratic systems break down.

Again, and this will be my last question: does the minister not see that this bill, this section, is undermining our democratic process and our systems, the administration of justice in our province, and opening this up — this government — for a constitutional challenge?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** Thanks to the member for the respectful exchange we've just had here. I would just say that 30 hours, over 30 hours, of public hearings over six days.... We're in a housing crisis. We need to get housing built. We had a council who made a decision. We have another council who has come in, has validated that decision.

So it's critically important for us to ensure that we have housing available for people. We're going to continue to do that work with our local government partners and others in the community as well.

**The Chair:** Shall clause 2 pass?

Division has been called.

[6:50 p.m. - 6:55 p.m.]

Clause 2 approved on the following division:



Anderson	Babchuk	Bailey
Bains	Beare	Begg
Chant	Chow	Conroy
Coulter	Cullen	Dean
D'Eith	Dix	Dykeman
Elmore	Farnworth	Fleming
Glumac	Greene	Heyman
Kahlon	Kang	Leonard
Ma	Malcolmson	Mercier
Olsen	Osborne	Paddon
Popham	Ralston	Rankin
Rice	Robinson	Routledge
Routley	Rustad	Sharma
Simons	Sims	A. Singh
Starchuk	Walker	Whiteside
	Yao	

NAYS — 19

Ashton	Banman	Bernier
Bond	Clovechok	de Jong
Doerkson	Kirkpatrick	Lee
Letnick	Merrifield	Milobar
Morris	Oakes	Stewart
Stone	Sturdy	Sturko
	Wat	

Clauses 3 and 4 approved.

Title approved.

[7:00 p.m.]

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

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 7:01 p.m.

The House resumed; S. Chandra Herbert in the chair.

### Report and Third Reading of Bills

#### BILL 26 — MUNICIPALITIES ENABLING AND VALIDATING (NO. 5) AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

**Deputy Speaker:** Members, the question is third reading of Bill 26.

Division has been called.

If members can keep their places, we will be looking to make this a little shorter than the time indicates, as long as we've got everybody in their places.

Members, I just wanted to get your agreement that it's all right that we waive the time. Is there agreement to waive time?

Leave granted.

[7:05 p.m.]

Bill 26, Municipalities Enabling and Validating (No. 5) Amendment Act, 2023, read a third time and passed on the following division:

YEAS — 47

Anderson	Babchuk	Bailey
Bains	Beare	Begg
Chant	Chen	Chow
Conroy	Coulter	Cullen
Dean	D'Eith	Dix
Dykeman	Elmore	Farnworth
Fleming	Glumac	Greene
Heyman	Kahlon	Kang
Leonard	Ma	Malcolmson
Mercier	Olsen	Osborne
Paddon	Popham	Ralston
Rankin	Rice	Robinson
Routledge	Routley	Rustad
Sharma	Simons	Sims
A. Singh	Starchuk	Walker
Whiteside		Yao

NAYS — 20

Ashton	Banman	Bernier
Bond	Clovechok	de Jong
Doerkson	Kirkpatrick	Lee
Letnick	Merrifield	Milobar
Morris	Oakes	Stewart
Stone	Sturdy	Sturko
Tegart		Wat

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

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

Hon. L. Beare moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

**Deputy Speaker:** This House will be adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

The House adjourned at 7:08 p.m.

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### Proceedings in the Douglas Fir Room

#### Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF HEALTH  
(continued)

The House in Committee of Supply (Section A);  
R. Leonard in the chair.

The committee met at 2:44 p.m.

**The Chair:** Good afternoon, everyone. I call Committee of Supply, Section A, to order.

We're meeting today to continue consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Health.

I would now recognize the minister to move the vote.

On Vote 32: ministry operations, \$28,526,258,000  
(*continued*).

[2:45 p.m.]

**S. Bond:** The minister is getting quicker at reading off that very large budget number.

I'm going to start this afternoon.... We're going to wind our way through some of these questions. We're going to try to pick up the pace a bit this afternoon. I'm going to start with having my colleague from Peace River North ask a question.

**D. Davies:** Good afternoon, everyone.

Good afternoon, Minister.

My question.... It is one question, and it has been asked before. I have had a conversation with the minister in the past about it. No commitment yet. That is about a Northern Health audit.

I know that there have been discussions. There has been a growing number of local governments that have also been asking that the government look at doing an independent audit. There are also organizations that are now doing this. I understand that it has grown even beyond just Northern Health. They're looking at audits for the other health authorities and, generally, the Ministry of Health. I think it's really important.

I had this conversation with a number of local elected officials up in my area. It's good practice. It's not a matter of playing a gotcha. It's not a matter of any of that. It's a matter of let's find the best ways that we can move forward and deliver health services for our residents. I hear this all the time from residents in my area, as well as people that I touch base with throughout the province. We need to do an independent third-party audit, in this case, of Northern Health.

My question to the minister. Are there any plans in the near future to undertake this?

**Hon. A. Dix:** Thank you to the member for the question. I know he shares with me the importance that northern residents and northern people who live in the Northern Health region feel about health care and its central importance. We've had some occasion, in these estimates — I know the member will have been following those occasions — to talk about the very effective

measures that Northern Health has led, in challenging times, to address health human resources issues we've had in Northern Health.

I say this.... I don't think the member is disagreeing by asking this question. I want to make that very clear.

We've had an outstanding CEO who has served Northern Health since 2007, under multiple governments, who is extraordinarily accountable to communities, in detail, in all of her work. We have a board of directors of Northern Health, led by Colleen Nyce, who is from Terrace, that represents people from across Northern Health, including his community, Dawson Creek and communities across the North. I think it does a very effective job of connecting to communities and bringing accountability to boards and engaging with communities as well.

Colleen Nyce, as members of the House will know, served on the Northern Health board before I became Minister of Health and was named chair just after I became Minister of Health. I think she's an outstanding representative of the North and has done an excellent job as chair.

Northern Health continues, in some of the most extraordinary circumstances, to deliver services, with commitment, to the people of the North.

On the capital side, as the member will know.... We've seen the most significant capital effort that the Northern Health Authority has seen, with new projects in Terrace, a new project in Fort St. James, a hospital project just finished and just opened in Quesnel, a major project in Prince George and a major project in Dawson Creek, in addition to all the work we're doing across the North.

I think it's the responsibility of health authorities to engage with communities, to engage with local MLAs, to engage with local mayors and to engage with citizens. It's our public health system.

I don't feel — the member knows this from our discussions in the past — that the kind of audit that he's suggesting.... And let's be clear. Northern Health is regularly audited in the normal process of events. I think he's calling more for a review than an audit, and I understand that.

[2:50 p.m.]

We do a lot of work and efforts in communities to make changes. He'll know, for example, with respect to surgery, that we've made some changes recently. When we made them, we spent a lot of time consulting and engaging with communities, including with him. His involvement and input were both appreciated and, I think, played a role in the decisions we've made.

We're going to continue to ask the Northern Health Authority to engage with communities. We don't believe that an independent audit is in order at this time. But I accept and understand the concern that mayors and the member are bringing. I think the task of Northern Health is to engage with communities, and that's what they do.

**D. Davies:** It's not that I disagree with everything the

minister said. I do believe that Cathy did a great job. She's now retiring. There are individuals, of course, within every health authority — certainly, Northern Health is one of them — that do an exceptional job.

I can tell the minister this. It is the number one complaint call that I get in my office. It by far exceeds all other issues that my office receives. I can probably talk to all the other MLAs. That, probably, might be one of their top calls that they also receive in their offices. The issues, and I won't hold back, range anywhere from unbelievable wait times in emergency. Emergencies, of course, are challenged with recruiting and retaining doctors and nurses and other health care professionals.

A lot of those we hear are because of what is happening within the system. It's not that they don't want to live in said community. It's what is happening within the system, within the health authority. We hear about.... This is one thing that is....

I had a meeting here about two weeks back. What has been ongoing is toxic workplaces. Hours and hours, people being driven into the ground and massive burnout. We do see these continued issues that are coming up over and over again. I know the minister has had, I'm sure, emails and phone calls to his office about all of these. I think that is the biggest thing.

To clarify, I am calling for a corporate audit of Northern Health. That is what is being called for by myself. There are other MLAs, local government officials. I believe there's even going to be a resolution on the floor at the NCLGA, the North Central Local Government Association, talking about this very issue. There are concerns, and things do not seem to be getting better.

I do implore the ministry to look at undertaking or moving toward that corporate audit to find out where we need to do better. Often having that outside agency looking in.... I know, when I was a city councillor with the city of Fort St. John.... The best thing we ever did was bring in, after a number of years, and hear these issues. Have that third party come in and say: "Here's where your issues are." Sometimes you don't see them when you're within. That is what I'm asking.

I do, again, want to see if there are any plans or if maybe we have this conversation in the very near future and talk about what that might look like.

**Hon. A. Dix:** I won't go through.... We've had, with the member for Prince George–Valemount, an extensive discussion of recruitment efforts in the North. We'll just say that part of it is asked and answered. Those efforts have been effective. They've been driven by Northern Health, and we need to do more of them.

The new doctors agreement and the new nurses agreement are focused on issues in Northern Health. The new relational security model in acute care focused on communities and came from recommendations from people in Northern Health.

The fact is that Northern Health had the lowest level of diagnostic care of any jurisdiction in, perhaps, the country, certainly way less than any other jurisdiction in B.C. So 22 MRIs per 1,000 when I became Minister of Health. We've now more than doubled over the last few years. A major beneficiary has been constituents of the hon. member.

We don't need to have a full debate about all of the issues in Northern Health. I just say that I appreciate, as well, the suggestion of the hon. member, his regular contributions and his personal advice to me in crucial moments. I don't forget that.

I believe that Northern Health is doing a good job and fulfilling its mandate. It faces challenges that other health authorities don't face. We've got to continue to find innovative solutions to retain people, to innovate in the health care system and to, of course, recruit people. You see this in both of these agreements and the actions in the health human resources plan, which we've discussed. So again, I won't repeat those discussions.

[2:55 p.m.]

I hear what the hon. member is saying and the issues that he is bringing to this House, but I respectfully disagree about the need for such an independent report. What we need — what people in the North tell me we need, what opposition members usually tell me they need — is action and not reports. That's what we continue to intend to bring.

**S. Bond:** Thanks to the minister for his responses. I really want to thank my colleague from Peace River North. I know how hard he works on behalf of his constituents. Today he is reflecting the concerns that people from where he lives and in the region are expressing, and I think it's important to acknowledge that, as the minister has. And we all need to encourage the system to respond to those concerns. So thank you to the minister.

I'm going to ask a couple of questions, and then I'm going to go back to.... I'll give the minister a heads-up here. I'm hoping that he will have specific UPCC information for me, as he did last year. But I want to quickly go through a couple of other issues, and then we'll go back to UPCCs.

One of the things we've heard about from physicians, and concerns have been expressed, is about not receiving timely payments — it's not everyone, but some physicians — in terms of payment from MSP. Invoices get submitted, and then they get rejected multiple times. It's been an ongoing problem. For some physicians, it's been at least two years.

The concern we hear is that the resubmission process takes a long time, and the government, through MSP, has said it's a glitch. It's an issue between MSP and the electronic medical records system that some physicians use. So I, first of all, want to confirm that the minister is aware of that situation, and I would like to hear a commitment to solving that problem, if it hasn't been solved already.

Physicians have enough challenges. The last thing they need to be worried about is whether or not they're going to be reimbursed by MSP.

**Hon. A. Dix:** I would say that physicians have brought these issues to my attention from time to time. We actively manage this issue. It's an important one. The volume is, as the member will understand, massive, in terms of the number of visits and the number of buildings.

Occasionally in the fee-for-service system that we've had, there are mistakes in paperwork — because there's too much paperwork, frankly — and mistakes on our side, and we actively manage those issues. One of the good things about the new payment arrangement is the work that's been done — it didn't get as much attention as all the family doctors things — through this discussion of the physician master agreement between the Doctors of B.C. and ourselves in both reducing the amount of paperwork, which we want, and giving doctors, physicians and others support, and administrative support and time, to do some of the very significant work they've done.

I think the model itself is geared towards providing more care and doing less paperwork, and that is a good thing. It's one of the reasons and one of the active goals of both the government and of the Doctors of B.C. in those discussions.

**S. Bond:** Thank you to the minister. I certainly understand the massive volume of work that's undertaken. But I'm sure — and I know the minister understands this — it's a very difficult circumstance when that happens to a physician, especially when you think about family practice and the margins and all of the challenges with all of those things. So I wanted to raise it to make sure that it remains on the minister's radar screen.

I want to move quickly to the gender-based fee review. It's my understanding that under the physician master agreement, there was a commitment to conduct a collaborative review of the payment schedule to identify whether there are inequities in fees for services provided to patients who are women or gender-diverse, as well as inequities in fees for services provided predominantly by physicians who are women.

Obviously, a critically important issue. I'm wondering if the minister can confirm: is the review underway, and when does he anticipate that work would be completed? Will he be making the information public so we know that if there are gaps or inequities, that will be rectified?

[3:00 p.m.]

**Hon. A. Dix:** Yes, it was in the PMA. Yes, we're beginning to work on it. Yes, it will be public.

**S. Bond:** All right, I'm impressed. That was the quickest answer by the minister so far in three days, and I am cel-

ebrating that. The Minister of Post-Secondary Education agrees with me, so I feel like I'm on solid ground here.

Let's talk a little bit about the UBC school of medicine expansion. It's always good news when we see more spaces, the expansion of training spots. Could the minister tell me what start-up and sustained funding was provided for the expansion of UBC's school of medicine as it was announced last fall?

The backgrounders in September said: "This optimizes the existing capacity at the UBC Faculty of Medicine." We also noted that there was a comment that they're still waiting for start-up and sustained funding. Could the minister assure me, and outline for me, that start-up funding and sustained funding was provided for that expansion?

**Hon. A. Dix:** Just to give the member the numbers, there's an undergraduate increase in spaces, and then there's a postgraduate medical education expansion. I've got to work on this, because the Minister of Post-Secondary Education is here. So I've got to get these things right. She routinely finds it when I'm not.

Undergraduate medical education expansion, 2022-23, is \$4.85 million. That's the fiscal year that just ended. This is the undergraduate: \$8.21 million in '23-24, \$9.66 million in '24-25; \$17.49 million in '25-26.

For the postgraduates, it was \$1.82 million in the fiscal year that just ended, March 31, 2023, but then it picks up, because most of it wasn't in that year. It's \$12.38 million this year, \$21.46 million next year and \$27.74 million in '25-26.

It's funded, and it's on track. We obviously appreciate UBC's commitment to this effort. I think it's very important. It's funded — as well as, obviously, all the work we're doing with SFU.

**S. Bond:** Thank you very much to the minister for those numbers. I'll certainly take a look at them after we finish estimates.

While we're on the topic of medical schools, I'm wondering if the minister can tell me if he anticipates receiving the business case for the SFU medical school within this year, and what the expectation is of when that might be received.

[3:05 p.m.]

**Hon. A. Dix:** SFU is working to a date of May 31 this year.

I would say there may be more questions on this subject. While the minister's here, I think her estimates are still open and upcoming. I mean, I'm sure she'll be responding to some of those questions. But yes, that's when the business case is expected. Going forward, of course, the dean is in place, and I think it's really exciting for SFU.

**S. Bond:** I know that my colleague the shadow minister for post-secondary has a number of questions for the min-

ister. I just wanted to make sure we know how long it takes to train health care professionals. What's critical is that we expedite and get moving. It's one thing to make a promise. It's another thing to actually deliver those spaces and have people into the system as quickly as is possible.

I want to go back now to UPCCs. I thought we had a good conversation about community health centres and about primary care networks. I should say that I thought the discussion on rostering was really helpful. I actually had somebody ask me last night: "How do I get on that?" "Well, just check out *Hansard*. I'm sure we can walk our way through that." So that was very helpful.

Let's talk about UPCCs. Can the minister tell me: in the last fiscal year, how many patients were attached to a primary care provider at a UPCC?

**Hon. A. Dix:** I'll do a little compare and contrast for the member, just to get started. I'm going to compare period 10.... There are 13 periods in the year, four weeks per on 52 weeks. So we're comparing period 10 of '21-22 to period 11 of '22-23.

In period 10 of '21-22, there were 290 FTEs. In period 11 of last year, which is about two months ago, there were 416. There were 26 UPCCs. There are now 30 UPCCs. At that point, in period 10 of '21-22, there were 1.08 million visits. In period 11, which is in February this year, there were 1.7 million visits. You minus the two to get a sense of the annualized visits.

Obviously, UPCCs disproportionately provide episodic care, and they have particularly in this period. I've made the case to the member before how valuable they've been in communities at a time when many doctors were giving care virtually. That's been their primary function, and we can go through the visit area.

On the attachment side, which has not been their primary function, there are some UPCCs that haven't attached but have been extremely successful in terms of visits, such as Kelowna, which is our most successful. It's not been a place of attachment. It's been a place of urgent and primary care, and that's been the strategy.

The total attachment is 25,881. Total visits, though, as of period 11, were 1.7 million visits.

**S. Bond:** Thank you to the minister for that. I'm wondering if he could tell me — again, if he wants to provide me with a chart, or however he would like to do that, that is fine: what is the average annual budget of a UPCC in each health authority? I'm very specifically interested in the one here on the West Shore, if the minister could provide that. But I'm very interested in knowing what the average annual budget of a UPCC is.

The minister knows that there's been a lot of discussion about looking.... Again, I'm always careful to remind the minister this isn't about the people who work in them and all of those things. But we want to make sure that when we're making significant investments of taxpayer dollars,

we also want to make sure the system is working, that results actually matter.

If he can provide me with the average annual budget of a UPCC in each health authority and, specifically, the numbers for West Shore.

[3:10 p.m.]

**Hon. A. Dix:** What I'll do, for the moment, just to keep the discussion going.... This is a response by health authority, all of them. That's how it has been framed.

What I'll talk about is two things. Obviously, not all UPCCs are the same. Some are much bigger and are producing much more visits, such as Kelowna, for example, which has been remarkable in the number of patient visits it has received. It's also bigger than some of the others. Kelowna has 25 FTEs, for example. West Kelowna has less. The member will know this. Kelowna has a bigger UPCC than West Kelowna, so it would have a bigger budget. A budget for 25 FTEs and 15 FTEs. They're different.

Let me give it to the member by health authority. Some health authorities and communities are, clearly, better suited in urban areas, although one of the most successful UPCCs we have is in Cranbrook, in the riding of the member for Kootenay East. It has been off to a remarkable start. In fact, it has beaten all of its projections in a dramatic way.

Across health authorities — let me give you the annual operating budgets. FHA is \$24.8 million. IHA is \$15.7 million. Northern Health is \$2.1 million. We've had different models, but there are Prince George and Quesnel in that case. Vancouver Coastal Health is \$26.4 million. Vancouver Island Health is \$33 million. Those are the total UPCC budgets across the health authorities.

Obviously, different health authorities have different numbers of UPCCs and different demands in the process. Others have had priorities on other things. It's not my view that every community is suited for a UPCC. Obviously, they're most suited in larger and medium-sized communities. Some of our most successful have been in both, from Prince George, where we have a very different model of a UPCC than we do, say, in the Surrey centre one, the Surrey-Newton one or others.

So there are different models everywhere, but those are the overall budgets.

**S. Bond:** I'm wondering. When the ministry counts patient visits to a UPCC, do they...? Does the government combine visits to physicians, nurse practitioners and registered nurses together, or is it separated out? Is it differentiated when the count is done?

**Hon. A. Dix:** What that reflects is the family physicians and nurse practitioners, those visit numbers.

Obviously, the work of urgent and primary care centres involves many others. Lots of allied health professionals provide supportive work and are part of the team. But when we're counting visits, we're not triple counting, in a

way. They're the NP visits and the family physician visits. We're working, as we provide more information on it, to track that other work that's done.

I'll just give an example, for the sake of argument. We've been talking about the Cranbrook Urgent and Primary Care Centre. Why it shows the work.... In that case, there's a real need for allied health professionals in the community. So 7.3 of the 14.9 FTEs are actually allied health. This is what the community of doctors wanted to support in Cranbrook.

It's actually, in that case, 0.9 physicians, although they get other supports. In some UPCCs, the physicians are provided through fee-for-service, or have been. Then it's 1.7 nurse practitioners, 5.0 nursing, 7.3 allied health professionals at Cranbrook. That's an example of one of them.

Yes, we have to measure that. In that case, we've really had a positive response, which shows that it can't be the same UPCC in every community. That's the balance there.

What we're trying to show with the visits is, principally.... We count it through family physicians and nurse practitioners.

[3:15 p.m.]

**S. Bond:** Thank you to the minister. That's helpful. Can the minister tell me if all UPCCs are now fully staffed and, if it's possible for him to tell me, which ones are not?

**Hon. A. Dix:** What I can do is sort of give a general view of that, and we'll see if we're getting at it.

As I said, we've had a very good year for recruitment of UPCC, understanding that there are four more net. So that's part of it. We went, basically, in period 10 of the last fiscal year, which would have been end of January, I think, of 2022, to February 2023.... We went from 290 to 415, so we've had a good recruitment period.

Every organization.... When I reported last year — I think we had a debate last year — Kelowna was fully staffed. People move in and out in health care all the time, so in this period that we're talking about, Kelowna was at 22, I think. Fully staffed is 25. That's the natural process. There's a churn to that process.

Where the member would be correct or where the concern is most significant, if you look across UPCCs, is on Vancouver Island. That's been where the biggest challenge has been. The one that the member was referring to, in West Shore, has been, in some ways, the most successful in terms of staffing and is connected to other primary care services very well as well, and the new CHC in the region.

Some, like Nanaimo, are harder to judge, because the physician staffing in Nanaimo is fee-for-service. It's the rest of the staffing that you're judging, so it's only ten, even though it's a UPCC that's actually quite successful in terms of treating patients.

Across the board, in terms of the total recruitment, we're at 100 percent or close to 100 percent in, probably, 12 of them. We're between 80 and 90 in the lion's share, and then

there are some under 80 percent of what we wanted. What we've done in a lot of UPCCs is.... We're building out, and the last stage will be to support attachment more. But the key aspect, especially given the most recent agreement and the work we're doing with the Doctors of B.C., is to continue to use UPCCs to support episodic care. That's a key contribution that they make in communities.

**S. Bond:** When a UPCC is considered fully staffed, does that include a mix of permanent staff, temporary staff? Is it a mix? The minister has said that there are likely 12 that are at 100 percent. Would that include a mix of staffing arrangements, permanent and temporary?

**Hon. A. Dix:** One of the main differences is on physicians. At some of the UPCCs, they're not staff or staff positions. They are paid for through fee-for-service. It's working with the local division of family practice and staffing through fee-for-service. We see that in some cases. So that's the difference. They're not staff against not-staff. That's the model that has been selected.

We have different models, as we've discussed before. In Vancouver City Centre, that was through a noted provider in Vancouver, who is providing that on behalf of the health authority. In Nanaimo, that's Medical Arts. In Prince George, it's a very strong and interesting partnership with the division of family practice that the member will be aware of.

There are two things that I would say. It's team-based care, so everywhere we see a combination of.... Let me just give you.... I said it was 415.7. To give the member a sense, the actuals....

[3:20 p.m.]

This is the actuals hired in UPCCs: 92.7 physicians, 48 nurse practitioners, 187 nursing and 74.8 allied health. So when we're looking at who is being hired, that's the mix.

I think one of the challenges.... It's an important challenge. We've got to continue to build out both physician care and nurse practitioners to continue to ensure that those services are in place, because for a lot of the episodic care, that's really important. But the team-based care is one of the things that makes UPCCs and primary care networks, I think, unique and a positive resource in the community. So that's the discussion.

Principally, if you look across that, those are our full-time staff. An FTE amongst physicians.... Say there are five physicians sharing a position; it might be 0.2, 0.2, 0.2, 0.2, something like that. The other staff tend to be more just one person, one FTE.

**S. Bond:** I would like to ask a specific question about the Chilliwack primary care centre. How many physicians and nurse practitioners have been approved for funding at the Chilliwack primary care centre, and how many are currently employed on a full-time basis?

**Hon. A. Dix:** What I have is information on the Chilliwack PCN. What I've asked the staff, unless the member wants to wait for the answer now, is just to keep going, and then we'll get that answer to her as soon as possible. Then we can have the exchange, perhaps, on Chilliwack if that works for her.

**S. Bond:** I appreciate that. I probably won't pursue further questions around that. I just would like to know those numbers related to an issue that I'm working on.

When the minister initiated the primary care refresh last fall, was there a formal review or evaluation with regard to the governance framework, the implementation and the operations of UPCCs? I think all of us know that nothing's perfect the first time you roll it out the door. I think ongoing evaluation, looking at monitoring and looking at where there may be gaps.... So is there a planned formal review or evaluation?

**Hon. A. Dix:** There's something called the Family Practice Services Committee. This isn't specific to UPCCs. It is to PCNs, and obviously, UPCCs play a role in PCNs everywhere.

Dr. Sari Cooper and the person just behind me, Ted Patterson — on the screen, to my left, and I think, to my right. Mr. Patterson is the co-chair of that with Dr. Cooper. There's been a reach-out everywhere to the partners — which include Indigenous communities, local communities, other health professionals and, of course, doctors — to see where the PCN process is working or it's not.

[3:25 p.m.]

That consultation has happened. Obviously, UPCCs are part of that. That's not exclusive to UPCCs, but it is to primary care networks, of which UPCCs are a part.

**S. Bond:** I think that that work is really critical, because we look at.... I've seen it firsthand. People line up first thing in the morning, in many cases, to get into a UPCC, and it's full by 8:15 in the morning.

I have a concern that many people.... The minister speaks to the model of UPCCs as focused on episodic care, and perhaps attachment isn't the primary goal. But when people line up, many of them are looking for a family physician. They want to be connected to a physician so they can have the longitudinal care that they need and deserve.

Tough question, but does the minister believe that the investment that's been made in a model that often results in people waiting for a long period of time and not necessarily ending up with an attachment to a family physician...? Should that continue to be a priority when we look at cost and effectiveness?

I'm wondering. I'll tie this in so that we can.... I thought we had a good discussion yesterday about community health centres and the value that they provide. They are community-driven. They're very individualized in terms of how they operate. Has the minister taken a look at...?

Okay, we created UPCCs. Has there been any thought to if we should be shifting more to the community health centre model?

I guess I just want a sense that there's an ongoing evaluation of effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and, most importantly, results for patients and that that's all weighed and considered without stubbornly — I use that word; the minister doesn't have to rise up here — heading in one direction when, in fact, we need to look at the outcomes and consider whether or not there are other ways to better meet the needs of patients.

**Hon. A. Dix:** I appreciate the question, because it's absolutely legitimate. It is a significant public investment. And I would say what I said in answer to a previous question. First of all, the doors have been open of UPCCs, so some of that lineup is people wanting to see a physician or a nurse practitioner in person.

We've gone through a period where we went, for the overwhelming number of doctor visits, from in-person visits to virtual visits. For some people, that hasn't worked very well. We're working that issue through with the Doctors of B.C., this issue of virtual visits. We were whatever we were, 90-10, and then we went to 30-70 the other way because of COVID. Now we're 62-38 or 60-40. So that's part of it.

The UPCC being open is providing services for people who need them. A significant portion of those people are people who have family doctors, but they want to see a doctor or a nurse practitioner, and that's what they do when the UPCC's doors open. So that's of value.

I think it's similar to some of the issues in the hospital. In health care, things are connected. I think we have been remarkably flexible in the approach here, given the challenges of the times. UPCCs have a number of different models, different in Prince George than they are at REACH, which is a community health centre that runs a UPCC for the government, than the one on Victoria Drive, which is health authority-owned and -operated.

The models have been different in different places. They're all team-based care, but the models of care have been different. I think we have to learn where they've been most effective and where they weren't.

I think a legitimate criticism of what we did in the capital regional district was too many UPCCs too quickly. I think that's a legitimate criticism. I have to acknowledge that. They're building out. The one in central downtown Victoria is now one of the largest, in terms of staff. But that had an impact, certainly, in the beginning phase. And that affected, I think, confidence here in the UPCCs that you don't see in other communities.

There are 30 UPCCs in B.C., and there are about 2,000 doctors' clinics in B.C., so they're a small portion of it. They're providing an important service for episodic care and connecting with the community, team-based care,

providing care for a bunch of people. I think it's a good model to go with.

[3:30 p.m.]

The primary care network is what we spend the most money on. It's a model that builds on the existing model of what are sometimes called patient medical homes, but they're really doctors' offices or health clinics of different kinds, linking them together in a community so that the community can support one another and build out services so that in some communities, where you have mental health services, a doctor can refer someone right away.

That's the broader primary care network of which UPCCs are a part. Community health centres are another part. There's a very significant difference in organization, where it's effective, of rural health care and urban health care as well.

I think we have to pursue all the models. All of this has changed by the fundamental changes that have come in primary care, with our agreements with the Doctors of B.C. and the increase in the number of nurse practitioners as well. All of that means and all of that has, I think, demonstrated, on the part of those who are leading our primary care network efforts, a lot of flexibility.

I think the UPCC model is effective. I think it's worked for people. I think we have to address the broader issues in primary care, and that's what we're seeking to do through recruitment of a lot more family doctors and nurse practitioners and having them working in family care.

One of the things we've done in B.C. that's more effective than most places is to create opportunities for nurse practitioners in primary care. In a lot of places, they're much more used in the hospital, say in Ontario, than they are here. So we're building out these models.

We're doing all of those different things. There's sometimes a focus on UPCCs, as there is on walk-in clinics, which we've also got to do some work with, to integrate them in a better way in the system. I think our walk-in clinics often provide really important care for people in communities. You see the same phenomenon there as you sometimes see at UPCCs, which is that the patient capacity is reached early in the day, and then they work through that capacity in the course of the day.

I think we need it all. As we build out patient care and hopefully reduce the number of people unattached to a family doctor, I think the role of UPCCs will continue to be important, especially for those who don't have access, who are unattached or who may choose not to be attached to a family doctor but occasionally need care from the health care system.

**S. Bond:** Well, I appreciate that answer. I guess I look at some of the comments that have been made about UPCCs being a stopgap, for example. Perhaps the minister would like to tell me what his view of that is when it comes to describing a UPCC as a stopgap measure. I'm assuming it's linked to the fact that it provides a place, other than an

emergency room, where people can get care so they're not being forced to visit a hospital emergency room, which the minister and I both know have faced some pretty significant challenges and continue to. So maybe just a quick comment on stopgap, what that actually means and looks like.

From my perspective, when we think about the discussions we've had over the last day, particularly, it is about access to primary care. I think we would probably agree that there's more work to be done, and people need to better understand the integration of the system, where they fit, how they navigate their way through those pieces of the health care system more broadly.

Maybe just a comment on stopgap, and then I'm going to move on to a question about physician attraction.

**Hon. A. Dix:** I would say that's not the term I'd use. One of the important things that UPCCs do, as well, is most of them are open 365. I think for people seeking care in communities, that's really important. It's not stopgap to have a place that's open on a Saturday and Sunday in a community and that's not the emergency room and that people can go to. I think that's of value.

Most UPCCs are open well into the evening. It's the same issue. A lot of doctors' offices.... They work very hard. They're doing all kinds of different things. But the offices' hours of operation tend to be ordinary work hours, so they're useful for people.... It's having a place for episodic care where people who need to see, or feel they need to see, a doctor for an urgent reason that day can go and get to see a doctor or nurse practitioner or the appropriate health care assistants. All of those, I think, are useful things to do.

I think sometimes the criticism of the UPCC is the criticism of a broader desire for primary care, to ensure people have access to a family practice doctor. You focus on the things that are there and not on the things that are not there.

[3:35 p.m.]

What UPCCs have done is really useful, but they're one tool in the system that I think provides both an excellent level of team-based care, referrals and connection to the health care system for people who might be disconnected to that system — and, of course, care for people who need to see someone for an urgent reason during the day and don't want to go to an emergency room. All of those are important roles for UPCCs.

I think, in most parts of the province now, they're doing well in terms of recruitment. We've seen a real growth in the past year, and we're going to continue to see a building out of that and a connection of that, importantly, to primary care networks. If UPCCs are off to the side here and are not connected, that's not what we want.

We want UPCCs to be a place people go. In a primary care system that's growing, it may be a place that people can connect and maybe they only go to once. That's not a stopgap if they're connecting to the services they need.



Those might be different services in a UPCC than in another doctor's office. But if we're doing that, then they're doing their task well.

But 30 on 2,000? I think the 30 should perform well, and they're really important. But with primary care networks, with community health centres, with patient medical homes and doctors' offices, we need to build out a system and community that responds to patient needs which are varied: in the course of a year, maybe; in the course of a lifetime, certain.

**S. Bond:** In November, there was an announcement related to internationally educated and trained physicians. I'm specifically interested in the changes that the College of Physicians and Surgeons were going to make in their bylaws. This focused on U.S. physicians. There was obviously a set of expectations about practice for that physician.

Can the minister tell me how many American-trained physicians have been recruited to B.C. since that announcement and where they are employed?

**Hon. A. Dix:** Thanks to the member for the question. The amended bylaws were put in place on January 13, 2023, so we don't have information. There's a recruitment campaign that's going to be associated with this.

But the changes — the college moved quickly on this. What it does is enable American Board of Medical Specialties-certified physicians with three years of specialty training in these following areas — emergency medicine, internal medicine and pediatrics — to obtain restricted licences to practise in B.C. We'll try and seek more information on how it's going.

This is something we can recruit behind, because there is a significant interest from American doctors in coming here. This creates a new pathway for three-year-trained, certified physicians to apply their training and experience to practise medicine in B.C., without the requirement of an additional residency training that would be required for a provisional or full licence.

What we're doing is allowing for this possibility. Then we can recruit behind it. This was an impediment to people coming. We'll provide more information, but that's the change that was put in place. The college said they'd put in place in January, and they did.

[3:40 p.m.]

**S. Bond:** I would look forward to an ongoing update about the effectiveness of that. I've certainly had people contact me about people living in Seattle, who are physicians in fact born in Canada and who want to come back — trained in the U.S. I will be very interested in seeing what the numbers look like.

I would like to move on to the issue.... You know, it may not seem like a big thing, but it is a big thing. I'd like to talk about administrative burden and the fact that physi-

cians are spending a doggone lot of time on administrative tasks. I'd like to ask the minister, if the ministry knows: do we track, and do we know, how much time physicians spend on administrative tasks in our province? Do we have an analysis?

I'm going to talk about the Administrative Burdens Working Group in a minute. I'm just asking, generally speaking. I thought it was really interesting when the Doctors of B.C. talked about a cumulative impact lens on physician demands. It's funny because normally, when we talk about cumulative impact, it's usually in the natural resource sector or land management and planning, and things like that.

They made some really important points. One of them is a quote from their work: "No single task is the ultimate cause of a problem, but when many tasks accumulate over time, significant stress is often the result." I think what British Columbians want is to make sure that physicians are freed up, wherever possible, to do what they are called and trained to do.

Does the province analyze the amount of administrative work that is being done? The Doctors of B.C. talked about using a cumulative-impact lens. Has that been considered by the minister?

**Hon. A. Dix:** I think that for the new payment model, one of the advantages of it is: there's a set-aside, and a recognition of that administrative burden. For a doctor who's working on that model — who are not all of the doctors, but there are 60 percent in longitudinal family practice — it's a significant change. This was a priority for us and physicians in the most recent round.

So we've set up.... People sometimes smile when we say we've set up a process and a committee together, but we have, and funded it through the B.C. Patient Safety and Quality Council — to focus on that very question of administrative burden. The pilot projects for the first year in dealing with that are what are called special authority forms, BC Cancer forms and appointment processes for health authority facility imaging services. Those are the pilots to reduce the administrative burden in all three of those areas.

In addition to the work we're doing together, I think one of the challenges that a lot of physicians face is that other people are asking them to do things outside of the health care system, that people come to them for but that are essentially administrative — and sometimes pay extra for, though.

An example: on my driver's licence, at different times in the past, I've gone to doctors, and then they have to fax to the driver's licence office to allow me to continue to drive — as a person with diabetes, for example. Those are the kinds of things, but there are a lot of administrative burdens.

A lot of people are asking doctors to do things that are outside of the health care system and for which they are

sometimes not remunerated, or not remunerated appropriately, and that, in any event, take a lot of time.

[3:45 p.m.]

We're working with them on that, but there is an absolute process. It was a key issue raised by them, and by us, in the physician master agreement. It is a process that is action-oriented. These are pilot projects to reduce administrative time in specific areas. We're going to go through those. The three that were identified first were the three that I discussed.

**S. Bond:** Thank you to the minister. I thought the statistic from CFIB was interesting. They actually say that physicians in Canada cumulatively spend 48.8 million hours per year on administrative tasks. The interesting part of that is, from their perspective, and looking at the analysis they've done, 30.5 million hours are considered necessary and 18.5 million are unnecessary.

I can understand and appreciate that the new physician payment model compensates, but what we want them to be compensated for is necessary work. The issue, as I understand it, that is being raised by the Doctors of B.C. is redundancy. Again, one of their recommendations did deal with third parties and trying to figure out how to limit the fact that they're asked for all kinds of things, like signatures and all of those things.

I'm glad to hear that work is being done, and I'm glad to hear that it is a priority. That is not where we want our health care professionals spending their time. What's necessary, absolutely, but let's get rid of the unnecessary.

There was a memorandum of agreement that was created to deal with this issue, the Administrative Burdens Working Group. Terms of reference were to be developed following the physician master agreement.

I'm wondering if the group has met. If so, who are the members of the working group? Maybe an update on that Administrative Burdens Working Group. Has it met? Who is involved with it? How often do they meet? Let's just start with that.

**Hon. A. Dix:** I'll share with the.... I'm going to get a copy of the list of the membership. It's shared by the Patient Safety and Quality Council, as suggested. The three items that were the first priorities were suggested by the Doctors of B.C. Those were particular items. This is a very concrete and practical process to deal with specific items that were causing administrative burden.

I think one of the challenges with the fee-for-service system has been.... One of the frustrations is that, often, we've done good things to increase the complexity of the system. Sometimes special areas of treatment. I'll go back to diabetes or whatever. We're attempting to use fee-for-service to appropriately compensate doctors, and sometimes the additional burden of dealing with new codes has been in place. That's why the goal has been to

reduce fee codes, in this PMA process, working with the Doctors of B.C.

This committee has been set up under the auspices of the Patient Safety and Quality Council. Its priorities have been identified for the first year. It has a budget, and it's acting.

I'll be happy to share the membership. I can just provide the member with that on paper.

**S. Bond:** I may have missed it. Is the working group called the Administrative Burdens Working Group? That was the memorandum of understanding that was signed. One of the things....

The minister anticipated one of my questions. I was going to ask about funding. This group, obviously, has a budget. It will meet regularly. Physicians would, obviously, have the opportunity to bring items. One of the specific suggestions, at least for a one-year pilot, was to actually look at specified forms and processes that create administrative burden. Is that part of the work that's being done, making sure we're looking at the reams of paperwork that need to be done?

As I understand it, there will be recommendations coming back from this working group that would, I'm assuming, come to the Ministry of Health and the Doctors of B.C. Could the minister just confirm...? What is the process for actually making change? Is there a focus on, literally, specific tasks and forms in order to identify what might be redundant or unnecessary?

[3:50 p.m.]

**Hon. A. Dix:** Yes. The specific form.... The funding is in place. I'll just say that the co-chairs are Liana Silva from the Ministry of Health and Rob Hulyk from the Doctors of B.C. There is a budget in place, and it's a very practical thing.

The Doctors of B.C. identified the three types of forms of administrative burdens that they want to focus on first. So that came from them. That's going to be very practical. It's not going to be a catch-all for everything. We want to focus on things, resolve them and then move on to further issues over time.

Those are, as I noted, the special authority forms, the B.C. cancer forms and the appointment processes for health authority facility-imaging, which are important considerations — again, not identified, in that case, by the Ministry of Health but by the Doctors of B.C. in that consultation.

The work has begun. It's very focused in a very concrete way on specific problems. It has excellent co-chairs and is under the auspices of the Patient Safety and Quality Council.

**S. Bond:** Will there be a public reporting out so there is a sense that we know the work has been done and what it's accomplished?

**Hon. A. Dix:** The reports would go to the Physician Services Committee, which is joint ministry and Doctors of B.C. So it could be. It's public, in that sense, with the Doctors of B.C. The process, and many of these issues, could be easily shared publicly as well. There'd be no reason not to share it publicly.

I think what we want to show, obviously, is progress on that. It would be communicated. It would have to be communicated to everyone who's a doctor in British Columbia.

**S. Bond:** Thank you to the minister for that update. I think, again, it's part of the process of.... I guess it's, in essence, red-tape reduction. It's trying to get rid of the things that are redundant or unnecessary so people can focus on the things that they really need to be doing.

I want to move to practice-ready assessment if we could, please. Again, still focusing on primary care. I'm wondering if the ministry has already increased the practice-ready assessment seats to 48, and are those seats full?

**Hon. A. Dix:** The process is going step-wise. The goal is, for of March '24, to get to 96. It's 32 now. This spring it'll be 41, in the first step. It'll go, step by step, up to 96. Progress is being made. We already have the confirmation of many candidates, of course, from the fall of 2023. We're in the process now. So it'll be 41 this spring. Then it'll build up to 96 by March of 2024.

[3:55 p.m.]

**S. Bond:** I'm wondering if the minister could just go over those numbers again. What I think I'm hearing is that we're increasing the intake. Are all of those seats full? If he could just walk through the incremental numbers again. And I'm wondering if the minister can assure me that the program has the necessary supervision capacity to take on a substantive expansion.

**Hon. A. Dix:** First of all, there's an active management process as we build out. We're increasing capacity. That means finding more preceptors, and that process is happening now. It's on track. We're on track in terms of recruits coming into the program. We feel confident, although it's challenging for some people to come.

[H. Yao in the chair.]

Sometimes you're working a year in advance, for someone who's coming to the country, to work through all the immigration challenges that they face. But we're confident about the 41. I want to say about the 96, though — and this is important: right now 16 of the 32 are reserved for rural areas. Those 16 will continue to be reserved, but we'll have 80, and some more of those will clearly go to rural communities as well.

I think the idea is to maintain that base, because half of

the focus of the program has been on rural communities. If you look at where people coming through the PRA program have been, you see communities in every part of the province. In fact, 59 different communities have welcomed physicians from the PRA program.

The 28 percent increase is this spring, from 32 to 41; that's nine. Then we build up through to next year, when we expand to 96 seats, by March 24. That work is being done in an organized way to make sure that they have the supports and the preceptors in place to make that happen. Obviously, there's a lot of interest amongst communities of doctors from international medical graduates around the world.

**S. Bond:** Thank you for that. Can the minister identify for me what new funding is in the budget to facilitate the tripling of the practice-ready assessment program?

**The Chair:** Minister of Health.

**Hon. A. Dix:** Thank you very much, hon. Chair. Good to see you.

In terms of the fiscal years, just to say to the hon. member, that's \$3.42 million in '23-24, \$6.94 million in '24-25, \$7.13 million in '25-26. We see it building out as we build out the positions in the program. That's a combined \$17.4 million over three years.

[4:00 p.m.]

**S. Bond:** I want to move on and spend some time on the health human resources strategy. I'm going to begin by just asking some specific questions. Then I'm going to invite my colleague, who is the shadow minister for Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills, to ask the minister some questions as well.

I want to begin by asking: has the provincial working group established key performance indicators for monitoring the health sector workforce? There are four categories laid out in the human resources strategy: retain, redesign, recruit and train. Let's start with just the basic question. Have key performance indicators for monitoring the health sector workforce in those categories been laid out?

**Hon. A. Dix:** The health human resources plan has 70 actions. Many of those have been acted on, in the sense that announcements have been made and actions have been taken by the government. There was a commitment, when we tabled the plan, to annual reporting. Since the plan was tabled in the last week of September — I think it was September 29 — the first report on that plan will be annual to that, on all the recommendations.

We have a government structure, which is called the Provincial Health Human Resources Coordination Centre, PHHRCC. That has on it, as part of it, the leadership council, which is the senior leadership group in

health care, chaired by the Deputy Minister of Health, Mr. Brown, and involving all of the CEOs of the health authorities. Then there's the coordination centre that is driving this initiative.

That's the broad governance and implementation, and we'll see the results of that. Obviously, there are other places where we see results. We saw the results from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, but we'll be reporting annually on the results of the plan.

[4:05 p.m.]

Obviously, internal to government, there will be an accounting to Treasury Board and Finance around the expenditure of money against those priorities, as well, which is the normal process. The member is a former Minister of Finance, so she knows about all those things, and a member of Treasury Board, so she knows that process is in place.

But the public-facing report will be annual. The first one will be one year from the announcement of it, and it will be a report on the recommendations — what has been implemented, what progress has been made. We can expect that on or around September 29 of this coming year.

**S. Bond:** Well, thank you, and I appreciate it. I think an annual report is important. But when you look at the report itself, on page 63, it says that: "A clear and transparent evaluation framework is key to assessing and demonstrating the impact of programs."

To me, that sounds a lot more explicit than an annual report. It speaks to the need, in my view, of being able to measure success and the impact of each of the objectives that is laid out in the plan. So my question is: is there an evaluation framework? Will that, first of all, be made public? Are there specific targets set for each of the objectives?

**Hon. A. Dix:** The purpose of the annual review is to report against the four categories — all of them, including redesign. We discussed pharmacists earlier, and we may again. That's an example of a redesign proposal.

The governance structure is to drive these 70 actions, many of which have been specifically announced. So things such as retention incentives; wage levelling, which has been completed; changes on associate physicians — we may have occasion to do that; the change in pharmacy; the change in emergency management; scope of practice.

Some of those changes are, in some cases, almost completed. The ones around retention that include, as I say, retention incentives that have been put in place, but also the relational security officers and the hiring and what we're doing against the announcement and the measurement we have.... We will measure in detail, both against the four priorities or the four areas, and also specifically against the 70 actions.

**S. Bond:** Well, thank you to the minister. I guess from my perspective, it's one thing to put out a report with

dozens of recommendations. It's another thing to measure and report progress. British Columbians need to have a sense of confidence that the government understands the demand and has a plan in place to actually deal with that.

I'm trying to think of how.... So the minister has, I think, told me that obviously, some of the recommendations, some of the actions, have been taken care of because they were one time, in essence.

I'm just concerned that we need to know whether or not the plan is working. The way we do that is by measuring, setting objectives, targets, and reporting out, holding ourselves accountable for those outcomes. I will leave it at that. I'm hoping the minister can verify that that is the process that will be undertaken.

I guess I'm a bit surprised. When I think about it, I'm sure the ministry has a matrix with a very long list of every single thing that was committed to and that they will be tracking where they are on completion of that particular action.

From my perspective, the next step is: "Let's lay out, and let's be transparent about that. Here's what we said we would do. Here's where we are at with it. Here are the gaps. Here are the challenges." Maybe the minister can tell me if that's how the process is working.

[4:10 p.m.]

In the strategy itself, "demand for health services will grow by 14 percent over the next decade," and "current baseline staffing issues will be further aggravated." This will probably lead to some of the questions that my colleague has. Does the ministry have estimates, by profession, of what we need over the next decade?

**Hon. A. Dix:** We do forecasting, of course, and as we know, the number of health care workers has increased dramatically in the last five years. We see, in the CIHI reports, how well we're doing in the key areas against other jurisdictions. It doesn't mean that we don't need to do better. It just means that.... I think the member talked about the kind of very specific accountability we're talking about.

I'll give an example. It's an important one, and people are asking questions about it. We laid out a plan, over a period of a little over a year, to change the security model. It was key advocacy of the HEU, of the BCNU, of the HSA and of a lot of people working in health care. The member has heard it as well — all of the issues around code whites and other things. We said we were going to change and implement a relational security model.

At 14 sites, 13 leads have been hired. All 320 relational security officer positions have been posted. They're all going through the posting positions, but they've all been put in place, and they've all been posted through the different health authorities — Interior Health, seven sites, 80 positions posted; Northern Health, 40 positions posted; 30 in Providence; 20 in PHSA; 35 in Vancouver Coastal, for example; 95 in Fraser; and 20 in Island Health.

We'll be reporting that they've been posted, that people

have been hired against that, and what progress has been made. We have the leads now in place — which is critical; that's where you start — and 13 or 14 hired. That's the kind of specific.... That's one action. That's action 3, which is involved in retention. In terms of retention assistance, we have the specific incentives, I should say — the number of recipients in specific regions, the numbers. We've discussed these numbers already. So I won't go through that again.

For example, on wage levelling, which is item 9, that has been implemented and complete in long-term care and in assisted living. Nurse-to-patient ratios, which is a key element of workload standards, which is action 18, is in progress, and, obviously, pending, in part, the vote tomorrow.

It would go through on pharmacy workforce optimization. We made changes in October that have added, in terms of prescription modifications, about 32,000 a month. That's a rate of 360,000 a year. We'd be reporting very specifically on that and on the prescribing-for-minor-ailments proposal, how that's taken up, and so on. These are very specific actions. They're not recommendations. They're actions so will be, in each case, assessed in that way.

On different issues, like training spaces and field training spaces, that's a different measure than it is when you're hiring 320 security officers. Each item will have a different measurement, because they are different, but all of them will be measured, and it's the job of the implementation committee to drive that.

[4:15 p.m.]

**S. Bond:** So there will be specific monitoring of specific vacancies. That will be part of regular reporting. I think that is what the minister just said. Are those vacancies tracked in terms of nursing? Are those broken down by position, emergency room physicians and other critical areas?

What I would appreciate the minister sharing with me.... He doesn't have to do it by reading it out loud. If he could share any data, which he is able to share, that is broken down by health authority and that provides us with a sense of what the vacancies are. Perhaps he can just outline for me.... Are the vacancies broken down by critical areas, emergency room physicians, nursing, etc.?

**Hon. A. Dix:** Just to give the member a sense and provide more information.... So I don't do a long list.

The areas where we have the highest levels of vacancy are the professions: licensed practical nurses, medical laboratory technologists. That's key in a lot of communities. Nurse practitioners. We're growing that out very significantly, in terms of training, but that's a place. Occupational therapists and, interestingly, social workers. Those are some of the professions that have the highest vacancies in the province.

Vacancies, in an overall sense — and this won't be a surprise to the minister — are highest in the Northern Health Authority and lowest in Fraser Health. But that doesn't mean, in Fraser Health, there aren't significant staffing concerns.

Those are some of the areas, if you want the areas right now. That may well change over time.

Part of the challenge in the health care system is.... We are building out a system — mental health and addictions care and other things. That will create new positions, which then increases the human resource demand.

We've added net 38,000 positions. We're leading Canada, over the last five years, in the rate of growth of registered nurses, of nurse practitioners, of LPNs and other groups we've been leading. That doesn't mean there isn't consistent and increasing demand.

On these actions, to give an example, just another one.... I won't go through a lengthy list. We've got lots of questions. I know we want to hear.... We'll hear from the member for Cariboo North, as well, on some of this.

On internationally educated nurses, these are answers I gave before, so I won't go through all of them. We talked about the return of service sign — that's 2,550 — and then the applications that have come in. We have assessments completed. On that item, which is item No. 36 in the plan, that's what's measured. How many have been hired? I said yesterday.... That was 160 IENs and 64 internationally educated health care assistants hired since the new pathway was launched. So that's the detail of the measurement.

We said we would do this. How is it working? How are we getting through? How many applications are we receiving, and who has been hired? Those are the measurements, for example, for action item 36 in the plan.

**S. Bond:** Thank you to the minister for that response. I think what people that work in the health care system are longing to see is some form of stabilization. If you stop and think about it for a moment, health care workers are constantly overworked. There is a great deal of stress. I know the minister has heard it, and I have heard it firsthand from people. I'll speak to it specifically when we get to specialist access in a few minutes.

People are actually using the phrase "moral distress." The reason for that is.... In the current circumstances, they can't provide the level of care that they want to and that they are called to. That is what they do.

Can the minister speak to...? What are the kinds of targeted outcomes for the stabilization of B.C.'s health care sector? The workforce needs to have a sense of confidence that the crisis management, which has to take place, will, at some point, be stabilized so they can have a more normal approach to their practice.

I know the minister can list off a number of things in the document. I just wanted to be on the record in terms of talking about stabilizing the system. That's what we need to do. There is a deep sense of distress.

[4:20 p.m.]

I'm wondering: what is it going to take? How much longer are people going to have to feel like the system is in crisis, and what are the specific resources within the next fiscal year? How are we going to move toward a more stable health care system?

**Hon. A. Dix:** I think one of the values of having the health human resources plan in place and then driving 70 actions is that people — doctors and nurses, all categories of nurses; health care workers, health sciences professionals, ambulance paramedics — see themselves reflected in the work being done on that plan.

On primary care, we've discussed the elements of that and, really, the success so far. You see that doctors see themselves reflected in the plan by the fact that they're adopting it in such remarkable numbers so far. It doesn't mean there won't be challenges, but what they talked to us about as being their priorities we worked with them to address. You add to that, in all categories, the efforts to bring in internationally educated doctors and nurses, increase training spaces in all categories and all the efforts on retention.

With respect to nurses, we, of course, have added the training spaces. We need to do that. When we add training spaces, nurses stay in B.C. This is true of physicians. It's true of nurses as well. We've added those training spaces to provide hope. The pathways for internationally educated nurses. Also, a collective agreement process — again, nurses are voting on this — that provides both a sense of stability and reflects their contribution.

I think nurses will see themselves reflected in the priorities that have been given to nursing in this area. In fact, if you look at it from 2017 to the present, you see that we have seen net new in registered nurses. We've grown the fastest in the country. We've got to continue to do that. That's what that does.

For health sciences professionals, equally, the Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association has increased by 26 percent over the period since I've been Minister of Health, and we've got a lot more work to do. We're doing the same work in that area.

The work with ambulance paramedics, I think, was reflected in their response as workers. We've talked about this in the House — the member for Prince George–Valemount, but not just the member for Prince George–Valemount, other members of the opposition — around ambulance paramedics. We worked with them on a model, both of recruitment and stabilization, that's moving that system from a casual system to a permanent system.

The work we did, which wasn't just collective bargaining work but was system work with ambulance paramedics, resulted in a 96 percent ratification. That is, if you know ambulance paramedics as I do, a pretty remarkable thing on a group that's actually quite diverse in terms of perman-

ent full-time, permanent part-time and casual workforce. To have that level of support for that effort is significant.

Equally, for health care and health care workers and assistants — the getting rid of Bill 29; the repatriation of health care workers; the HCAP program, which has been phenomenally successful. It's expansion to home support with 900 home support workers.

All of those things are intended to drive stability and confidence to the public and of health care workers in the system, and they reflect what health care workers and health care professionals have been asking us for.

[4:25 p.m.]

I think, as I meet with health care workers and health care professionals across the province, these are the things they've been asking for on the recruitment side, on the retention side, on the training side and on the redesign side.

I'll say finally, because this is one area we haven't talked about too much, pharmacists see in these changes as well, and the public will see in these changes, a recognition of their role not just as the leaders of a vaccination program that saved, let's face it, tens of thousands of lives in this province — not just pharmacists, but they were key leaders in it — but increasing their scope of practice and allowing them to work to the full extent of their practice.

And others will see that as well — people coming into the system, the licensing of associate doctors, which is significant in the system, and all of the work that has been done on scope of practice issues across the system. So I'm hopeful, and I'm going to limit this response to five minutes because it was a significant question I think the member was asking, that that is a reflection in the health human resources plan of the priorities of the public but also of health care workers.

I think that on the actions we're taking, it is showing that success, and we've got to continue to work really hard because we need to do what we've done in the last five years in the next five years, which is to add net new tens of thousands of health care workers and professionals to the system.

**S. Bond:** Thank you to the minister for that. One of the things I hear regularly and have very much come to believe.... We talk a lot about recruitment and training, and those are all essential, but right now we need to focus on retaining the incredible people that are in our system. Many of them.... The minister knows there have been surveys done where a large number of our health care professionals are contemplating leaving because of the impacts of COVID on their personal lives.

One of the things we have to do is make sure that we are taking care of our health care workers. I was appreciative of seeing that in the strategy, but it has to start with caring for the people who care for others. That's how we're going to retain them. So I will just ask this question very

quickly. Has the provincial health workforce wellness team been created?

**Hon. A. Dix:** Just in terms of the overall, just to give a sense of the priority on all of these initiatives, it's \$324.9 million in retention, which is to build healthy, safe and inspired workplaces. If you look at the overall budget, the \$955 million over three years to support the 70 actions of the plan, this is the proportion in the category. It's \$324.9 million on retention, \$193.9 million on redesign, \$224 million on recruitment and \$323 million on training. So when we say those are the four priorities, we mean that. They're all significant, and that shares those priorities.

You can see in the partnerships under recommendation No. 4, action No. 4, the increased support for health care worker wellness, the supports that are going on for the Care for Caregivers and the Care to Speak programs. In addition, specifically, the money allocated to physician wellness in our agreement with physicians, the money allocated specifically under the nurses' agreement.... Again, they're voting on it, but specifically for nurse wellness, which is important for supports for nurses.

[4:30 p.m.]

The provincial health workforce wellness team hasn't been established yet, but these are elements of it, and it will be established shortly. But they're specific items, and we could say the same thing for the Health Sciences Association agreements and for the Facilities Bargaining Association agreement, which is predominantly HEU.

All of those elements are part of the work we're trying to do. We've talked about action 3, which is the change in security. That's important for nurse wellness. The specific elements of these collective agreements that are focused on mental health supports and wellness, that is a key part, the action we're taking, so retention. The member's right. It's reflected in the priority given to retention throughout the health human resources plan.

It is, in fact, of the four initiatives, the one we're investing the most money in, creating healthy workplaces, because obviously, creating those workplaces assists in all of the others as well. It's great to have recruitment programs, but the retention programs mean that the recruitment programs, when they succeed, stick. That's what we're trying to do. We've seen the positive impact of that in the health care assistant program, the net impact of that on numbers. But across the system, those are the priorities.

That's how we provide priority across the 70 actions. Retention is the largest of the four — just slightly over training, but it's the largest of the four priorities.

**S. Bond:** Thank you to the minister. I guess this goes back to my earlier question, because I'm not only interested in the workforce wellness group, which is new.... One of the things that.... There needs to be a sense of urgency. I'm not suggesting the minister doesn't get how important it is, but we need to move quickly to provide the

supports if we want to retain people. People are considering leaving.

When you think about announcing workforce wellness, we also have peer mentoring and that in fact people will be hired to initiate those things. I guess my ultimate question is: is there an implementation schedule — we started here, and we're going back there — for each one of these actions so that people have a sense of when we're going to see those committees, when peer mentoring will be in place, so that there is a sense of urgency about caring for people in health care — who, many of them are expressing, are experiencing moral distress?

**Hon. A. Dix:** The one item, in addition, I wanted to note is the creation of SWITCH B.C., which focuses on occupational health and safety of health care workers. It's led by health care workers.

There was an agency that was in place. It was eliminated approximately 14 years ago, and it's now been reinstated, under the Societies Act. It's in place. It has a CEO. It's a key aspect of the relational security model. It's counting on them to drive that. That's something that we said would be in place. It's in place. It's directed by health care workers and not by the government, but obviously, we provided \$8.5 million in funding to support its establishment.

That's just one example of the actions that are taken, and there's a series of others. So yes, there is urgency here. If you look at what's happened in the last number of years.... We had the COVID-19 pandemic, all of the changes that occurred directly after that — the urgency that went into those changes, continue to see.

We've seen these very significant reforms in primary care for doctors, supports for doctors. The nurse agreement is, I think, a landmark agreement in Canada. I'm hopeful, again, about the vote tomorrow, and we'll probably have that while we're still in estimates. And all of the changes we've made with health sciences professionals and others.

Yes, there is urgency. The scope of reform is remarkable. I think some people felt that we'd be returning to silos, as we evolved into this phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and the other challenges facing the system. That is the opposite of what's happened.

I'd argue that there is more desire from health care workers and health care professions for change. Seeing that change happen — that deals with issues of distress that many are feeling.

[4:35 p.m.]

**S. Bond:** What I would be relieved to see is a chart that lays out all of the announcements, with an implementation strategy, plan, date, outcomes and measurements attached to it. I look forward to seeing that or being made aware of what that looks like, because it is one thing to make an announcement and roll out a document. What really mat-

ters right now is how we are responding on the ground to support people.

The report itself talks about some of the key things that are needed: ensure a balanced workload. I think if you spoke to many people in the health care system this afternoon, they would not feel their workload is balanced. We are post-pandemic, but we are not post the critical issues that people are feeling from a personal perspective.

One of the things the report repeats numerous times is that we need sufficient people to care for patients and co-workers alike. I want to urge the minister to look at those initiatives that are linked directly to retention so that we can work to keep the people who have served us beyond measure, over the last number of years in particular and prior to that as well.

My last question before we sort of link the need to understand vacancies and what the future looks like and the training plans and strategies: can the minister speak to the issue of the representation of women in health sector management, whether he's concerned about that, whether there are initiatives in place to look at that? One of the things I would be very interested in knowing is what is being done to eliminate a gender pay gap in terms of health care overall.

**Hon. A. Dix:** First of all, recommendation No. 13 of the plan hard-wires a gender-based analysis in every element of the plan.

I'll just say a few things. I would say all of our regional health authority CEOs are women. The majority of our management are women. I think they're remarkable. You're seeing that increasingly through the professions.

Obviously, a majority.... That's good because the majority of our workforce are women. I believe the majority of younger doctors, for example, if you look at that physician workforce, are women. That needs to be reflected. So in every aspect of what we're doing, that gender-based analysis is in place. Obviously, significant work is done broadly and across government and that, but that's a core element of what we do as well.

I think that's a reflection.... I think it's more than symbolic. This is important also in the way that we appoint health authority boards, which are majority women, I believe. Look across our six boards. I think three of our board chairs are women, and three are men. In terms of our membership, a majority are women as well. This is important beyond that, in other representations as well.

One of the things I'm proudest of about our pandemic response was the central role played by the First Nations Health Authority. We have a leadership council in health care. The First Nations Health Authority is integrated with all of them. They're at every meeting that we have.

[4:40 p.m.]

Every meeting in the pandemic response, both at the provincial health officer level or at the CEO level, has involved them. Every health authority has at least, and in

some cases more, two Indigenous members on it. Across what we're trying to do, that issue of both representation and involvement is critically important.

The member is right. That is critical to our success, as well, whether it's in efforts to ensure that younger doctors.... This is seen and reflected in the new payment model for family practice. It reflects and creates flexibility for younger women doctors and all of the efforts we need to do to ensure that people have the opportunity to achieve leadership positions in the system.

All of that is in place. Obviously, all of the actions we've taken, in terms of the repatriation of health care workers, the majority women, in terms of supporting and dealing with Bill 29, and then wage levelling, the majority women.... All of these actions are embedded in all of our actions under the health human resources plan. It's critically important that our health care system reflect people in society.

I think, at some point later, we'll be discussing the *In Plain Sight* report. So I won't get into those aspects of it.

All of that is critically important, as well, to health care outcomes. Sexism and racism are bad for your health, and we have to target them in every possible way in the system.

**C. Oakes:** Our success in all of this depends on our students and the confidence that our students have in the systems that we have in place. I do want to enter.... I said I would raise it. We met with the UBC political advocacy committee. I knew that you were in estimates, so I committed to raise it here and table it.

It's 86,000, and counting, calling on the province of British Columbia to address elective surgical wait times in B.C. They spent seven months working on this very important report, with lots of recommendations. So I just wanted to draw the minister's attention.

To follow up on my colleague's questions around the human resources strategy and how we are measuring outcomes and looking at net new health care workers.... Training is going to be a considerable part of that. I have been working across the province and listening to a lot of students to identify.... It's wonderful that we're announcing all of these training seats. It's critically important to the strategy. But the piece, I think, when we're looking at indicators, is the enrolment numbers.

I'm glad that the Minister of Post-Secondary Education is in the room. I want to ensure that there isn't a disconnect — that there is a significant amount of work being done on making sure that seats exist, that the Minister of Post-Secondary Education is looking at enrolment numbers and that there is that alignment.

If there are issues, for example, in Northern Health, in the training seats.... We know that enrolment numbers are down, and that is a critical issue for the success of this strategy.

What we've heard from, specifically, nursing, on the training side, is the.... We want a consistent provincial



curriculum. There needs to be better transitioning and bridging from LPN to RN. The LPN access program in British Columbia provides no credit for work experience, whereas Athabasca does. So we are losing a lot of our students who go to Alberta because there are some of those training credits provided for work experience. I think it's critically important that we understand that.

Loan forgiveness. There is a lot of competition across the country, from a training perspective. I would say that a lot of the students are deciding not to stay in B.C. because they can access programs elsewhere. It may be a factor in why our enrolment numbers are down.

To the minister, when we look at enrolment numbers, what is the relationship between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education to ensure that there is alignment?

[4:45 p.m.]

**Hon. A. Dix:** There is strong alignment between the two ministries. I'll give you an example that's practical, a practical example of success. I think the HCAP program has been one of the most successful human resources programs the province has ever done. We had to stand it up in a pandemic and address major demand for health care assistants. There were different standards throughout the province.

The biweekly meetings between senior officials of my ministry and the ministry that's led by my colleague the Minister of Post-Secondary Education helped arrange that. We levelled that off so we could do the training throughout the province, which led to enormous success — more than 7,000 additional positions on both the infection control side and the 54 additional positions under HCAP, which included health care assistant positions in community for home support and in long-term care.

It was a remarkable success, and it involved that key alignment of the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education, which drives a lot of the training, and the Ministry of Health. So that work is continuing, and we do that on an active basis every two weeks in order to ensure that those issues are addressed.

There's a bursary that's been put in place for people making the transition. I know that the member was referring to LPN and to RN, I think, from health care assistant to LPN, which is also a really critical area there because we really need LPNs. We also need to provide opportunities to health care assistants to make that move, to ladder in that level, so a bursary was created, the access to practical nursing program, which is a 12-month full-time bursary or a 24-month part-time bursary against the return-of-service agreement. And that's part of our action 57 around a bursary.

That comes out of the work that's been done and the clear alignment between health care and the ministry which the member is responsible for as the critic. That alignment is key, so as issues develop, including issues

around new enrolment in particular programs, we can address those. Obviously, it's my colleague to whom the member will provide those clear and practical questions within her ministry.

But we're connected closely to that because some of that is about work experience, and that certainly was the case in the HCAP program. So that area demonstrates it's an area of success and shows how working together makes sense. It's not a health program or a post-secondary program. It's a combination.

There's currently a wait-list for all nursing programs, so that tells us, perhaps will tell us, that even though we've added 602 nursing spaces, we're going to need to add more, because there's a potential there. We know, and I think as the member said, that Athabasca is important and that B.C. is the desired place for people to come to work.

It's a real source of pride for our province that in all sectors, we are net beneficiaries. So in terms of doctor training, 80 percent of those trained in B.C. stay in B.C. That number for Alberta is that 61 percent trained in Alberta stay in Alberta, and 20 percent of those doctors trained in Alberta come to B.C. We welcome them. That seems good to me. And 8 percent of those trained in B.C. go to Alberta.

That's in the nature of things. People will live in different places in the country. So that's in the nature of things, but we are net beneficiaries of that change, and that's a system change. But that work, that alignment, is a clear part of everything we do. It reflects the work that that ministry does with my ministry and that minister does with me.

[4:50 p.m.]

**C. Oakes:** I appreciate the member's comments about how there's a waiting list for nurses across the province. Does the minister have any comments on why, on April 8, the folks of Okanagan College — faculty, staff and the community — were stunned to learn that they're losing their nursing program?

**Hon. A. Dix:** There was an amalgamation, as the member knows, at UBC Okanagan, so everyone got spaces there. All the staff have been offered employment, and we'll be using the capacity of Okanagan College to advance allied health education. So that's not a loss of any spaces at all. It's a practical decision that was made under the leadership of my colleague. I'm sure the member will have more questions on that, when her estimates come shortly.

I can say that I can't wait, because I so enjoy the estimates process myself that I sometimes wish it would never end. My colleagues do not agree. I don't think I'd win a vote on that in this room, but I'm a fan.

**C. Oakes:** I will have lots of questions when we head into estimates. I just wanted to put that as a marker here because of the cross-ministries.

I'm going to go to a personal, in the community... The minister has talked about Dunrovin in the past. I always

appreciate the ability to come and bring forward questions, because I think, ultimately, we want solutions in the community. I do want to raise a concern that has been brought forward by multiple people in my community around the skyrocketing use of agency nurses.

In the experience of Dunrovin, the only casual at Dunrovin has recently resigned because her income has dropped significantly. What we've seen is a significant increase in agency nurses. That has dramatically impacted nurses that are in my community and that have worked and have built relationships with the clients for many, many years.

We are worried, in our community, that we're actually going to be losing the nurses that exist in our community because of the agency nurses. We're very appreciative of the work that they're doing, in coming in to support, especially during the emergency. Now as we move into what the next phase is, we do not want to lose any nurse in the community. As a rural community, that is even more difficult.

What we've also heard from our nurses is that agency nurses are coming in. They don't have to pay their.... Our nurses get half the income. They still have to pay all of their fees and their dues, yet we're bringing in agency nurses, and they don't have all those costs. Our community is very concerned and would like to raise that to the minister.

**Hon. A. Dix:** Thank you for raising those issues. It's always important. This is one of the reasons I value this process but also the work we do all the time. The member, as members will know, raises issues about Quesnel with me on a regular basis — not just Quesnel. I know that her constituency is larger than that, but Quesnel is important. What happens at Baker is important. What happens at Dunrovin is important. I appreciate that.

Here's what I would say to the member. Agency nursing is 1.4 percent of nursing hours. There's a lot of nursing hours. So that's not a small number: 1.4 percent. I don't say it's small. It's higher in Northern Health, where Dunrovin is. It's higher than that in Northern Health. It was closer to 8 percent. That's a lot of agency nursing.

[4:55 p.m.]

One of the major purposes of the BCNU negotiations was to value our permanent workforce. Our permanent, full-time and part-time nursing workforce has to be given priority. It's important for the stability, especially in communities of the size of Quesnel but in smaller communities as well, which face sometimes even more pressure when they lose a single employee. That can be critical to them in providing care.

Dunrovin Lodge has benefited significantly from the HCAP program for the very reasons I describe. That's nursing, as health care assistants, but that's important in long-term care in particular. I absolutely appreciate that that's why we were so focused on that during the discussions with the BCNU. It's a priority for nurses in places

such as Prince George and Quesnel and places in the Northern Health Authority. That was a particular priority of our discussions with the BCNU, to address that very question.

We surely have to make the incentives right for longtime nurses. We can talk about new nurses. They're so important, and we've got to recruit them, and we've got to make that work. But our longtime workers, ensuring they're retained and valued in the system, was a priority for the BCNU and a priority for us.

It was, of course, the whole province in mind, but it was exactly communities like Quesnel that we had in mind.

We did also increase agency nurses. I had this discussion at more length — I'm trying to shorten today my answers; I'm trying to shorten them a little bit — with the member for Prince George–Valemount. But just around the COVID-19 pandemic, we used more agency nurses because we had to keep all our nursing staff in place and add resources for things such as contact tracing on overtime.

We're now at a different phase of the pandemic. It's not gone away, but a different phase of it. But part of our focus of this agreement was exactly what the hon. member's raising and she's hearing from nurses in community, which is responding to those needs but also valuing our longtime nurses, who deserve our support.

**C. Oakes:** My last question is.... We talk about recent graduates of, specifically, our nursing program and making sure that we invest in our students. We want to ensure that they have success. We've certainly, over the last few years.... Another indicator that I think we need to measure: are we retaining our students? They graduate; are we retaining them, and what does that number look like?

One of the things that has been raised to me by both students and from trainers is that we've seen a shift, specifically in Northern Health, that there has been a cut in the education budget. It has moved from.... We used to have educators on the floor in hospitals. That was a really important support for both students that recently graduated, but as part of the training one. It's moved to a regional training program, which is not embedded in the hospital. That has been a significant concern raised by both students and graduates.

**Hon. A. Dix:** This was a key item in the collective agreement. Again — we've been talking about this — it's not yet been ratified, although we'll hear tomorrow for that. But that issue of clinical education on the floor was a key aspect and is addressed in that agreement.

The member's quite right that one of the challenges that happens in an unbelievably busy workplace — like Baker, like Royal Inland, like University Hospital of Northern B.C., like long-term care — is that support for new nurses as they come in. It's critical that be in place, and that was a priority for us in those discussions and for the BCNU.

How do we ensure...? People come in. We've recruited them. We make all this effort, internationally educated, coming through our training systems. We want to make sure that they're supported when they get there. And the challenge for existing nurses, who have on the floor new nurses who are not as experienced.

This is not just the way in health, but in education and other areas — like new teachers and the supports that we're providing for them in a community such as Surrey, where we have a lot of new teachers, and making sure we're supporting and retaining and supporting them as they go through their early years in that profession.

In health care, it's been a significant part. The issue the member raises is one that's raised by nurses in her community and communities across B.C., which is how we retain and support. That issue, clinical education, was specifically dealt with in our negotiation. We'll see how it goes tomorrow.

[5:00 p.m.]

**S. Bond:** Thank you very much to my colleague. I know she will have additional questions in her own estimates, but I appreciate the work that we do collaboratively. It's a real pleasure to work on the files together.

We're going to have to pick up the pace here. So I'd like to work our way through some very specific questions. Let's start with the UBC ophthalmology program. In January, there was a report that there was a risk of losing accreditation related to the UBC ophthalmology program. Can the minister identify for me whether that issue has been resolved?

We know that B.C. is training only three ophthalmologists per year and retiring close to six, so obviously, a great deal of concern about that program. Have those issues been resolved?

**Hon. A. Dix:** We were made aware of the issue, and we understand UBC has been dealing with it. There were some HR issues related with it, and they've dealt with it. They are regular accreditation issues, but they're dealing with those issues.

**S. Bond:** Well, I am certainly hopeful that the minister and the Health Ministry have made it clear that we do not want to be losing our ophthalmology program. We're at risk already of having not enough professionals. So I will look forward to an update on that.

I want to move to the issue of ER closures and staffing. Does the minister have data related to emergency health room visits for 2019-2022 so that I can have an understanding of the total number of unique patient visits to ERs? Is there data that is broken down by health authorities, areas or facilities? I'm hoping he could provide that data for me.

Obviously, we don't have time to read through every line of health authority or facility. But first of all, can the minis-

ter confirm there is data? Do we know the total number of unique patient visits from 2019 compared to 2022? Maybe while the staff is looking for that information, we'll move on. I have a lot of questions, and we are not going to get to them at this rate.

**Hon. A. Dix:** We absolutely have that. We'll absolutely provide it, as requested, to the member, in advance of the beginning of estimates tomorrow. That might facilitate it.

We do get those numbers, also, on a daily basis. Interesting what it was yesterday. We use the baseline, the pre-COVID baseline of about 6,500 visits a year to ERs. We're typically above that. I think the average is closer to.... Well the average during COVID was 6,755. So the pre-COVID, 2018-19 was 6,514 a day; 2019-20 was 6,600 a day. We can get the details on that. In '21-22, it was 6,755 a day.

The post.... What we call the current period, '22-23, was approximately 7,200 a day. You can see the increase over time.

**S. Bond:** What I would like to see is data that shows me local health authority areas. What I want to do is.... If the minister could share that, I want to be able to look at whether initiatives that are taking place are actually lowering or changing the pattern of appearing at an ER when you have other places that you could actually be going.

I want to walk through a series of questions. Again, the minister can either just quickly answer them or provide me with information.

[5:05 p.m.]

Obviously, I've had a lot of people concerned about Elkford. The Elkford ER has been closed for nearly 19 months. Can the minister confirm if the emergency department in Elkford will fully reopen by July?

**Hon. A. Dix:** I can give the member quickly.... There's some information on physician staffing. It's really important for her colleague from Kootenay East, as well, who we're in touch with regularly on this issue.

Interior Health has filled all Elkford position vacancies as of July 2023. The physician resource plan for Elkford calls for two FTE physicians to support primary care and ED services. This is a change, and this is a hiring. So it's a really exceptional effort in this case, very much personally by Susan Brown, who's our outstanding CEO in Interior Health.

Currently Elkford has one part-time physician working 0.5 FTE and a 0.4 FTE nurse practitioner. The latter is currently on leave. So that's where we're at now. The site is supported by locum physicians now, primarily out of Fernie. There is, as of July 2023, a full complement of physicians expected to be in place. That's 2.0 FTEs split between four physicians.

Sparwood, which is a neighbouring community, as the member will know, has a full complement of five physicians since August of 2022.

There is other information, if the member would like, around other services and lab staffing that I can share with the member and the member for Kootenay East, who I know is interested. I know she's representing him on this issue.

**S. Bond:** I remain hopeful we will resolve that. I guess my overarching.... When I go through and I think about the circumstances we're facing.... The minister now has a Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health. There has never been a time like there is now.

Well, actually, there was. I remember that — a very large rally in my community in a very large hockey rink. Yes, I do remember that. But these are significant issues in rural communities. I am hopeful. Perhaps the minister could describe for me the connection and work plan that the Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health has.

In the meantime, I would like an update on Merritt. We have people in Merritt that.... That ER has been closed eight times this year, and it's only April. If anybody has actually driven to Merritt or through Merritt, we have winter weather during that period of time, with some of the most challenging conditions. I can just tell you that lots of people where I live have to travel that way for sports, for families, for all kinds of things. Again, significant concern about Merritt.

Can the minister outline for us, because I'm sure the protests will continue, what exactly is being done to create some immediate solutions to stop the closures? Perhaps, at the same time, maybe the minister could answer about Merritt while we're looking up Chetwynd.

Chetwynd has had numerous diversions and interruptions. Again, what recruitment strategies and funding are in place to put an end to that?

I would also like to know — we don't have to do it right this minute, but perhaps the minister could provide me with updates — what the timeline is to reopen emergency services fully in Port Hardy and Alert Bay. In February, Eagle Ridge Hospital's emergency department had only half the nurses it should have, and one quarter of those were provided by for-profit agencies. So could the minister tell me how many vacancies there are at Eagle Ridge Hospital?

[5:10 p.m.]

The minister gets the point here. We have people in parts of British Columbia who are unable to access an emergency room. Those are just a few that I chose to highlight, but we know that provincially, there are significant challenges, particularly in rural and northern communities.

So could the minister, at some point, provide me with updates on Merritt, Chetwynd, Port Hardy, Alert Bay and Port Moody? And perhaps now just speak to the general issue of emergency room closures. I can wait to hear the details on each of those other ones.

**Hon. A. Dix:** Just to go through them, because what we take, and what's very important in the case of closures, because they have an impact on the public and on public confidence and the sense of support for the health care system....

Last year when we were discussing this issue, we were focused on a single community, which kind of symbolized it at the time, which was Clearwater. There hasn't been a closure there since Labour Day. We worked together with the community on a longer-term solution, and while we still have lots of work to do in Clearwater, a solution was found and put in place.

With respect to north Vancouver Island, the Mount Waddington area, similar actions were taken. I introduced a comprehensive plan, working for the member for North Island and the Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health. I'm happy to respond to that, but I don't think the member wants a long response on the parliamentary secretary. I'm happy to talk about her work and the work that she's doing.

But in that case, a multi-point plan addressed emergency health services, adding new services in terms of diagnostic care, which will improve health services in that region. The efforts in terms of nursing recruitment and doctor recruitment in that area are laid out in a specific plan. I'm happy to share that with the member.

With respect to Merritt, it's a high priority for me. I've had a number of conversations with the mayor of Merritt on these questions, who is obviously concerned on behalf of his community, and there's a very significant effort going on both on the recruitment of doctors and nurses. The most recent closure was related not to a doctor shortage but a nursing shortage in that community. We have a major effort in place to continue to support that community and, indeed, to add services to Merritt.

We've talked about Elkford. Happy to provide more information about Chetwynd as well.

I'd say, in general, what we're doing is.... Our broader response is the health human resources plan we've been talking about, with the specific improvements for rural health and rural physicians and rural nursing that are found both in our actions on retention, our actions on recruitment, our actions with respect to internationally educated nurses and doctors and health sciences professionals that you're seeing.

These areas illustrate when there's less flexibility and there are more, broadly, increases in absences in the system because we are trying to go to a system where people stay home when they're sick from a system which often drove presenteeism in the health care system in a way that wasn't healthy for health care workers. So in each of those cases, they have the highest possible priority.

You've seen the work that's been done in Elkford. The work that's been done in Clearwater is similar to the systematic approach we're taking in the north of Vancouver Island, in Merritt, in Elkford, in Chetwynd and in other communities that the member has outlined. And I think

it's that work.... We need to take urgent action. That urgent action sometimes requires agency nursing, and we've seen that, but what we're looking for is long-term, stable solutions that bring back that sense of confidence.

No one wants to see an ER close. Occasionally that happens because we have to maintain certain standards. We don't want to see it. That's why we're taking actions to address these issues in the long term and in the medium term, and that requires specific recruitment in those communities. So that's what we're trying to do.

I think I touched on just about all of them, but I'll review the *Blues*, and if I've missed a community, I'll provide the member with a response when we start tomorrow morning.

**S. Bond:** I know we're into the rapid-fire section here of these questions.

What people in these communities want to hear from the minister is a commitment that those ERs will be open, that we're not going to see diversions and closures and that there will be timelines. When you think about Elkford, for example, they've been waiting and uncertain for months and months.

[5:15 p.m.]

Could the minister just specifically speak to Chetwynd for me? I want to be sure that I understand if there are specific recruitment strategies in place and if there is funding in place to put an end to emergency department closures in Chetwynd.

**Hon. A. Dix:** Well, Chetwynd is a high priority too, as are other communities that face challenges in the North. I'm thinking of Fort Nelson. I'm thinking of Tumbler Ridge, Chetwynd, Hudson's Hope but also, towards the other side, Hazelton and others.

We talked, I think, yesterday or the day before about the travel resource pool. That applies to Chetwynd. The prototype rural retention incentive applies to Chetwynd. The housing pilot applies to Chetwynd. The child care pilot we're trying to support and trying to extend it to communities such as Chetwynd, and all of the retention bonuses and other elements that are part of that, because nursing is critical in Chetwynd. It is a priority as well.

There are, of course, resources there. Northern Health is working very hard with people in the community in Chetwynd to provide support, as they are in communities such as Mackenzie and Tumbler Ridge in the region.

**S. Bond:** I'll look forward to some additional information on some of those particular sites. The overarching issue is a challenge in many parts of British Columbia.

I want to move on to a topic I raise again this year. From my perspective, I fail to understand why the answer to this question is not yes — not "We're looking at it," not "We've been looking at it." That is the issue of physician assistants. I'm sure the minister has seen the map recently. Brit-

ish Columbia stands in splendid isolation. Most jurisdictions across this country have said yes to physician assistants. Soon we are going to be the only province that is not utilizing physician assistants.

Straight-up question to the minister: is he prepared now to look at physician assistants as part of the solution to the myriad of issues and challenges we have been talking about for what is now day three?

We have seen representatives from rural communities, from Fort Nelson, Elkford and New Denver. I'm certain the minister has those proposals. Last year the minister said there was a lack of training. That seemed to be a roadblock. Well, other jurisdictions across this country have somehow managed to figure out that this is a position that would help reduce the stress, the congestion and the workload for physicians.

To the minister, will he, today, commit to introducing physician assistants in British Columbia?

**Hon. A. Dix:** The member talked about a number of communities. We're talking about an extremely small number of workers. The point I made last year wasn't a training question. We don't train physician assistants in B.C. In fact, they're trained, in Canada — she talks about multiple provinces — only in Manitoba and Ontario. Those are the two places they're trained.

There's the potential, I think, in B.C., potentially, of some 40 to 50 physician assistants who could be authorized for practice. The College of Physicians and Surgeons is doing work on that area to see what that would be. But it would be a limited group of workers. Potentially, they'd have access to work in B.C. The college is, as I know, working on that question to make it happen.

[5:20 p.m.]

When you look at the health human resources plan, the integration of a small group of workers is something that is being considered. It would require the college to set the standard for that, which they're looking at. That would be a limited introduction of support.

People are looking for a big response. That's why we're doing associate physicians and adding nurse practitioners and tripling those numbers and adding nurses and expanding the scope of practice across professions.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons is looking at whether and how physician assistants will be licensed to practice. I look forward to that, and once they do that and announce that there may be a possibility for that in the system, understanding — I know the member understands this — that there is a very small number that would be eligible to practise in British Columbia.

We're not training them, and there wouldn't be a plan there to have training here or to establish a training mechanism here. It was simply to.... The College of Physicians and Surgeons is considering the way in which that number of people would be eligible for practice, and then poten-

tially, if they do that, they would be eligible to practise in British Columbia.

I know there's a lot of talk about the issue, but it's a relatively small group of workers, so it couldn't be integrated across the province or across health care systems because there's simply not the numbers of them. Obviously, our focus in terms of education has been on allied health professionals and health care workers, health care assistants, ambulance paramedics, nurses, doctors, pharmacists and others. That's what we're doing across the system.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons is looking at that. Physician assistants, I suspect, could soon be eligible to practise in B.C. But then again, I'd just say to the member that it's a relatively small number of physician assistants.

It would not be our plan to establish a training system here in British Columbia for that because we're focusing our health human resources plan on other things. But once the college does that, sets the guidelines, physician assistants might well be eligible to practise in B.C. Obviously, we'd be making that announcement.

**S. Bond:** Thank you to the minister. That was definitely not a clear-up yes. That's for sure. I would have hoped that would have been the answer.

Here is the great news. There are physician assistants who want to come to British Columbia to work, and guess where they want to go. They want to go to parts of British Columbia that are in desperate need of additional health care professionals.

From my perspective, this is something that we need to get past — all of the reasons why it's complicated or we can't do it or we're thinking about it or we're monitoring it. Other jurisdictions in this country, including Alberta, just recently said, "Yes, come on aboard," and I think it's 40, actually, that they're looking at.

I can assure the minister, whether it's a small number or not, we have physicians that are asking this minister to put, for example, together a physician assistant pilot, and even that would be a start. What it would do.... And in fact, I'm sure the minister is aware that the Conference Board of Canada has actually even looked at the effectiveness and efficiency gains and time savings when there is a physician assistant.

I don't know how many more times I can ask and how many more times we can get the same answer, that: "We're looking at it. We're thinking about it." We have a health care crisis. Everywhere we go, we talk about the people we need. Here is another way, and from my perspective, it's all hands on deck. Let's figure out how we make it work.

So I'll leave this.... I will give the minister one more opportunity here. What concrete steps will he take immediately to ensure that physician assistants who want to work in British Columbia are welcomed here as they are being welcomed all across Canada?

**Hon. A. Dix:** In terms of their scope of practice, those are the scope of practices that will be established by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. I'd say, in the last year — I'll just repeat — across health human resources, 2,000 internationally educated nurses in the pipeline. Massive changes in every aspect of health care to build out health human resources. A health human resources plan that I think is the envy of the country.

A collective agreement with doctors or master agreement with doctors and a reform of the system that has been remarkable in its success. The increase in nurse practitioners from last in the country to the fastest rate of growth of nurse practitioners, of nurses, of LPNs in the country last year, of health sciences professionals, a 26 per cent increase in health sciences professionals.

[5:25 p.m.]

In this area, which is an area of interest to the member, there will be put in place, I suspect, from the College of Physicians and Surgeons, a scope of practice for physician assistants as a category of workers. When that comes into place, we'll have some announcements to make. But it has been the remarkable buildup of team-based care over the last few years, unprecedented in the history of the province, that's reflected in our health human resources plan.

I've answered the question on physician assistants. The scope of practice is laid out by the college, and then, from there, we would take a look. There isn't a plan, just so everyone understands. Right now it's just Manitoba and Ontario. There are, I think, three programs that provide new physician assistants in Canada. There isn't a plan to add that in our British Columbia mix of this sort of massive response to the health human resources situation. That's our response.

Our priorities have been what we know, and those priorities have been, in the last year, remarkably successful in B.C., relative to any other jurisdiction in the country. Number one on nurses. That's important. Number one on physician recruitment, compared to other jurisdictions, and all the success that we're seeing now. And let's acknowledge this: all the massive challenges facing the system that we've been canvassing for days and days and days and days.

So on physician assistants, the college will address the issue of scope of practice, and we'll go from there.

**S. Bond:** Can the minister give me the timeline for the college to finish looking at this issue?

I'm simply going to say it again. I certainly am not standing here suggesting that any addition to health care professionals and the number we have and the places that they go to serve isn't important. Of course it is. The whole health human resources strategy talks about how, if we don't have people, the system is not going to function.

Here is a group of people that could help remote communities, particularly. They could help physicians, for

example. Other jurisdictions have looked at this issue and said: “We welcome you.” Yet in British Columbia.... I can’t tell you — this must be the third set of estimates where I have raised this issue, and the answer is virtually the same. “We’re looking at it.” Well, it’s long past the time to look at it. It is time to do something about it.

My final question for now. I can only urge the minister to, frankly, get on with this and make sure that we have every single person who can help us. We have physicians who are willing to look at piloting, to demonstrate the value, despite the fact it’s going on across the country.

Can the minister tell me what the timeline is for the college to finish looking at this issue?

**Hon. A. Dix:** I expect it to be soon. Again, I would say this: two provinces train physician assistants in our country — two. It’s important when you’re integrating groups of workers....

We’re building out a team-based-care model that sees people expanding their scope of practice across health care professions. It is, I think, a remarkable change to the health care system that’s taken place over the last number of years to build out team-based care across the system.

I appreciate that the previous government, for example, the nurse practitioners.... Minister Abbott brought nurse practitioners to B.C. in 2006, and 11 years later, we were a miserable last in the country. We’ve gone from, now, 300 practising to 900 practising. That’s an extraordinary success. We’re going to continue to do that and to drive that kind of innovation and reform in the system.

Again, once the scope of practice is established, that will tell us the usefulness to the overall system of extending opportunities to this group of workers. I’ve met with physician assistants. I hear the public call. But I want to be very clear that the massive investments we’re making in health human resources and the results that we’ve seen, as compared to other provinces, understanding the real challenges faced in the system, are remarkable, and I’m very proud of them.

**S. Bond:** Well, you know, I can simply say that the debate isn’t about whether we train them or not. It’s whether we recognize them, make sure they’re certified and have them participate in team-based care in British Columbia.

[5:30 p.m.]

It’s pretty straightforward, from my perspective. We were described just this week as isolationists because when you look at the map, we’re standing out all on our own. I love to see British Columbia lead, but not in this area. So I’m going to continue to press the minister and the ministry to do the work necessary to make sure that we have all hands on deck.

Speaking of all hands on deck, can the minister tell me how many associate physicians are currently employed in B.C. in acute care and how many are in community primary care?

[M. Dykeman in the chair.]

**Hon. A. Dix:** To take the member through some of the information around associate physicians and physician assistants, I’d say, on physician assistants, this was a proposal that was repeatedly rejected in the years between ’01 and ’17. I want to say that. It was rejected for, I’m sure, good reasons. I’m just saying that when I say that we take these issues seriously, we take these issues seriously, and I’m sure that previous Health Ministers, including the Leader of the Opposition, had good reason at that time.

Circumstances have changed, I think it’s fair to say, and the position is different. But I want to say that we take it seriously too, and we’re working our way through those issues with people. Had those decisions not been made, of course, the circumstances would be different today.

With respect to physician assistants, as we see it, there are 461 prospective candidates. There is often, sometimes, talk of thousands of people. We identified 461 prospective candidates. Of these, 204 currently hold Canadian work status, and 257 require immigration support. The total of planned programs is 75. The total planned hires is 255. It’s just starting. There are six accredited programs of the 75 in place.

The accredited programs are currently in specific areas. They’re in the Provincial Health Services Authority. They are pediatrics, neonatal intensive care, pediatric intensive care, surgery, pediatric gastroenterology; and in the Providence Health Care at St. Paul’s, in-patient medical and surgical program. So they all have to be accredited. Those are the six that are accredited.

There are, as I understand it, seven hires, 20 postings, six accredited programs, 255 planned hires. That’s the information I have for the member. Those are the areas that are accredited — those specific areas. So none of those are primary care yet, but it’s our expectation. Those accreditations are required by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. The primary care accreditations are coming, but those are the areas that have been approved and accredited so far.

**S. Bond:** I will resist the temptation to respond to the question about physician assistants. I have looked them straight in the eye and had the discussion about those things. And, yes, circumstances have changed.

I’d like to move on to specialist access. One of the most difficult conversations I have had in a long time was a conversation with a specialist who described the unbelievable agony on behalf of their patients of what is called “Wait One.” Wait One is the period of time that it takes for your first consultation with an oncologist, for example.

What I was told was absolutely devastating, because once again in that conversation, reflecting the views of a large number of specialists, was the moral distress that those specialists feel when there is a diagnosis and you are waiting for that first consult.

[5:35 p.m.]

What I would like to know is: is wait-time data available by health authority and specialist? And will the minister commit to providing that data publicly?

**Hon. A. Dix:** First of all, just because it's important to make progress in these areas, too.... There is specific funding for specialists in the new master agreement with physicians, over the next three years, to address fee-for-service specialist disparities in compensation and to assist with recruitment in that process.

The Wait One data is something that we've been focused on with the Doctors of B.C. It requires us to go for that data, as opposed to the general surgical wait-time data that we see, specialist by specialist. That work is being done now. It's important that we have that information to focus in on that, and that hasn't typically been held over time.

Part of the important work we did, in working with the Doctors of B.C., not just for primary care, which we've discussed, but for specialist care, as well, was to focus in on those issues. Those tables are some of the most important work we're doing in that specific area, which she identifies, of Wait One.

Specialist wait times are an area.... We are focused in on the data and working, sometimes clinic by clinic and specialist by specialist, to confirm and then authenticate the data, which is required to be done. So we're doing that work as well.

As the member will know.... Obviously, we've done very significant work with surgeons on the surgical side. That's work to increase outcomes. The results are there for all to see, under surgical renewal. The work that has been diagnostic care to increase that capacity dramatically over time....

The specific work around Wait One is a priority for the Doctors of B.C. and for specialists and one we're doing with them right now.

**S. Bond:** I don't know if there has ever been a letter like this before. The minister, months ago, received a letter that started out, apparently, with 26 signatories and ended up with 319, I think it was. It was over 300, anyway, and it came from multiple specialties.

When we talk about Wait One.... We talk about delays, and we talk about what we are going to do about that.

The list talked about things like a patient with sudden hearing loss who, if they had been seen sooner, wouldn't have been permanently hearing impaired. And 16,000 people waiting for an echocardiogram. Patients on the Lower Mainland with a new cancer diagnosis waiting two to three months for their first visit, Wait One, with an oncologist. A lone respirologist in Northern Health, unable to recruit partners, who had to close her practice. The list goes on.

[5:40 p.m.]

I understand there have been steps taken in the master

agreement. I am not confident that is going to deal with the crisis we are facing, with one million people waiting to see a specialist in this province. One of the things I have heard consistently is.... Specialists want to know they are valued. A lot of the hours they work are not remunerated. Obviously, that leads to burnout.

I would like to ask the minister, specifically, some questions about the physician master agreement. Did the master agreement raise the daily cap on the business cost premium by 12 percent? Does the minister believe that that will fully address specialist costs and the significant overhead costs? Are the minister and the ministry having discussions about that gap?

**Hon. A. Dix:** Post the letter the member refers to, we set up a group, with specialists, to work through some of the very issues they've raised. At this point, in terms of the physician master agreement.... Yes, there is an increase, as described. We're going to get the exact number — I think the member said 12 percent — to make sure we have that number right.

As noted, on specialist physicians.... In the physician master agreement is new funding to address fee-for-service specialist disparities. Ninety percent of that disparity funding is intended to address intersectional disparities in compensation, and 10 percent is to address what are called interprovincial disparities in compensation.

The member will know, for example, on oncologists.... We made a very significant move recently to address that, and we're now number one in the country. We were trailing Alberta by some significant number. I think the number was around \$60,000. We've addressed that.

All the funding will be allocated through a single, binding adjudication process, based on submissions of the sections, the Doctors of B.C. and the government. In making that decision, the adjudicator will consider disparities arising from gender differences. That addresses an issue the member raised earlier.

There's also new fee funding for specialist physicians, for the Consultant Specialists of B.C. That is set based on priorities that they have set themselves. There's also new annual funding for the Specialist Services Committee, for initiatives to support the specialist care system, including those raised in the letter.

Those are significant moves in the agreements and the other moves we're making to support specialist care in B.C.

**S. Bond:** Has the minister met directly with specialist physicians?

**Hon. A. Dix:** On the committee in question, it has been at the deputy level. I meet with specialist physicians on a regular basis, but the committee process, which established a permanent committee, has been through direct meetings between the specialist physicians and the deputy minister.



**S. Bond:** The medical on-call availability program is another concern, related to the physician master agreement, that was raised by consultant specialists. Is there work underway to address the gap that they believe exists there?

**Hon. A. Dix:** Yeah. In fact, a 10 percent increase across the board in MOCAP, which is a significant increase.

[5:45 p.m.]

**S. Bond:** I may have been inaccurate when I was doing this work, but I thought that the recommended increase was at least 30 percent and that the eventual outcome was 10 percent. Is that correct?

**Hon. A. Dix:** The newly ratified PMA resulted in 10 percent MOCAP rates for all level 1, 2 and 3 groups, effective April 1, 2022. We negotiated the agreement, and then it was retroactive to that. That was the agreement that was negotiated and, obviously, approved by both sides in that agreement.

The member may be talking about something else. So perhaps we could briefly.... We could discuss that after so we make sure we get the right answer.

That was the negotiated number. It was, obviously, negotiated in a collective agreement and massively approved by doctors.

**S. Bond:** Well, I think the consultant specialists actually asked for or, at least, recommended a 30 percent increase. So you can imagine that they consider what was delivered to be a gap.

I need to move on, in terms of some of the other questions. I just want to reiterate for the minister.... I know he knows it. We've known each other for a long time.

The message that was delivered to me by specialists across this province is that Wait One is being extended. People are literally stuck in Wait One. That is causing enormous personal moral distress for people who want to see patients in this province get the best care possible. Those were very difficult conversations, but I listened and committed to raising this issue.

When we think.... I can't even imagine — I'm sure many of us have walked alongside people who have been waiting to hear from an oncologist — the agony and the difficulty. It's, obviously, for patients and families, but it's also for the people who care for them. They feel like they can't do the job that they want to do and are called to do.

I want to move on to nursing and to ask some questions about nursing. I have a number of areas. I want to raise the issue of safety. We know that occupational health and safety is absolutely essential if we're going to retain nurses in the health care sector.

Can the minister tell me what percentage of staff are currently code white trained amongst health care professionals in B.C. hospitals?

[5:50 p.m.]

**Hon. A. Dix:** On the specific data the member required, what I'll seek to do is find that data. I'll probably end up sending her a response. They don't have it exactly in the form she's asking for.

Just to say that obviously, the creation of the new relational security model... I gave the member a detailed answer on that earlier in response to another question about where we were in the hiring process. The leads have been hired.

SWITCH B.C., which has been created to address specifically occupational health and safety, and funded to do so, and led by health care workers, including nurses, health care workers, health science professionals and doctors, has been put in place. The hiring process is in place.

The curriculum is being developed. That's really based on the recommendations by health care workers to improve safety and security in workplaces. It's a critical part of our health human resources plan. It was developed based on the work of health care unions, of health care workers, of health authorities, and, of course, now SWITCH B.C., which has just been created.

As I said, and I won't say this again, the previous occupational health and safety agency that was similar to SWITCH B.C. was eliminated by a previous Health Minister, the current leader of the opposition. We recreated it because it was necessary in this time.

Again, we talked about times changing. Well, this is a time when SWITCH B.C. can play a critical role in all of that development, as can the new relational security model. Again, we can go back to *Hansard* to show specifically who has been hired, where we are in that process and the training that's been developed to prioritize that in health care facilities across the province.

**S. Bond:** What are the requirements to document a code white when one is called? Where there are external security providers, which we certainly see in some hospitals? I'm assuming they track safety and security data, so how are those records made available? What are the requirements to document, and what are the expectations of external security providers?

**Hon. A. Dix:** All code whites are documented. They're kept in a record base for that that's held by the Provincial Health Services Authority.

**S. Bond:** So external security providers provide that information, and it is captured in that database?

**Hon. A. Dix:** It's health authority staff that record it, so it's not external, the health authority staff. It may be that external staff.... We have lots of contracted security in the province. They might respond to those circumstances. But the code white data is maintained by health authority staff.

**S. Bond:** Thank you to the minister for that clarification. I'm wondering: when there is an incident of workplace violence, what is the expectation following the completion of an investigation? Are there individual incident reports correlated at a facility or a health authority to determine best practices or operational gaps? In other words: incident, investigation, what happens afterwards to ensure that there are steps taken to either modify or deal with whatever gaps or issues may have led to that particular incident?

**Hon. A. Dix:** Well, the incident summaries would go to the occupational health and safety joint committee in a facility, and then if recommendations flow from that, they flow from there. So that's the way in which those reports are structured.

[5:55 p.m.]

**S. Bond:** Can the minister tell me how many protection service officers and violence prevention leads have been hired to date — and who have started work, basically — and what hospitals are they located in?

**Hon. A. Dix:** I think it was in response to a different question that I answered this question earlier. I'll just say that of the 14 leads, 13 have been hired. All of the 320 relational security officer positions have been posted through the health authorities. The training program that they would go through, once hired, is being developed by SWITCH B.C.

**S. Bond:** Obviously, the announcement was made in October of 2022. The government announced 320 in-house protection service officers and 14 violence prevention leads. Can the minister tell me what the timeline is to hire all of those protective service officers and violence prevention leads?

**Hon. A. Dix:** This is as announced. It's on track, as announced. What I might do is share the sites. I think the member asked about the sites. I can just share that information; I don't have to read the 26 sites. The leads, as I say, have been hired — at least 13 of 14, so substantially hired.

The training content has been completed or will be completed by the end of this month or this week. The hiring will take place May 2023. Full implementation is for September, which is within the time that we presented when we announced the program.

**S. Bond:** Can the minister tell me how the initial 26 sites were selected?

**Hon. A. Dix:** Well, the 26 sites were initially identified by the BCNU and other unions, and then the health authorities added to those sites. That's how we got to these 26 sites. I think they've already been listed out

in public, but I can share those sites. That's how they were developed. They were developed from the workforce representatives, including BCNU, the HEU and others. They identified critical sites, and then the health authorities added some other sites as appropriate. So you see it in different communities.

On Vancouver Island, that model is already in place at many sites. These 26 sites only include a couple of new sites in addition to existing sites on Vancouver Island, but they include three sites in Northern Health, seven sites in Interior Health, three sites in Vancouver Coastal Health, two sites in Providence Health Care and eight sites in the Fraser Health Authority.

In Northern Health, it's Mills, it's Prince Rupert and it's University Hospital of Northern British Columbia, for example. I'll provide the member with the full list, which I have here.

**S. Bond:** Thank you to the minister for that. Obviously, after the announcement, I had a stream of MLAs in my office, asking: "Why not us?" I'm sure there are concerns in every community. I know that I spend a lot of time working on files with my colleagues, particularly from Cariboo North, who spends a lot of time dealing with issues supporting nurses.

Will the model be extended to other health care facilities? When would the minister anticipate...? Obviously, we don't have workers in place yet in all of those sites. We hope to by the fall. Will the positions be expanded, and how would additional sites be added?

[6:00 p.m.]

**Hon. A. Dix:** I think it's fair to say 26 sites, as you're launching a program, is an ambitious program. All 320 positions have been posted. The leads have been hired, essentially — except for one, I suppose — 13 of 14. The plan is in place. These 26 sites were identified with workers as the priority sites. Absolutely, one would see the program expanding — of course, also work to bring into the health system, as we have done with others, workers who are currently contracted out.

All of that work is taking place now and continues to take place. We're looking to launch fully at the 26 sites, 320 positions as committed to, and that process is on track, on time and on budget.

**S. Bond:** Having a safe workplace is pretty critical, and all of us have heard stories from nurses — horrific ones, actually. The sooner we get this program up and running and available, for example, in more than a small number of sites in Northern Health, which has two-thirds of the geographic land base of British Columbia... That really matters. All of us in this House made a commitment to work on ensuring that nurses felt safe in the jobs that they hold.

I want to move a little bit to recruitment and retention of nurses. We've had some discussion about that earlier

today, related to the health human resources strategy. It's something I've been, frankly, very disappointed by, but surprised as well. When a nurse chooses to leave their career, leave nursing, leave the public health care system, can the minister tell me if there is an expectation that there are exit interviews completed every time?

**Hon. A. Dix:** It wouldn't, of course, just be nurses but health sciences professionals, health care workers and others. I think it's fair to say that such exit interviews take place at some sites but not at all sites. It's not an across-the-board policy. I'll take that as a suggestion from the hon. member — that they look in that direction in terms of retention. Certainly, that work is taking place.

I would say, as we start the discussion of nursing, that we led the country in new registered nurses, not just in the last six years but, in the last year, dramatically so. A 6.7 percent increase in B.C. and a 0.7 percent decrease in Alberta is an example of that.

I think that reflects the commitment and the work of B.C. nurses, of the government and also of the BCNU at nursing sites and, really, the dedication of nurses in B.C. — the efforts we made during the COVID-19 pandemic to bring nurses back into the system and increase the training of nurses.

It's also fair to say that we started in 2017 at a lower base than other jurisdictions. That's true of nurse practitioners. That's true, in the last year, of licensed practical nurses, where they increased by 8.4 percent in a year — against, in that case, a 5 percent increase in Alberta. All of that is net increase. That's not just new nurses; that's net increases.

[6:05 p.m.]

That addresses retention and training and recruitment of nurses, but we have to do better, especially on retention. That's why we're saying we'll do a relational security model. Then putting it in place, working with SWITCH B.C., which the B.C. Nurses Union and other nurses have direct responsibility for, is important.

Those steps on retention, on recruitment, on training and on making changes to the health care system — all of those are part of the health human resources plan, and nurses are critical to that. They are, by far, our largest group of health care professionals. Obviously, all of the changes that are being put in place for recruitment in our recently negotiated collective agreement add to the significant improvements that have been made in the last number of years but certainly, as well, in the last year since we last discussed these issues.

**S. Bond:** Well, thank you. That was a lot of information that I appreciate, but I'm asking about exit interviews. I've heard from many nurses that they do not have the opportunity to have an exit interview.

One would assume that if we are trying to retain and also recruit, one of the things that would show a great deal of respect and value is that when a nurse chooses to

leave the system, they actually have the opportunity to talk about why they're leaving. I think that is a pretty important human resources strategy that would help build value.

I've heard from many nurses who, when I ask that question, actually just shake their heads and say no. I get that everybody is busy. But on the other hand, if we're going to try to create a workplace where people feel valued and want to stay and work — and not only that; if we want to attract people — knowing why they're leaving is really important, and being able to close gaps and deal with issues that are identified.

We might also find out that there are certain sites or certain health authorities or certain work environments that are more difficult than others, and we should be working to identify that and fix it. So I would strongly urge the minister to talk to health authorities about the fact that nurses who choose to leave the system, for whatever reasons, have the opportunity to talk about that.

The minister opened the door to a couple of other questions with his comment just moments ago, but I'll ask this question first. We know that in all of the materials that we see and the comments that are made, there is a recognition that there is stress and burnout in the health care system. We know that health care workers — many of them or some of them; we don't know how many — are taking early retirement. Obviously, that's a significant concern for us, when British Columbia is short of nurses today.

So what I'm wondering is, first of all, do we have data about early retirement? Do we have information about who's leaving the system and when? What I would like.... The minister doesn't have to answer with specifics. He can provide them to me later, if we have them. Do we have a way of knowing how many registered nurses, practical nurses, nurse practitioners may have taken early retirement starting in 2019 and moving the way up to 2022?

We should be looking at whether that number is increasing. What was the causality of those decisions? So I'm wondering: do we collect that data? Do we have the ability to compare 2019, '20, '21 and '22?

[6:10 p.m.]

**Hon. A. Dix:** First of all, I would say that our legacy human resources systems and information systems in health care could provide us with better data. Let's acknowledge that. That's why we're currently doing an RFP on data on human capital. That's the priority that the member identified and, certainly, I've identified.

I would say that when we say we've increased the number of nurses by between 6 percent and 7 percent this year, that's net of early retirement, new hires and people returning after, in some cases, absences from the system. We saw quite a bit of that assist British Columbia, maybe more than other jurisdictions, during COVID. Of course, we're very grateful for that as well, that we led Canada and that we increased between 6 percent and 7 percent. Alberta lost

close to 1 percent net of its registered nurses in the last year. That includes all early retirement and everything else.

The member is right. We need better data on human capital in the system. That's precisely what we're seeking to get.

Finally, and this is critical on early retirement.... This is an issue that was identified in the negotiations with the BCNU and that we're really focused on — you see that in both the incentives and other things in place for experienced nurses — ensuring that we maintain nurses in the system longer and properly recognize the most experienced nurses and senior nurses in the system. That was a key priority for ourselves and the BCNU and was reflected in those negotiations.

All of those things are in place, I'd say. But on the data side, we're seeking better health information so that we can identify such issues not just across the system but site by site.

**S. Bond:** I just think that one of the things that we owe health care professionals in British Columbia is a graceful, thoughtful approach to how they choose to leave the profession, whether they're retiring for whatever reasons. The minister doesn't hesitate to remind me about how important the work was that they did. I agree with that, and I think that our health human resources approach needs to reflect that.

That means talking to people when they choose to leave, figuring out what's causing, in many cases, some of those decisions and figuring out how that becomes a priority for us, to care for the people who care for us. I think that there are ways that could incrementally improve that. An exit interview, looking at early retirements. Why did that happen? And what can we do to bring nurses back into the system?

The minister knows that at some point during this discussion, I am going to ask the question I'm going to ask. He opened the door for that. British Columbia today again stands virtually alone in not allowing unvaccinated health care workers to return to their jobs.

The thing that I find difficult to understand about that is that other jurisdictions have considered the implications, have considered the place we find ourselves in with regard to the need for health care workers, and all of them have decided that it is appropriate to ask health care workers to come back to work. Yet in British Columbia, we stand virtually alone in Canada.

I'm going to ask the minister one more time. I know what the answer is going to be, but I feel obligated to ask on behalf of people whose lives were changed. In British Columbia, they are looking at the rest of our country and saying: "What makes us so different?" Will the minister reconsider the decision that British Columbia has made to continue the practice of not allowing unvaccinated health care workers to return to their jobs?

[6:15 p.m.]

**Hon. A. Dix:** First of all, it should be noted that 99 percent of health care workers got vaccinated across the system. Secondly, I'm not correcting the member on the facts, but I'm saying these are the facts. British Columbia was the only jurisdiction to do that. It's not that we're the only one who hasn't returned. We were the only jurisdiction to do that. At the time we put that in place, the opposition and others did call for us to do that. We were the only ones in Canada to do that.

We did that, understanding the vulnerability of the most vulnerable people in society — people living in long-term care and people in acute care — to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because we have that in place, 100 percent vaccinated across the system, it allows us to do other things, including the changes put in place by Dr. Henry a number of weeks ago to reduce some restrictions, particularly in long-term care, for visitors in long-term care and with respect to the use of masks in long-term care and acute care.

The issue of the proof-of-vaccine requirement is a provincial health order in B.C. It's based on the evidence that's put in place by the provincial health officer and her team. We have consistently, in British Columbia, supported them. It's not that I'm saying that's their responsibility and I am not supportive of that. I have supported them in that up and down the line.

Overwhelmingly health care workers got vaccinated, and overwhelmingly they supported that. They support that. It's not just the issue of some. It's an issue of all health care workers and the issues of the 99 percent who did get vaccinated.

I respect everybody. I understand how difficult those issues were for people, and I respect everybody involved in the health care system and everybody in the province. This has been a time of very difficult decisions, when people make difficult decisions in their own life. I have never, not once, said anything disrespectful of anybody. The member, who has had these discussions with me both publicly and privately, understands that.

This is a provincial health order. It's one that I support and one that's going to continue to be in place. We were the only jurisdiction in the country to do it because of our fundamental concern with the most vulnerable that defined all elements of our COVID-19 response. That's why I'm not back and forth or talking about what other people are saying or doing or are arguing with this agreement.

The COVID-19 response had remarkable support across the province. It always focused on the most vulnerable, whether they be temporary foreign workers in agriculture, whether they be seniors in long-term care, whether they be people living in acute care, whether they be health care workers. It defined our vaccination response and its priorities and continues to define those issues.

I think it's important that we continue to provide the maximum protection to the people that we can, while balancing that off. You saw that in the many difficult decisions

we made with respect to the opening of schools. Our position in B.C. was to keep schools open, more so than any other jurisdiction. I think those were the right decisions, but they're often much debated.

I'm proud of our COVID-19 response overall, and I respect the member's position. I want her to understand that I am not and I have not and I will not say anything else but be respectful for people.

Just to say this finally in our debate. While we disagree on this question, I understand how seriously she takes these issues, how supportive she was personally of our response, of these issues. This is an issue that I take very seriously. We put in place measures in B.C., the provincial health orders, and they will continue to be in place, and this policy will continue to be in place. We believe it's in the interests of the most vulnerable people in society. That is our motivation in making this decision.

We believe overwhelmingly that health care workers support an approach that sees them vaccinated and ensures that in this area of COVID-19, our health care facilities, where vulnerable people live and spend time to get well, are given the maximum possible protection.

So that's the reason for it. I'm respectful of the question, respectful of the member's desire to raise these issues here.

**S. Bond:** It was June of last year when we called for the return of unvaccinated health care workers. I'm going to move on, but I want to.... I appreciate the minister's comments about being respectful.

[6:20 p.m.]

I just want him to stop and think for a moment about the statement that talks about British Columbia doing this, in essence, to protect the vulnerable, and the rationale that is continually used. By implication.... Other jurisdictions across this country have carefully and thoughtfully moved ahead and made the decision to rehire those workers, and I would be stunned if it meant that they didn't care about vulnerable people.

My point is simply this. I can't imagine that other jurisdictions went ahead without thoughtfully and carefully considering the impact of that decision, and that British Columbia stands alone. I simply wanted to make sure that our view was on the record. That call came in June, partly because we looked at what else was happening in the country. We were thoughtful about that recommendation, and we also know we have a health care crisis, in terms of personnel, on our hands. Our position is also based in careful thought, as I'm sure other jurisdictions in this country are as well.

I'd like to talk about the internationally educated nurses. I think the minister has covered off the numbers for me in terms of recruitment totals to date. I am hopeful that we will continue to see transparency with those numbers. Certainly, there was a lot of excitement when that announcement was made. I want to make sure that results are what we focus on, not simply making an announce-

ment that says: "There's thousands of nurses that want to come here." What we need to do is expedite the process so they actually are able to get to work.

I think the minister told me how many bursaries had been announced last year for internationally educated nurses. Could the minister just repeat that for me?

**Hon. A. Dix:** Just to reply, I don't think we need to go into an ongoing debate. I didn't suggest that because the member disagrees, she didn't care about vulnerable people. I'm very careful not to say that, or that other jurisdictions don't. I'm just saying that this is our position, and we were the only ones to do it through the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's not a question of rehiring. The other jurisdictions.... Quebec tried, and they failed to succeed in putting in place that policy. In a number of health care facilities in Ontario, of course, it was put in place. They have a slightly different structure to their health care, and they put it in place. Some of those facilities, I think, still have it in place.

I want to be clear. I was very clear when I said it, I think. That's not what I was suggesting. I was suggesting that is our motivation, and the motivation of provincial health, for that decision. We were the only ones to do it. We were the only ones to do a significant number of things in the COVID-19 pandemic. I think it's one of the reasons why, and our support and respect for public health, that we had such a good response in B.C., relative to other jurisdictions, to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With respect to action 36, which are the actions around internationally educated nurses, I think I've provided it before, but I'll go through some of the numbers again, if that's okay, because the member was asking about that. It's 2,635 — it's updated from when I actually responded to the question before — that have signed return-of-service agreements. We have 2,997 applicants, and 100 of those applicants have completed competency agreements. The college has received about 2,000 applicants. That's up from 641 in 2022. It shows the impact of this.

The college has directed 88 IENs to complete remedial education, and they're eligible for a bursary to do that, and approved 80 of them for registrations. As of April 20, 160 IENs and 64 internationally educated health care assistants have been hired by health authorities. There have been over 15,000 expressions of interest, and 356 bursaries have been distributed to eligible applicants. That's the basic information. If the member needs more, she can either indicate that to me or in the coming days.

[6:25 p.m.]

**S. Bond:** Obviously, I find myself in an awkward spot here when it comes to discussing some of the issues related to nursing when we're in the middle of voting on a collective agreement, but I'm going to ask these questions. Perhaps the minister would, I don't know, prefer to wait until.... I'm not sure what he's able to say either. I don't

want to.... They're important questions, from my perspective.

Under the tentative collective bargaining agreement, there was \$108.6 million specifically announced for career development. I'm assuming — perhaps this needs to be a follow-up response from the ministry — that there will be timelines for each of the initiatives and a specific breakdown of what dollars have been put into mentorship support for nurses, clinical mentorship positions. How many will be in each health authority? Those things are important information, from my perspective.

Also, the \$100 million in one-time funding to support nurses in day-to-day operations. I'm interested in knowing the breakdown of those numbers, what that \$100 million is. I don't know whether that's something that the minister can speak to, or whether he'd prefer to document it and send it to me. That's also fine.

I'm wondering specific things, for example, related to the working short premium and whether that's in or out of the agreement. Are those questions that the minister can answer today?

**Hon. A. Dix:** What I'll endeavour to do.... The voting on the collective agreement ends at noon tomorrow. I do have detailed information. I could give an answer without some of the details, because we want to go through that process, in fairness to the BCNU. I'll endeavour, at the beginning of our one o'clock session tomorrow, to provide a detailed answer to that question, if that's okay with the hon. member.

I mean, I could answer it now without some of those details, but that would mean two answers. Why don't I do that in full? If that works for the member, I would appreciate that.

**S. Bond:** All right. We'll skip on past some of those. I know that my time will be limited tomorrow afternoon. So I'm hopeful.... I will have a number of other questions.

Interjection.

**S. Bond:** Yes, if it could be fairly brief. I have a couple of major topics that I want to try to cover off tomorrow. I know we won't have the whole afternoon tomorrow, and I will speak to the minister about that timing.

One of the things I want to make sure that I'm on the record about is the issue of nurse-to-patient ratios. I felt cautiously optimistic when I heard that part of the announcement. I am positive that there must be contract language around that. The minister may prefer, again, for me to get this information later.

Obviously, it's great to have a ratio. We need people to actually make that work. So I'm assuming that there's some sort of transition to where there is an expectation that those ratios are in place. I am concerned about things like

grievances. Is the ratio grievable? Things like that. Is there language that would allow grievances if ratios are not met?

There are a number of specific questions I have about the timeline for implementation. We know that we have 7,000 nursing vacancies at the moment in the province. I want to be hopeful about nurse-to-patient ratios. I think it has worked in some other jurisdictions.

My significant concern is: where are going to get the people? When I listened to the announcement.... Certainly, at least according to conversations that I've had directly with nurses, the ratios can be much higher than were noted. So the ratios are very aspirational. We hear circumstances of very significant nurse-to-patient ratios in some hospitals and in some circumstances.

[6:30 p.m.]

We know, for example, that Australia brought forward legislation and a number of things. What I want to know is: how do we ensure that this works? What are the steps? How do we transition? Is it grievable? What is the language? Again, I'm in an awkward spot because of the timing.

**Hon. A. Dix:** Let me talk generally about it. Then if we want to go into it in more detail, perhaps we could do that. I'll be brief. I'll just do a brief report off the top. If the member has any questions, I also commit to our deputy minister, probably, leading a briefing for the member, because I think it's important that we understand. This is an important public policy question. It's going to be with us for, I think, years to come. I think it's an important innovation.

Just on the money, there were essentially two tables. There was the agreement on the table with the NBA, the Nurses Bargaining Association, which is primarily BCNU but includes HSA members and others, as we know.

There was a second table with the Ministry of Health on policy questions, including this one. We are committed to, over the next three years, on that question, spending \$200 million, then \$250 million and then \$300 million. That means hiring people, basically. If we don't spend the full \$200 million, any amount — say we spent \$199 million, and there was \$1 million more — would be spent on initiatives to support nursing.

In achieving this goal over those years, this is a substantial investment in nursing that we're putting forward and putting in place together to improve the situation and to implement that ratio system. So \$750 million, over three years, in addition to all of the recruitment initiatives that are in place — our multiple agreements between the Ministry of Health, on that table, and the collective agreement table are significant here — will be spent on nursing and to address the issue of ratios.

If, for example, we were not able to spend all the money in one year, that means that all the remaining money would be spent on nursing. That's part of our agreement. I'd be happy to go into it in greater detail, I think, in

summary form tomorrow, but perhaps more useful to the member would be a detailed briefing with ministry staff as we develop it. This is going to be an important issue for the health care system for years to come.

I think it's a great innovation. I'm very proud of our team. I'm very proud of the B.C. Nurses Union, the Health Sciences Association and others that were involved in developing it. I'm very proud of that work. It has, I think, proven its worth in Australia, and, in part, in California. I believe that B.C. is going to lead in this area and that other jurisdictions are going to follow.

**S. Bond:** Thank you to the minister. I certainly would appreciate when we get to the place where we can have a fulsome briefing on the contract more broadly. I think that would be helpful. As I said to the minister, I try to be thoughtful about what will work. I think sometimes, that isn't partisan. It is: how do we make this work? What I want to be aware of is: what are the metrics? What are the measurements? How do we press for results?

On paper, it sounds like a great idea. The question is: does it work on the ground? In the context of a situation where we have significant nursing vacancies, it's hard to imagine how we get to the ratios that have been agreed to, hopefully. We'll see what happens tomorrow. I'm certain that will likely be the case.

I want to go back to the issue that my colleague raised around agency nurses. The stories that I heard and that were shared with me in talking to people are really causing concern. We want local nurses to be able to work in their communities. The minister and I talked about this in the context of community health centres and other parts of the health care system.

Nurses are choosing, some of them, just to not work, because they are not given first priority when it comes to, at times, agency nurses. So there is growing concern about the number of agency nurses that are being used. I'll ask the questions. The minister can provide the information to me later if it's easier. The minister may not have it here.

[6:35 p.m.]

How many nurse agency companies are currently operating in B.C.? How many of them are there? How many are new in the past three years? I'd like to take a look at what's happened. I want to know what the total cost for agency and travel nurses in B.C. has been over the last number of years so that we can see.... I mean, obviously, it has escalated the cost, and that is a significant challenge. Is it possible for the minister to provide those numbers, broken down by health authority?

**Hon. A. Dix:** We spoke about this earlier. Over the whole province in the last fiscal year, it was 1.4 percent of nursing hours. We talked about that. We talked about it being higher in Northern Health. What I'll do is provide those breakdowns by health authorities, including any information with respect to nursing agencies and other

information we have. Perhaps I can do that, because I know the member has a few more questions, and I don't want to occupy all her time waiting for the next answer.

In a general sense, I would say that we used more agency nurses, particularly during COVID, for obvious reasons. We wanted to maintain the system. We had to bring more people in. When it comes to providing care for people, I think the member knows that we are prepared to take extraordinary action.

It's not our desire to have more agency nursing, but it is our desire, when people are sick in hospital, to get staff there. If staff is available and we need them to fill in, we are going to go do that regardless of even if the costs are high, because we believe that that's the right thing to do. I don't think the member is disagreeing with that.

It was a fundamental question for us, in discussing this with the BCNU, and for them to focus on our permanent staff even more so. There was some criticism, and the member would have seen this online, from casual staff and others to have an agreement that reflected our commitment to our permanent staff and our recruitment of that staff, which provides stability to communities. I talked about that with the member for Cariboo North earlier.

What the member sees is correct. It is more of an issue in the Northern Health Authority than it is in other health authorities, although it is an issue, generally, in the system. There's more now than there was. I think the action that we're taking is to make this the best place to be an employed nurse in the world, which is the purpose of our actions here and the purpose of our collective agreement here and the purpose of our discussions to the BCNU.

The final thing I'd say is this. We did a lot of work with doctors around their issues in the past year. That has, I think, shown itself to be successful, but it's successful partly because it renewed our partnership. I believe that's the work we've also done with nurses and the HEU and the HSA — a partnership together with nurses, a partnership for recruitment and a partnership for retention. Of course there are union management issues, but this is unprecedented policy work that we've done together to address some of these very issues.

**S. Bond:** I appreciate the minister's response and his willingness to provide some of the data that I think will literally confirm the very things both he and I are apparently concerned about.

The thing that I found most, I think, frustrating was that nurses perceive that, and it's true, agency nurses have a better work-life balance. One of the significant concerns was that we are hearing that nurses are leaving our public system and becoming agency nurses. Why? Because in many cases, they get to choose the shifts that they work. There are premiums when it comes to what they are paid, and they end up, in some cases, working right alongside a nurse that they have worked with previously, and now they are an agency nurse.

So there are pay differentials. There are other things that are creating a very uneven playing field. I want to just be sure that we understand that there is a great deal of concern about making sure that if you live in a community, you get to work in a hospital. Why on earth wouldn't it be that the people who live there and are committed to that community and to those patients get to choose?

[6:40 p.m.]

Build the flexibility into the system instead of bringing someone from outside and saying: "Here, you get your choice of shifts." And by the way, they're the ones that.... The other nurse needs to be able to care for her kids, or whatever it is. We need a system that responds far more flexibly and with an innovative approach.

I'll leave it at that, but I would very much appreciate details and data around wage differentials, those kinds of things. We've heard stories of agency nurses taking taxis from Prince George to Quesnel, for example. I would tell you that that is not a cost-effective way to be transporting anyone. I can't even imagine what that would look like.

I want us to honour the concerns that we're hearing from those nurses who want to do their jobs in their communities. If the minister could agree to provide us with that information, and I look forward to seeing how we might be dealing with agency nurses, moving into the future.

Do I have time for one more question, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** Yeah, one more, please.

**S. Bond:** All right. Well, it'll depend on the minister's answer, I'm assuming.

I don't want to start a major topic. I'm actually just going to ask a question about something I know the minister and I both care about. That is ALS. We know that we need to continue to move towards clinical trials in British Columbia. That really matters. We also know that there are very few treatment options available.

I wrote to the minister expressing concerns about Albrioza and looking at.... Health Canada approved that particular drug in June of last year. However, there have been conditions on the recommendation that it be reimbursed on drug plans — specifically that it only be covered to treat those who had symptoms for 18 months or less. The minister knows that this would eliminate many ALS patients.

I really want to urge the minister to think very carefully about the impact. I know that negotiations are currently underway, but I absolutely believe that we need to think about all of the patients who are impacted by ALS and the fact that a decision to have that kind of restriction would eliminate a lot of ALS patients from a drug that, potentially, would dramatically improve their quality of life.

**Hon. A. Dix:** First of all, it is an issue and a shared concern. Recently, I met with a young man on this very question in my constituency office. I'll be meeting with

the society very soon on a number of issues, including our work together. I think we've provided some unprecedented support.

Partly, I acknowledge that it's our joint discussions with the member, her advocacy for patients with ALS and my own, that led to that. I think we have a very strong and good relationship with the society and the effort to support them as they build towards a clinical chair and clinical trials in B.C., which is so important to those overall efforts.

As the member suggests, we have, of course, advanced in recent times the coverage for Radicava, which is edaravone, an oral liquid, and Albrioza. They are currently being negotiated. Those are issues that I have.... We've personally engaged with the community involved with ALS. Those are issues that are before us, and the member will know that the drug approval process and the negotiation process are really important to give maximum access to prescription drugs.

We've got a very committed PharmaCare team here in B.C. that advocates and is regularly engaged with patients as well. Those are issues before it, but I take the member's representation on that issue because it's an important issue. She'll know that I'll be very much engaged in working with the society and with her, and I will be keeping her informed of progress we make on that file.

With that, hon. Chair, I move that the House rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 6:45 p.m.

## Proceedings in the Birch Room

### Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF  
WATER, LAND AND RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

The House in Committee of Supply (Section C);  
K. Greene in the chair.

The committee met at 2:47 p.m.

**The Chair:** Good afternoon, Members. I call Committee of Supply, Section C, to order.

We are meeting today to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Land and Resource Stewardship.

I now recognize the minister to move the vote.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** And Water. I apologize.



**Hon. N. Cullen:** Don't forget the water — incredibly important. Thank you.

Welcome, committee members.

On Vote 46: ministry operations, \$124,009,000.

**The Chair:** Minister, do you have any opening remarks?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Very briefly, because I know time is of the essence when we're engaged together. I've been looking forward to these conversations and dialogue, which I hope it is, describing what is this ministry's, essentially, first year of operations. We celebrated WaLRS's, as we affectionately know it, one-year anniversary just last week with staff. There were a number of walrus outfits in the audience, which I was very appreciative of.

The ambitions this ministry has for the future are described in the estimates that we're dealing with — I think some pretty significant efforts, with respect to things that I hope are shared interests, regardless of political orientation or where you live in the province; the need — as is in the name of the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship — to better steward the natural resources of this province, and in particular, the land and water.

I'm joined by people far smarter than me from the ministry who will help guide on some of the more specific elements. I don't know where we're going, so we'll have a look as to the topics discussed today. I look forward to the conversation, and I'll leave it at that.

**L. Doerkson:** Thank you. I'm looking forward to the engagement, as well, of course. I can give a bit of direction as to questions that we'll be asking today.

[2:50 p.m.]

I should say that we'll be joined later by the Third Party around 5:30, somewhere around there, 5:45. And, of course, I do have some questions that I'm going to read into the record for one of my colleagues at the end of today, and also I'll be joined by another colleague of mine who will have questions in general terms around environmental issues.

Also, frankly, what I want to try to understand better today... While we will have a few questions about the dollars and cents of the ministry and why it seems to be ballooning, really, what I want to try to leave here today with is just a better understanding of where this ministry is going. And my first question, really, is going to be around that. I want to get a better understanding of what this ministry hopes to accomplish. I want to get a better understanding of the hierarchy amongst other ministries.

Now, we touched on this last year in a number of different ways, but, honestly, in many ways, other ministries are pointing to this minister for specific answers. I understood from last year and other conversations that we've had that there is going to be a lot of policy writing coming from

this ministry, and I want to understand what that directive looks like, how it will affect other ministries.

So I guess, right off the top, I would like to just understand better what the ministry hopes to accomplish and what the hierarchy looks like.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Thank you for the question. It's good to sort of, as we are about a year in — we are more than a year in now — go back to the beginning of how this ministry was formed, which was quite unique, I think, than the way government normally restructures itself.

We spent a significant amount of time in my first mandate — I was the Minister of State for the Ministry of what was then, well, FLNRORD, the very, very large ministry that had been put together over a number of years and had grown quite significantly — with some hope, anticipation of efficiencies when it came to permitting, efficiencies when it came to land use planning, which, according to the folks that I would call the government's clients, had not been fully realized.

A mandate from former Premier Horgan — whose name I'm allowed to say now, I think — was to seek a restructuring. As we were doing that, we went out and did a very, very broad consultation, a very extensive consultation over a number of months, with industry, with municipalities, with user groups that may have interest, particularly in the more rural parts of our province and particularly with First Nations, which, in the end, preoccupied the majority of our time. What we heard back was significant, and it leads to the answer for my friend's question as to who we've become.

There were three principles that we received back from the public, from those interest groups. One was around the issue of reconciliation and making the declaration of the rights of Indigenous peoples real on the ground, the opportunities for co-management, co-decision-making with Indigenous rights and title holders.

[2:55 p.m.]

The second was environmental protection — that we see the stresses upon the land and water of this province, the increased threats of climate change, the changing nature of the impact that we have had on the land. The sustainability of that land to sustain us was another key feature, as well as the economic opportunities — so an increased sense of certainty and increased use of tools like modernized land use planning to allow those who are looking to work in B.C. or who are working in B.C. to make the right investments and to understand what the larger role is.

I'll speak briefly to the.... My friend talked about hierarchy. We have a number of significant partnerships, as one could imagine, across some of the ministries that would be on the typical list. The Ministries of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation, as well as Environment and, certainly, Forests and Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation would be some of our primary relationships.

The design of this ministry in seeking mandates to co-develop land use planning requires us to be a convening ministry, so we are often in the role of bringing various partner ministries together to solve a challenge. A very important and recent example, my friend would know, is the agreement around Blueberry River First Nations and other Treaty 8 Nations that have come into that, their own agreements, to settle, which was a very difficult challenge, the cumulative impacts case that my friend would know....

Rather than continue to litigate against those interests of Blueberry River, in this particular example, it was to seek a way to dialogue and reconcile the challenges of recovering back the land, creating those economic opportunities and reconciliation more largely. I think that is a good example of what this ministry does. Rather than hierarchy, it's much more organized with respect to partnership.

Last thing, and I'm sure we'll get into this in the estimates. There are other things the ministry does, but around the question of permitting, the Premier and I stood up at the beginning of this year and publicly announced our housing task force specifically focused on permitting — significantly more resources to speed up the permitting process, because we know that's an impediment to a lot of interests that I think we all share — and then to take the examples from that experience on housing to the broader natural resource sector, to the broader question of permitting.

Anyone who's ever dealt with the provincial or federal governments on permitting.... There's a significant backlog that we're addressing right now that has built up over many years and that, I'd say, causes an inordinate amount of challenges and missed opportunities for our province.

I'll leave it at that. I know we'll have some time together to explore more, but I've been greatly.... Well, I've been gratified, frankly, for the advice we got from the people we first started the conversation with to have a more client-focused view of this government and this ministry in addressing the needs at hand and the interests and concerns people had as a reorganization, certainly not for its own sake but to get something done, to get a series of things done. That's what we've been doing for the past year or more.

**L. Doerkson:** Thank you, Minister. I guess I want to canvass this just a little bit more, because I think it's confusing. I mean, if I'm understanding correctly, things like groundwater registry, for instance, are still in the Forests Ministry, but it seems to me that you've got the title of "Water."

I'm wondering. When it comes to those types of initiatives, other initiatives like old growth and things like that, oftentimes that's referred right back to this ministry. Again, it's confusing, because I would think that by talking to the Forests Minister, I would be talking to the right person about some of those initiatives. But oftentimes, as you just mentioned, permitting which would

affect all of these ministries.... I do hope to get to that and canvass that a little bit later. But all fingers sort of point back to this ministry.

I'm trying to understand things like water registry — you know, the groundwater registry — and those types of things. I don't know how to ask that question in a different way, Chair. What is the hierarchy? I mean, is Water and Land — WaLRS, as we're affectionately referring to it — going to dictate policy to the Ministry of Forests to look after something like that? I want to leave that vague because I'm talking about only one initiative, and there are others. So will this be the ministry that will dictate, through policy, to the Minister of Forests, the Minister of Mines, with respect to all of these types of issues.

[3:00 p.m.]

**Hon. N. Cullen:** The question my friend put forward was a good one. I like dealing with specifics and examples, because that helps describe what the function and form of the ministry is. Again, part of the initiative of building this ministry was to have a more strategic view, a higher-level view — 50,000-foot, if you will — of some of the larger questions and challenges facing this province.

Water is a good one, because as we've seen in the last number of years, through the various environmental and climate change-related crises, we often have too much water at times and oftentimes too little water. The effects of that don't fall within one ministry just because that ministry has the authorities. If we have a drought, of course it affects Agriculture, and it affects Health. It affects Municipal Affairs. It affects a broad range.

Recently we set up a watershed security strategy, which we canvassed last time we were engaged in this way. That is a strategic-level effort from this ministry that implicates a number of other government agencies and a lot within the private sector and other orders of government, to be able to bring forward strategies for watersheds to make them more resilient, to make sure that the water is there when we need it and to make sure that the infrastructure is in place, all the rest of that.

We wouldn't have the authorities under Water, Land and Resource Stewardship to guide what the municipality does on their infrastructure investments. But because we have a partnership with Municipal Affairs, the advice can be given and handed down and then the action taken in a coordinated manner.

I think this speaks to, sometimes, the frustrations people have with government in saying: "While one hand of government is doing this, the other seems to be either unaware or moving in the opposite direction."

Another example — because, again, I like examples — is the old-growth strategic review. Obviously, that is predominantly held within the Ministry of Forests. But in that partnership, there were two recommendations that fell to us, as does the larger canvassing of how to do modernized land use planning in a way that implicates First Nations in

the appropriate way as partners. A lot of that work again falls to the ministry.

We have, I believe, 18 modernized land use planning tables around the province right now that our ministry guides. An issue like old growth will sit within many of those tables, because it's reality within that territory. But the engagement means that we're able to talk about more than just the question of old growth in terms of that nation's interests in the survivability of the ecosystem.

I hope that helps. I think my friend was seeking.... He used the word "dictate." For lot of the authorities, say, on groundwater registry, we would bring forward recommendations through the appropriate cabinet subcommittee. In that case, it would be ELUC. Ultimately, though, it's the government. It's the cabinet itself that would make that final policy determination.

[3:05 p.m.]

Who has the legal authorities would then administer that determination, but we're often the ministry bringing folks together, bringing the best minds we can to make a strategic decision with our partner agencies. But the ultimate authority, the ultimate dictation, as my friend referred to, would be done by the appropriate level of cabinet, but ultimately, the cabinet of the government of the day.

**L. Doerkson:** Thank you, Minister. It does help, and it is coming a little more clear.

I guess with respect to policy writing and things like that, I can appreciate that this ministry may be consulting with individuals and different groups and such. I guess what I'm trying to get a full understanding of is if this ministry is able to write policy on.... I can appreciate that there are other people at the table.

What is the chance of that policy going forth? Is it written? You're in consultations, you just mentioned. I'm trying to understand.... Perhaps "dictate" is the wrong word. I could look for a different word, but I'm trying to understand, I guess, who is in charge of this massive task.

I'm not trying to simplify it. I'm not trying to muddy the waters. I can appreciate how complex this is. The minister just touched on.... Sometimes we have too much water. Sometimes we don't have enough. That is Cariboo-Chilcotin in a nutshell. So there's no question that this is a significant challenge.

I guess I'm just still confused. Maybe dictate, hierarchy — those things — are.... I'm trying to find out who's in charge of this. I want to understand. Honestly, you mentioned permitting. We just talked a little bit about that. So it looks like that falls here, and we'll come back to that. But it looks to me as though this minister or this ministry is going to — I want to refrain from using the word "dictate" — set policy that other ministries may operate within.

Again, I stress this because we have asked questions of other ministries, and they point right back here. So I want

to understand, I guess: is this ministry actually taking a lead on many of these initiatives?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** It's a good question. I appreciate what I think is the intent of my friend's questions. As in any government ministry, there will be times when cabinet has said: "Go solve this question. Go try and fix this on behalf of the public that we represent."

[3:10 p.m.]

The coastal marine strategy would be a good example. Our province has never, for whatever reasons, historically put any thinking to a strategy about how our coast and our marine environment were to develop or be conserved. That is something that cabinet has directed this ministry to lead on, which is very exciting, because it allows coastal communities and interests to actually come in and say, "What is the strategy for our coast?" and to compare us to other maritime subnational states.

We're one of the few that has not given much time to this question. It's a bit Wild West, to not be too pejorative about it, here in B.C., and it causes problems, as my friend.... My friend lives in the Interior, as do I, but we know the stresses that are on our coastal environment right now — communities, a lot of interest in living there. Also, the impacts of so many people coming — yeah. It's an incredible part of the world, and it needs that.

That's an example. When the ministry is handed a task, we're taking the task, and that is the work that we're doing. There would be other instances. We have a deputy ministers committee made up of all the natural resources sectors that my deputy minister, Lori Halls, chairs. There are initiatives that come out of that that we then bring to government and say: "This is a significant challenge. We should take this on." Cumulative impacts would be one.

Previously, or up until this moment, the notion of the effects of cumulative impacts on rights and title holders or on the environment in general has been somewhat ignored by government. We have permitted activity and use without giving much attention, I would say, to be fair, to what happens when you add it up over time, and it adds up in some cases. So developing that policy was something that we said to government, being in government: "This is something that we need to fix."

I would say, to pull it back, the ability of us to have a better understanding of the interests, the sustainability and the opportunities that we have within the land base, territory by territory, across B.C., necessitates more investment in planning, more investment in bringing those values and interests together. We had a bit of that in the '90s. It wore off a bit in the 2000s and 2010s. Many would argue that the lack of planning then leads to the greater uncertainty and potential of conflict. So that is something that we take very seriously, and that is an imperative of our ministry.

I guess I will circle back to one of the examples I started with, which is in the northeast, a pretty significant court case. It left a great deal of uncertainty for any-

one who works, particularly in the oil and gas or the forestry sector, in the northeast. Tradition would have been to continue to appeal and appeal and appeal up to the Supreme and likely lose, given legal history, which in all of that time would have led to more uncertainty within industry and for First Nations and a lot more costs for the treasury, for the public.

Our ministry was the one who brought folks together to negotiate a solution with the impacted First Nations, which then, as my friend would have seen in Prince George at the Natural Resources Forum.... It was around that time, I think, that that was announced. It was endorsed by local government. It was endorsed by industry and certainly by the First Nations partnership that we had.

That's the industry in action. That's what Water, Land and Resource Stewardship is doing in actions solving what have been, sometimes, vexing and generational challenges in real time with some very prescribed outcomes that I talked about earlier — reconciliation, environmental stewardship and economic opportunity for the province. Those are our guiding lights when we get into work.

The complexity around the land and marine bases is real, as my friend alluded to. I'm happy to get into more specifics that might be of interest in the estimates.

**L. Doerkson:** I think we'll move on from that. I don't get a sense that I'm going to get a full understanding of what the hierarchy looks like. I can appreciate the complexity to that. I'm not trying to in any way diminish what's going on here, but it is very confusing. It's not just confusing to MLAs. It's confusing to the public. It's confusing to industry. It's confusing to just about everyone.

We did touch on groundwater. I hadn't anticipated asking questions about that, but I would like to just ask if I could get a better understanding of where we are on that. Does it still sit with the Minister of Forests, and if so, how is this ministry involved with that registry?

[3:15 p.m.]

**Hon. N. Cullen:** On the very specific, in terms of the groundwater licensing.... Yes, that is under statute and remains with the Ministry of Forests. If there are very specific examples or questions, that would have to go there. The overall strategic impacts of groundwater will be encompassed by something I mentioned earlier.

A watershed security strategy sits within our ministry. It, again, would implicate not just groundwater licensing but a whole host of other issues — watershed restoration, for example. We know there are hundreds of watersheds across B.C., some of them much more impacted than others. We know that there can be a connection between the two, certainly.

If you have a watershed security strategy and there is evidence that there is an over-issuance of licences and there's a lack of groundwater, that could be something

that would be incorporated in. That's where the partnership happens with us and the Ministry of Forests or other industrial users, EMLI and others that may be issuing permits.

Specific permits, forestry. The strategic review of watershed security would be us. Ultimately, though, any of those policy recommendations that we say.... We go away from consultations with the public and First Nations and say: "This is the strategic review we've done. Here are some changes we would enact across a whole series of ministries." Those end up, again, back at the environment and land use committee. Ultimately, cabinet would have to endorse that, and then the work goes out to the ministries to make it so.

On the very specific administration of it, groundwater licensing, yes, with Forests. On the strategic level review, it sits with us here at Water and Land.

**L. Doerkson:** Thank you, Minister.

Just a couple more questions on this topic, then. I can appreciate that it started there, and it has stayed there. Would that be the same answer, then, for surface rights and any tenures over surface water?

[3:20 p.m.]

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Yes. Specifically to my friend's question, it remains the way it is.

**L. Doerkson:** I guess, then, likely my final question on this will be: do we see that coming over to Water and Land?

It would strike me as peculiar, Chair, that an initiative that would, obviously, be water, and policy being written here.... It would just seem to me that the management of that should be in this ministry, particularly with respect to watershed restoration. I mean, obviously, all of that work points to surface rights that people have tenure on and water licences that go back, my gosh, decades, right?

I suspect that this is going to be quite a challenging amount of work going forward. It just strikes me as peculiar that it would remain in the Forests Ministry and not be here.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** In creating the ministry, we heard a lot of advice, as I mentioned before, from a lot of different interest groups and rights and title holders with respect to what would make sense.

The reason I used the word "unique" before in terms of that process.... "Unique" is overused, I'd say, in our general conversations. "Unique" means "one." It doesn't mean "unusual."

We couldn't find another example of spending that much time hearing from folks that are engaging with government. We asked them three very simple questions, which were quite provocative in the end. What's working? What's not? And what would you change if you could? My

friend could imagine that the answer to the last question, in particular, covered a vast spectrum of opinions. What could you change if you had a magic wand?

With respect to restructuring government to have a strategically focused ministry, which is what we are.... Bringing forward water and land use planning, at a very high level, which implicates all sorts of statutory decision-makers.... It was deemed thoughtful, at the beginning, at the very least, not to decouple that. So to remain with those issuing those water licences within Forests and other statutory decision-makers, which are sitting with different ministries, to remain there. There's a relationship. There are legal authorities.

Some future reconsideration of that may be the case. We're feeling, at this point, as we stand up modernized land use planning, as we do negotiations like we did in Blueberry River.... Having those implicated ministries at the table, who have that statutory authority there, inputting into the land use planning, inputting into the negotiations, is working.

At the other end, there's not, not that I've seen, a disconnect between the presentation of, say, a Blueberry River agreement.... Suddenly somebody at another ministry is saying: "Well, that's not going to work." They're at the table as we do the negotiation, which has been, I think, the way government ought to work more often.

The confusion my friend talks about is felt the other way, when going and seeking a permit and having to knock on eight different ministry doors. That leads to some confusion for somebody who is looking to develop housing or build a mine or do all sorts of things. We are moving towards a one-door model because of that very interest.

I think we share a common experience, maybe, in talking to people going through the process with government. The ultimate aim and the work that we're engaged in is to lower that confusion, present a face to the public and to industry and to First Nations that is not nine — it is one — and allow people to move through a process that they're trying to get through in a much more expedited way.

**L. Doerkson:** I understand what you've just said. I think you just hit the nail on the head, Minister. The confusion....

[3:25 p.m.]

I've had a number of constituents that have reached out to me, and I'm sure they've reached out to you, with respect to my critic role under Water and Land. Those constituents have reached out because of, for instance, groundwater licensing. They have had what they felt were pretty confrontational visits from officers that were representing the province with respect to registries that had been submitted but not processed.

I think probably the public would specifically come to Water and Land to make their claim or try to understand. "Why is an officer coming to my yard in Kevlar to talk to me about water licensing that I've already submitted?"

Now I can certainly share that information with the member offline, but I think it is very confusing.

I guess my question is: how will this ministry try to help constituents that are in that situation? And is the ministry here from Water and Land dictating — there's that word again — policy about groundwater registry and surface water rights to the Minister of Forests?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** First of all, I'm not familiar with the specific Kevlar case but more than happy, offline, to get some details. We hope, as cabinet, to do that all the time, right? We have folks that come from government benches, opposition and bring specific cases. I had one just after question period today. Whether it falls within my ministry or not, we try to seek out what's going on with a permit or a licence, so we're happy to do that.

With respect to the water question and the dictation, or instruction, again, we sit as a strategic planning ministry. We are also responsible for water sustainability plans, which very much affect things like groundwater licencing, surface water and all of those kinds of things.

The ultimate dictation, the ultimate instruction, of policy, again, would go from us as a recommendation to a cabinet subcommittee. If they would recommend it, it goes to cabinet. "This is our new direction on water sustainability." Then it becomes a government directive which then would implicate Forests or the Oil and Gas Commission or whatever it would happen to be.

That's where the ultimate authority comes from. Our ministry is charged with that strategic engagement. I mentioned coastal marine strategy, looking at things like water sustainability. That's us. In that process, it's not an either-or. We of course implicate Municipal Affairs; we of course implicate Forests; we of course implicate Agriculture — because all of their constituency groups are very important to the conversation.

[3:30 p.m.]

Talking about water in the Fraser Valley, you better include Agriculture, right? They have a strong and important voice. Water is incredibly important to their operations. So, too, are the municipal governments that operate within that specific area. So when we work on water sustainability, we take those voices. We have partnerships with those ministries. We will make a policy recommendation. That's our job. We don't get to dictate anything, though.

As one who's spent time near government, that's got to go to the proper authority. That ultimately rests with the cabinet. Once from there, though, yes. Hopefully, our recommendations give the government a much more strategic view than just a case-by-case, which has sometimes been the error government has made in the past.

Where a particular water issue comes up, it's advocated for. There's a campaign around it. Government makes a decision on that specific case but doesn't set policy, doesn't have a strategic view of the entire region, doesn't have a

view of the entire province. I think people are looking for something a lot more predictable with a little bit more of a grander scale, and that is some of the work that we do.

**L. Doerkson:** We definitely digress here, so I'm going to probably move on. But I do just have two final questions on that topic that I had not intended on talking about today. Would that officer have represented Water and Land, or would it have been a CO? Could the minister comment on that?

Secondly, is the minister in a position...? Noting that permitting and such is falling to this ministry, is the minister able to comment on where we are with respect to those registrations and the process of those registrations?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Again to the.... I think it's that we're back to Kevlar. Maybe not. But in the specific example used, I'd feel relatively confident that somebody working for Forests was a natural resource officer. It's a best guess without knowing the specific details. But my friend's question was: do they represent the Ministry of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship? No.

With respect to the groundwater licensing and the permitting that's been going on, for more specific questions, it's natural that that would fall with the Minister of Forests, on the process that's been used, which ones are being applied and how that's going — better there.

But I would say this: the overall challenges of backlog permits — which my friend, if he's dealt around this issue would know — exist there but are ultimately part of the work that we're doing on permitting reform. It's one of a list of permits that we deal with. Riparian zone.... There's a whole suite of them that we've been tasked with, by the cabinet of the government of British Columbia, to improve the backlog — by that, I mean reduce significantly — and also improve the timeliness of people getting permits out the other end.

One thing I might add, if I could is I talked earlier about modernized land use planning, that sort of strategic-level look at the land base. One of the known outcomes of good land use planning is that a lot of what I would call more day-to-day, lower-level permits can be handled staff-to-staff. They don't implicate a full First Nations consultation, for example. Once you have an actual strategic plan, an agreed-on plan, together, that's some of the certainty that industry has talked to us about. If every permit has to go to the First Nations governance table, the time it takes, the backlog there, is significant, and they're not often as resourced as we would like.

[3:35 p.m.]

Part of the effort of having a ministry explicitly focused on modernized land use planning is that you get to tackle all of those big questions, the map questions, work and activities. I can my friend a number of examples, if he'd like of successful land use planning initiatives that have gone on around the province.

There's one in the northwest that the Gitanyow Nation has done. It's ten years old now. You talk to industry; you talk to local government. The ability to know what the map is that had been agreed to at a government-by-government level is good. You know where work can happen, where permits can be sought. It has brought a lot more certainty to the ground and, I would say, much, much better outcomes. That's one example. There are many, and there are many more to come, which is exciting.

I know we started with groundwater permitting, a very specific thing. I think some of the frustration that First Nations have expressed to industry, local government, is that if every permit has to hit the so-called political level for First Nations, then folks are left waiting a long time, because there are so many people knocking on that door right now.

What we've come to in our agreements with First Nations is if you can settle out the larger land question as to what the plan is, those permits, the day-to-day permits, drop down. Then they become much more routine because we know that activity is permitted there. We know that the permits go through this kind of function from us, from First Nations, and then people can move on with their business. So there is a light at the end of that tunnel. We've seen it function. We've seen it function well.

We just need to do more of it. That's why you'll see some funding increases. My friend referred to it as ballooning. I was looking for more, to be frank. But you'll see why we're investing in those kinds of things, because the ultimate result is better on a number of different fronts that I think are important to all of us.

**L. Doerkson:** Maybe I'll ask that question in a different way.

The minister has mentioned a number of times throughout this early engagement that this office is going to be taking the lead on permitting. My question was a simple one. Can the minister comment on where we are on the registry itself as far as accomplished registries? I think last time we heard, there were about 15,000. I advocated quite loudly from my riding for my members and, certainly, constituents to fill out the paperwork, get this done, because there's something to be lost here.

I can ask those questions about water to the Minister of Forests. What I'm wondering is.... This ministry is leading on permitting, so where are we as far as completed registrations?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** This does sit with Forests, but in full transparency of how we're working, as of November 22, 7,967 total applications, and 2,967 were accepted, and 1,867 decisions were made. As one can see by that ratio, we've got some work ahead of us with respect to groundwater licensing.

**L. Doerkson:** I think I will check that number or maybe

get it later if I could get some help. I thought we were at more like 15,000. But I'm going to move on to question 1.

[3:40 p.m.]

I want to just come back now to the budget itself and the actual expenses. I guess my first question about the finances itself is if I could get just a general understanding.... I mean, I see the budget, over time, growing to around \$124 million. I think we started somewhere around \$82 million, if memory serves correct. But I just want to get an understanding, if I could, in general terms: why such a large amount of growth in this ministry?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** This was anticipated as a question, and it's a good one. It's on my first page. I'll just read out the very specifics of it, and we can get into any particular detail that my friend would like.

For budget 2023-24 now, the budget is \$124.009 million — I've got questions about that \$9,000 — representing an increase of \$32.001 million compared to the original '22-23 budget, which was \$92.008 million.

We seem to really enjoy these little bits at the end. Not that they're little bits; \$8,000 is a lot of money. It's just when put beside the \$92 million figure, it seems interesting.

The related estimates of \$103.747 million was an increase of \$11.73 million for interministry transfers. I'll break that down, because that might be helpful for those listening: \$4.43 million was attributed to budget realignments through the natural resource sector restructuring and \$7.3 million were for Indigenous funding program for collaborative Indigenous stewardship forums, which I'm happy to speak to as well.

The '23-24 estimates budget is an increase of \$20.262 million or 19.53 percent compared to the '22-23, which was estimated at \$103.74 million.

Here I'll get into the specifics of where the lifts happen. The \$7.06 million, April 2022 budget letter, was for 99 new FTEs; \$3.973 million was for permitting authorization and housing priority. We talked about this a little bit before. We were putting new resources into permitting, more people, but also doing the work differently. And \$9.2 million, a little more than that, was shared recovery wage mandate, and \$210,000 was to the minister's office.

That's the whole breakdown of where the changes happened. Like I said, happy to get into any specific one.

**L. Doerkson:** Yeah. Let's do exactly that.

A couple of specific questions. I mean, first off, just with respect to executive, I want to get a better understanding of what qualifies under that category and why it's such a big lift there, because I think the lift was pretty significant in that category alone.

I was going to suggest.... It is under "Executive and support services," the question. Specifically, corporate services climbs from \$14.222 million to \$18.894 million. I can, I guess, somewhat guess at what executive services might

be, but I would like a little clarity from the minister, if I could.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Now that we're getting into that level of specificity, I'm wondering if my friend could outline where he sees the figures that he quoted. I have slightly different ones, and it'll help us in answer to know where he's pointing towards.

**L. Doerkson:** Sure. I'm quoting the 2023-2024 estimates binder.

[3:45 p.m.]

**Hon. N. Cullen:** I was hoping there was something more exciting in the answer. But the answer is that in the previous year's budget, we weren't fully staffed up as a ministry yet. Fast-track to the year forward, and now we're at the full size that was contemplated when the restructuring took place. That accounts....

For the delta, what I'm reading is in the \$4.9 million range. I had \$14.756 million in the estimate that I'm looking at, and then that went to \$19.757 million — they're the two that I'm reading off — from the 2022-23 to '23-24. That gives you just shy of \$5 million, \$4.9 million. That is, again, becoming fully staffed with the deputy ministers, the minister's office. We looked across government at other ministries, and this is about the right size and right cost, given the scale and scope of the ministry that we operate.

**L. Doerkson:** I can provide this page later. We are definitely looking at different numbers. There's no question. However, they are close enough, and I understand the answer that the minister just provided. I would note, though, that the minister just noted that it's a ministry that was about the size of this one or that one. I would suspect that that would not be, maybe, the best way to decide how many people might work in this ministry. But that's just a comment. The work ahead of this ministry, of course, is massive.

I want to just ask about the folks that are working in the ministry now. I can appreciate that we maybe didn't have enough people to do the tasks at hand, but my question was.... I think about a year ago, we were around 1,700 people working in this ministry. I wondered if I could get a general sense of how many people are now working in the ministry and where those people are working in the province.

Chair, I don't need real thick detail. I just want to get a sense of where we have individuals working throughout the province. Are they scattered about and in different regions? That kind of thing.

[3:50 p.m.]

**Hon. N. Cullen:** As of last year — and we'll double-check this just to be exactly accurate — we were sitting at around 1,150 FTEs. As of April 1, we're now at 1,313 full-

time-equivalents. I find this interesting just in terms of the percentage breakdown. And we can get as specific as my friend would like in terms of which regions.

I was just in Prince George for the COFI summit. We went to meet the WaLRS folks working in Prince George, 30 or so staff, I believe — 30 or 35 staff working there. That would start to give my friend some understanding. I have personally, and now the government officially has a policy, a strong interest in people being able to work essentially wherever they'd like. We have a new directive that has come from the head of the public service allowing people to live in other parts of the province and do work for the provincial government. They don't have to be in Victoria or Vancouver specifically anymore.

The only other thing I would point out is that — my friend is right — it's a massive amount of work that we're engaged in. Of the FTEs as of just a couple of weeks ago, 390 staff are in science and technical, 231 in what we call the management band, and IT is 226. There are some really good investments in lidar and a number of other IT functions that I think are going to be really interesting. Senior admin and research, 170; finance and economics, 172; admin 116; and executive ten. We're trim, we're lean, we're mean, and we have people working right across the province. Ideally, for a ministry like this.... This is something that I am greatly supportive of.

**L. Doerkson:** Thank you very much for that specific information. I appreciate it. How many people, then? I'm curious how many people were added in that lift of what we seem to be debating as far as the \$4 million. How many people have been added to this ministry in the last year?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** The number of staff — and I've rightly been cautioned not to always use FTEs, because it's number of staff — as of last year was 1,141 and this year is 1,313, give or take 170 more people working for the ministry.

**L. Doerkson:** I guess just a yes or a no. I'm assuming that a lot of the folks that are working in this ministry have simply transferred from Forests to Water and Land. I mean, I would presume that there has obviously been a bunch of new hires. But is that...? So would that be consistent with...? I see the minister nodding yes, so I'll just move on. Thank you for that.

[3:55 p.m.]

The next question I had about the numbers was the minister's office, of course, which is going from 614 to 863 in my documents. I wanted to understand better what that might be for.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** One quick piece was that in last year's budget, in the entire ministry's budget and also in the minister's office budget, we had been prorated. We weren't fully staffed up right off the get. There was another change,

somewhat unique to ministers. We have two outstanding parliamentary secretaries. In having two, there's an executive assistant increase to support the parliamentary secretaries' work, which we can get into later. It's really good and exciting work.

Of course, there are legislative salaries for the minister and the parliamentary secretaries, and there was a \$5,000 office and business increase for training. Add all those up, and that's where you get the difference between the 614 and the 863.

**L. Doerkson:** Thank you, Minister, for those answers.

Just in general terms, I want to ask a couple of questions about the work that, obviously, has been completed over the last year. Again, I appreciate what's happening here, but I wondered if the minister and staff might be able to just give me a sense of what accomplishments have been achieved over the last year.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** My first response to my friend's questions about what has been happening in the last year is: how much time have we got?

Interjection.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** A couple of hours. Great. I can do that, no problem.

I think there are, as we are a policy-oriented ministry, a couple of intentions papers that were released for public review and then have been since taken back — one on the watershed security strategy, which we've talked about a little bit. The second was on the coastal marine strategy, which is very important for a whole bunch of reasons that we talked about.

[4:00 p.m.]

I mentioned earlier we are now up to 18 modern land use planning tables around the province, each being supported by our ministry. As well, I want to mention the collaborative Indigenous stewardship forums. They fell under different names — ESI, often — a number of them. The reason I want to mention those is they are very collaborative stewardship forums. It's right in the name.

[R. Leonard in the chair.]

One of the challenges we've had with regard to reconciliation — and land use planning, more broadly — is that we're too often embroiled in the debate over the data. My friend would know this, coming from Cariboo. One side says there are this many moose. The other side says: "No, no, it was different."

The CISFs we've stood up, and they're functioning. They have been going for a number of years, and we want to increase them, because what we're hearing from First Nations, in particular, is that working at the technical level with provincial staff, coming to an agreement on the data



— no “politics” within that conversation — allows the political conversation to happen where it needs to happen.

If we agree this is what the forest coverage looks like, this is what the caribou count is or what the moose count is, once you have that agreed to — which has not always been the case; it’s too often not the case — then we can have the engagement on what the policy should be, rather than arguing about the data and the policy at the same time.

I’ve just heard from some very, very trusted First Nations voices that have been frustrated, sometimes for decades, in dealing with government, because they’re fighting over the data. These tables that we’re investing in are just outstanding, and we’re hearing from industry partners and others that this is good.

A couple of other important pieces. On the watershed security fund, we’ve set up the Real Estate Foundation of B.C. as our partner, an incredibly credible group. This was co-developed with the First Nations Water Table, I believe, and the B.C. government. Strong endorsement from our First Nations partners to be able to set up a fund. Other funds, we hope, will locate.... We talked about this before in the supplementary estimates. It’s \$100 million, and it’s meant to be in perpetuity, so that it can grow, obviously, because funds like this are invested.

As well, it is a great location for other funds to land, be they federal or private sector funds, ideally. The restoration of watersheds is not a one-year project. It’s not a two-year project. It’s many years. We had done, I think, \$57 million worth of work during the pandemic, predominantly — a huge success. Just really strong partnerships between local groups, First Nations doing the tangible work that we all want to see of rebuilding back the resiliency of watersheds.

We doubled the B.C. salmon restoration fund, the BCSRIF — enormously successful in trying to recover wild salmon stocks. I met with the federal Fisheries Minister last week. This was one of the highlights for them. We all know the salmon crisis that we’re in. This, combined with the watershed work, starts to give people a sense of hope that we can actually recover stocks. We have a larger conversation with our American partners that we need to have about intercepting our salmon as they go by.

I’ll just mention a couple of others. The housing task force, I think, can’t be given enough attention. That accounts for some of the changes in the budget. It is bringing more people onto the permitting scene, which is what industry, housing developers and municipalities have been asking for. To deal with that backlog, you need to change how many people are doing the work and how they’re doing the work, which is what the task force is going to do.

Just the recent announcement of \$38 million towards lidar.... For those that are not familiar with lidar, it is a mapping tool, incredibly useful. A number in the private sector do it — some forestry companies, some mining. It

gives incredibly detailed 3D maps of what’s going on, on the land base — and sub-surface, if you want. Some 11 percent of the province is covered right now. We’re going to cover 100 percent of the province, make it publicly available data, all within the next six years.

Folks who deal with lidar are incredibly excited about this. It’s one of the things that we heard about at the recent COFI conference. Now we can get to see what the forests look like, actually look like, in real time, as opposed to more guesswork than not. The ability to have.... Anyway, don’t get me started on lidar. Those are just a number of things. There are other things that I’m sure I’m missing. It’s been a good year so far, but with lots of work to do.

[4:05 p.m.]

Maybe last, because it always bears re-mentioning, is the Blueberry River First Nations agreement. The reason I want to highlight that and mention it is because it’s not just the agreement itself, which is incredibly important for the oil and gas sector in the northeast, for the forestry sector, for Blueberry River First Nations, other Treaty 8 Nations, for local municipalities. It is a different way of doing business. Conflicts in court are very challenging ways to do land use planning, but it has been our practice. It has been our tradition to be much more in a conflict posture.

We are attempting and are realizing what it looks like when we can actually collaborate and sit at the tables that are needed to come to an agreement that is much, much more durable, by the way, in terms of people feeling endorsed.

**L. Doerkson:** Thank you for that. I think most of that I understood was going on.

The one thing, though, that the minister did touch on that maybe I have read and have forgotten — I’m not sure — is the collaborative Indigenous forums. I was wondering if the minister could expand on what that is and what that initiative is all about.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** This is a great line of inquiry, because as somebody who lives in the North, this has been a constant frustration, especially when there’s conflict, especially when there are court cases and challenges over land use decisions.

The fact of B.C. being largely — a large percentage, anyway — territory not existing under treaty — and those treaties, as we saw with Treaty 8, were never fully satisfied until recently — creates this constant circulation back to a place of conflict and, as I mentioned before, conflict sometimes over data, just having an agreed-upon set of data that you can then argue over.

There are four main categories of groups of initiatives that sit within stewardship forums that we have in British Columbia. I refer to them as the CISFs. We’re trying to have one standard name. Some of these date from different times, and they’ve got different names, which is

the way things are sometimes, but they effectively do the same thing.

[4:10 p.m.]

There are environmental stewardship initiatives, ESIs. That's the one I'm familiar with. That exists in the part of the world where I live. There are four forums that have 32 nations within those forums, which again is quite an interesting model. In the North, we have an ESI table that I believe has Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en. I'm not sure if any other nations participate in that ESI.

The reason that multiple nations coming and engaging with the province over that stewardship forum is important is that because oftentimes, as my friend would know, when talking about land use, you have issues like overlap. You have issues of shared interests between two different nations, which can make land use planning difficult — historical challenges and whatnot. So that's one set, and there are four forums, 32 nations.

Another is called the collaborative stewardship frameworks, CSFs. There are six of those across B.C., and those implicate 30 different nations.

On the marine side, because we are water and land resource stewardship, we have what's called the marine planning partnership. I'm not sure if my friend attended the IMPAC5 conference in Vancouver. It was a global conference on marine planning and protection that was going on. The federal government announced some new protected areas.

There are 16 nations in four subregions of the North Pacific coast which are participating in the marine planning partnership. The basic idea, without getting too much into the detail, is that we've learned from other jurisdictions around the world that you don't necessarily have to close off the entire marine environment to activities, but you can concentrate on the most productive areas, allow protections for those. There's a so-called ripple effect that then happens and rebuilds back the marine environment. We've been very successful with these around Gwaii Haanas in the north.

Speaking of the central and north coast, the Great Bear Rainforest initiative, which my friend would be familiar with, was brought in by the Campbell government along with the feds and First Nations. There are 26 nations across the central and north coast that participate in that forum.

To understand what this table looks like, it's the technicians. These are the technical experts. These are the biologists. These are the folks that deal with the data side of these conversations that come together in these forums. We come to agreement on the data, multiple nations engaging with the government. They're outstanding. They're really worth.... We can get all kinds of reports and engage with them if my friend is more interested in this, because they are one of the most hopeful things that I've seen on the land question, on coming to the reconciliation efforts.

As one would understand, there's a lot of history here and a lot of mistrust, frankly, over decisions that get

made when there's a disagreement about the numbers, when there's a disagreement.... And if there's a disagreement about the numbers, it's very hard to trust the outcome, the decision that gets made. If we fundamentally disagree as to how many moose are actually in the neighbourhood, whatever hunting regulations you put in, one side is just going to distrust the outcome. It's very hard to resolve things.

These have been proven to be outstanding for our ability to come to land use agreements, to have deeper reconciliation and, frankly, to incorporate so-called Western science with Indigenous-led understandings of how the world works. That happens at these tables as well.

I can't say enough about them, but I'll stop talking now so that we can talk about other things — or more about that.

**L. Doerkson:** I honestly had not heard about these collaborations. So I guess maybe just a real quick question: where can I find more about that? I don't recollect it from the mandate letter or anything else.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** There's a mandate, and it ties to this specifically. Our website has a bunch of information on these forums. We can get my friend any of the forums that he's interested in specifically any time he wants.

With regard to mandate.... I'll keep this short because I know we're going on to other things. Our mandate is to increase the province's capacity to manage for cumulative effects through the integration of science-based land, aquatic, resource, geographic and Indigenous knowledge so evidence-informed policy and decisions can be made by statutory decision-makers.

[4:15 p.m.]

That's a broad list, but it includes some incredibly important things so that we can understand what's actually happening on the land base.

I'll stop after this. There was an audit in 2015 from the Auditor General of how things were going, *Managing the Cumulative Effects of Natural Resource Development in B.C.*, concluding that at that point, the Ministry of Forests was not adequately addressing the cumulative impacts in decision-making and that the cumulative impacts forum was a much-needed step forward.

So the Yahey decision we talked about earlier, the Blueberry River, was based upon the government not properly tracking the cumulative impacts that were going on within a territory. Yahey, the Blueberry River First Nation, argued that was an infringement upon their treaty rights. The court found in their favour and said: "Yes. Because the government is not properly tracking all of the impacts, they couldn't possibly know what the treaty impacts would be. Therefore, you were being infringed upon. Therefore, you are successful."

That led to all of the conversation we're having about Treaty 8. Therefore, to not repeat the mistakes of the past,

these stewardship forums are great places where we can actually understand all of those things I listed before, understand things like cumulative impact. Now, we've got the potential for reconciliation and agreement over the land base, as opposed to it landing in court, being found in violation of things like treaty rights or other rights and title, and the province being forced or pushed into decisions rather than having it in a much more collaborative forum. That is why they're called collaborative stewardship forums.

**L. Doerkson:** I definitely would like to get more information on that, but I'll get it outside this forum. I guess that actually brings up a number of questions. If it pleases the minister, I'd like to just talk about land use for a moment.

I absolutely agree there are overlapping interests between bands and private landowners and tenures and different guide outfitters and trappers and everybody else. I guess what I'd like to hear from the minister is: what is the minister or the ministry doing to balance all of that on the landscape? I can appreciate we're starting with landscape plans and such, but I think this is probably.... The biggest challenge before British Columbia right now is understanding where we're going with respect to everybody's claim. It's not just Indigenous claims. There are so many other people.

So I'd love to hear, if the minister could just tell me, what the ministry is doing to balance that.

[4:20 p.m.]

**Hon. N. Cullen:** We will talk a lot about land use planning because that's the edict and the direction that my ministry has been given from government. It's an important one and one I deeply believe. While doing those 18 tables, the modernized land use planning, there's also some work being done on forestry on landscape planning. The effort is to bring an interest-based view to the conversation.

There was a different version of them, not as comprehensive and didn't engage First Nations, back in the '90s. They were called LRMPs. I witnessed some of them, was engaged in some of them back in the day. What I witnessed was that they were able to bring the interests of industry, of user groups — the snowmobile club, the cross-country ski club — whoever had an interest in the land, and put an interest-based view onto the question of how the map works and what activities happen where.

As one can understand, that localized knowledge is so critical when government is making decisions, whether it be harvesting permits, whether it be to permit a mine. When you get to that final stage of permitting the activity or not, if you're not well informed of what the interests are, particularly from the communities, from the user groups that are there, it's almost.... People end up in a very defensive or almost antagonistic posture. You have to play defence because the permit being issued is going to deeply

affect an interest that a community group has, and now you've got to fight it. You've got to fight the permit and whatnot. So those land use planning tables are critical for understanding where we're headed.

In the meantime, a number of the strategies we've already talked about today allow us to bring those interest groups forward. The Together for Wildlife group has been exceptionally well received. My friend mentioned hunting, trapping, some other interest groups, as well as a strong Indigenous participation. The coastal marine strategy, we talked about earlier.

One that we haven't mentioned to this point, which I think is a very good example, is that our government has been investing more in the guardian program, both on the marine and the territorial side. We all, I think, collectively agree we don't have enough boots on the ground, as it were. Conservation officers have always been in short supply in B.C., especially given the terrain in some of the northern and more rural parts of the province.

First Nations have been advocating for guardian programs for some time. We've been standing up more and more of those programs, which are being incredibly successful and incredibly helpful to the provincial government because you have more people on the water and on the land observing the activities.

We have a lot of hunting interests in my part of the world. One of the strong interests from that community is the issue of illegal hunting and poaching and how you get at it — illegal fishing — if you don't have enough people on the river, on the water, on the land. So that's been an extraordinarily win-win situation for us as government — a great, I think, fantastic investment.

To take it back to the beginning, when we construct land use planning, the idea of that is to bring those interests forward so that we can hear from them as we're doing the parallel process of government-to-government negotiations. It's very informative both ways. We can start to talk about specific examples, if my friend would like, of ones that have been achieved already. And the forecast forward is very positive.

These are difficult to land, though. These take time. These are not quick solutions, for understandable reasons, because we're talking about what the use of the land is, what the use and the stewardship of the land is, and the water, hopefully for generations to come. So getting them right is important, and the interests are multifold. They cost some money, but I would argue that the expense of not doing them is much, much greater. It's not just the financial costs of not doing them that's much greater but also, I would argue, the environmental and social costs as well.

**L. Doerkson:** Thank you, Minister. We could get into specifics. I certainly would have some examples.

I asked how the interests are being balanced out there. I can appreciate that you've potentially had conversations with different associations and groups, certainly Indigen-

ous groups and bands, etc. But my question was: how do you balance the landscape when we've got private landowners that, no fault of their own, have found themselves in the middle of what is obviously some very uncomfortable conversation?

[4:25 p.m.]

This points to access. It points to private property rights within title areas. It involves tenures like woodlot licensing and those types of things that are in the middle of Treaty 8.

I would be happy to bring up specifics, but with all due respect, when we reach out to the snowmobile group of whatever, are you completely convinced that you spoke to the residents in that area? They may only have three members. I often hear from constituents who have not had an opportunity to engage. So I don't know how you balance those scales if you haven't talked to the residents in a full-some way.

I really want to understand this specifically, because I think this is extremely important to residents of British Columbia. All residents, frankly. So I would ask how that's going to be balanced going forward.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** My friend is correct. I'm talking about land use. I'm going to say it over and over again, marine as well.

Inherently with multiple interests, there has been a history of conflict, competing interests, who gets to set what policy and who has the authority at the end of the day. Predominantly, land use planning, if you had to point to one part of this place that was doing it, forestry had a lot to say about it historically in B.C. Forestry, having such a large footprint and being so pivotal to B.C.'s economy, has significance over the decisions that were happening. That's how the government was structured as well.

Now that we've stood up a ministry that's dedicated towards this, it is meant to make what was conflictual much more collaborative, so the process follows the following general pattern. There's a government-to-government relationship.

This takes some education, frankly, of municipalities, resource groups, industry, who say: "Well, we should be at that table too. When the province is sitting down with First Nations, everyone should be at that table at the same time."

[4:30 p.m.]

We have constitutional obligations. We also are a province existing under the rule of law, and the rule of law is around the declaration on rights of Indigenous peoples, so that explicit government-to-government relationship occupies a very specific place. That being said, in our land use planning tables, we have an explicit directive that also allows for the inclusion of all the other interest parties, as well, in a somewhat parallel process. As the negotiations are happening, there's both feedback out and feedback in.

Again, because we like examples, Blueberry River, Gitanyow and some others have very explicit agreements

within the settled negotiation to allow for, in the case of Blueberry River, First Nations to invite hunting and other wildlife groups in to participate in consultation.

Of course, it's complex. Of course, there are multiple interests. There's a lot of history, often, that we're dealing with, as well, which has to be contemplated. We talked a little bit earlier about the stewardship forums in terms of getting landing data. One can imagine how helpful that is when you get to the point of now deciding on wildlife use and where forestry will take place, where mining will take place. Now that you have agreed upon data sets, it's hugely helpful.

The ultimate goal and the reason for the exercise is that the status quo is rife with conflict and court cases and challenges and protest. To move out of that pattern, we set up a good stewardship forum so we get good data, collectively agreed to, and then we set up the modernized land use planning tables so that we look at the entire territory. We have the government-to-government forum, and we also have set in that ability of the large republic — interest groups, industry, etc., municipalities — to participate.

The last thing I would say as I think my friend was raising the example of.... There are groups. There will be a snowmobiling group in the place where I live, and they will be represented. They have representation they can put forward as representatives of snowmobiling interest or cross-country skiing interest.

What if an individual person that we talk to, a constituent, says: "Well, I'm not in that group, but I want my voice to be heard." The ministry allows for that through open public forums. So there's a land use planning agreement that's coming forward. Here are some of the things that are being debated. People can see it, talk about it and input — as well as online, because some people don't like going to public halls. Raising their voice can be difficult in small towns. There's a path for that as well.

This is multiple interests coming into one area, one same place. But resolving it, the durability of what we've seen out of land use planning, gives me a constant confidence that it's worth the time and the effort. Otherwise, it's valley by valley; it's resource by resource; it's interest group by interest group — everybody hectoring us, as elected people, to try to get their interest put to the top in what I would say is often an inequitable way.

Not everyone can get down to Victoria to lobby. Not everyone can hire lobbyists. We know who can, and we know who can't. I'm interested, and we are interested, as a government, in making sure that there's some equity in the conversation that we're having so that voices can come forward whether they can afford a plane ticket or not, to make sure that when we're talking about the land which they are implicated in, they have a voice as well.

**L. Doerkson:** I can appreciate what the minister is saying. I heard the word "resident," I think, in there somewhere. It is residents that I'm talking about who, through

no fault of their own, find themselves as a victim of what's happening here.

This certainly would not be surprising to this ministry, because we've had conversations about fishing lodges that might be impacted by an MPA that is announced. We've heard comments back from fishing lodge owners that were not part of an association, and they had no opportunity to comment. Their only question is: "Do you actually know what we do at a fishing lodge, Lorne? We actually fish there, and it sounds like we might not be able to in the future."

Now, we're seeing the same thing with respect to other lodges, other recreational opportunities. Far be it from me.... I want this to get sorted out, right? I think the residents do too.

[4:35 p.m.]

Let me be a little bit more specific. Is the province...? Is this ministry considering compensation for people that are stuck within this framework? I guess I will continue to ask.... How do those individuals be heard? Frankly, we've had situations in my own riding.... Unless you went to a specific website, you were not notified of these conversations.

I guess there are two questions there. I'm hoping the minister could answer both of them.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Just with respect to the two questions. One is about notification and people being able to be involved. Was the second question about compensation?

**L. Doerkson:** Correct.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Okay, thank you.

I thank my friend for the specificity of the question. It does draw on an interesting example — the marine protected area network. I won't get too much into the federal aspect of this. Of course, this is a program led by the federal government, broadly. The marine protected areas and the network.... When there's a closure or when there's a reduction in fishing efforts, that's a DFO sort of obligation. Not sort of. It's their obligation.

I think, deeper to the idea of land use planning.... One of the things that I've noticed over time is.... Fish would be a good example — and other things, hunting moose, caribou. We've been steadily, in most places in this province, degrading the resource. There are fewer and fewer over generations. We get into a place of managing for scarcity rather than abundance.

It was probably hard to imagine a century ago that we would ever get to, in areas in the Cariboo or the northwest, where I live, where there are simply not enough moose to go around. That would have been a hard thing to contemplate two generations back.

[4:40 p.m.]

Looking at the biology and looking at what we're seeing now, it is a reality that there is less opportunity. That

points me towards the desperate need for land use planning to better manage and steward the resources that we do have.

I've seen this. I think my friend is talking about some of the other — maybe not — recreational opportunities. People who run skiing lodges, people who run wildlife lodges have, historically, been impacted by land use planning that they've had almost no effect over whatsoever. A permit gets issued. A mine gets sent. The impact on somebody holding a tenure, a heli-skiing tenure.... They are going to be very limited in terms of the influence that they can have over the process. So having the interest brought forward in a land use planning way is incredibly important to us.

Now, in the land use planning legislation, and the obligations that we have in policy, is to consider not just the broad socio impacts of any land use planning that we're doing — positive, negative. When changing the land designation, what will the impacts be economically? We also are obligated, for specific tenure holders, to include and understand what the impact may be on them.

Again, there's a notion in which.... This is sort of a net-cost exercise. My argument would be the status quo brings with it a significant cost, as well, as it is right now. If we are not stewarding the resources properly in this province — and one would argue, in terms of wildlife, for example, or fisheries, we are not, over generations — then we have to do something different. We have to do something more comprehensive, more thoughtful, science-based, Indigenous knowledge-based to bring us to a place where we can actually have more confidence that we are stewarding the resources better.

To those folks that are interested in the.... I'm blessed by having a minister's wildlife advisory group that's made up of people from all over the province with deep generational knowledge. They say, very consistently, that we have to change the way we're doing things. We have to change the way that industry, the natural resource sector, interacts with the province. We're just seeing that steady decline and can't look at our grandkids and say with any confidence: "You will have the opportunities that I had growing up in this province." That call is there.

If the obligation for reform and doing things is clear and understood, then land use planning consistently comes as the answer. It's not easy, and I said it's not quick. It's that old expression I use too often. If you want to walk quickly, you walk alone. If you want to walk far, you walk together.

Land use planning, at its core, has that as its base philosophy. If you don't bring the interest groups in, if you don't have an access point for people to have their voices heard, people end up feeling like victims or are victims if there is something happening to a practice or a business that they're running and they're not being considered. I'm happy to talk about specifics.

I would end with this. Something like the marine planning partnership, the protected area network, which is try-

ing to be established.... I know some of those lodge owners. I know lots of people who fish off the coast. The ability to point down to California, Chile and some other places that have gone through this exercise is....

You give the potential for the oceans to bounce back. Nature will do this if you give it the space to come back and recover. In fact, you go from the opposite of what people fear, which is the total loss of opportunity to run their business and hand things down to the next generation, to a much more restorative economy, which is another topic that we can get into this afternoon, if my friend would like.

**L. Doerkson:** I'm not even sure if I heard the word "compensation" in that answer. I asked specifically about compensation for residents.

Now, I can appreciate.... Actually, I used the MPA as one example. We have residents' lodges that are uncertain about access. They're uncertain about compensation. All kinds of tenures. There have been all kinds of compensation out there. What I'm asking about.... Again, I heard about interest groups.

I'll specifically ask this question. What compensation is being considered by this ministry or the province with respect to people and businesses that are caught in and amongst this situation?

I can tell you right now. I can give you all the specifics, Minister, with respect to people that are uncertain that they will be able to access their privately deeded recreational property. I've talked to the ministry about this. What I'm trying to understand, and nobody is saying here....

[4:45 p.m.]

Well, certainly I'm not suggesting that some of the things that we're doing aren't good ideas. What I'm suggesting here is that there are residents that are having to pay the price while they wait to go fishing again. What is the solution around...?

I can appreciate that it may improve stocks, but I don't want to focus on what's happening with respect to salmon rehabilitation. I want to focus on the residents that are being forced into a situation that is maybe not beneficial to them. I can appreciate that might be to do with stocks. It might be with moose numbers. It might be to do with a number of different things. All I'm asking is: is there any compensation model being considered for businesses and residents that are in this situation?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** The question around compensation by those who're impacted by land use planning: is their compensation complicated? Yes. Specifically, there are places where it stands in law. In forestry, for example, if there's a woodlot owner, if there's somebody impacted with tenure, there's a very specific policy and a formula. For those where that policy doesn't exist, we are obligated under

modernized land use planning. Once a land use plan is contemplated and we....

There's a socioeconomic impact I mentioned earlier that gets done in modernized land use planning, which contrasts land use planning very much differently from, say, the federal Species at Risk Act, which my friend might be familiar with, where there is no socioeconomic impact whatsoever. There's a species that the federal government deems at risk. They can bring an order that this must now happen with regards to land use, and compensation is not even contemplated in the act. It's what I would call a fairly blunt instrument.

Land use planning allows you to incorporate and anticipate those things, because you can see in the map who may be impacted and affected. So yes on both. One's very set by policy. Another one we are obligated to. If it's not set under, say, the Forestry Act, if somebody has some interests, economic interests, and there is compensation sought or compensation anticipated, we can do that under modernized land use planning. There's a whole series of moneys that could be made available.

I harken back to this, though, and I think it's an important thing. Outside of doing something like land use planning where interests can come forward.... We are obligated to give public notice, by the way. I guess it's one of those reasons.... I love folks that are.... I have admiration for folks that are unwilling to sign up to groups; they just want to go their own way, do their own thing and not be part of an association or whatever. There is certainly an advantage when it comes to some interest groups with respect to being a part of, because one of the things those groups are organized for is moments exactly like this.

[4:50 p.m.]

We all attend and engage with different associations and groups, be they industry groups, be they sport groups, hunting groups, whatever they happen to be. Those associations are very useful in moments like this. That being said, if somebody is standing alone, doesn't sign up to their snowmobile club, doesn't sign up to a hunting advocacy group, they can still participate and have their voices heard, particularly if there's an economic interest at play.

And yes, in our modernized land use planning, we can anticipate compensation efforts being made under forestry ones. I think my friend mentioned a woodlot, maybe, in his question. There are very specific policies that sit within government as to what the formula is to compensate somebody who gets impacted by a land use decision.

**L. Doerkson:** I'll move on from the interest groups. I can appreciate what the minister is saying, and there are many interests that I have, but I don't really affiliate with any of those groups, so it might be hard to reach me if I'm in a place like Nemaiah, for instance, where there are challenges around Internet, phone, everything else. I hope that there's some consideration given to that.

I believe I just heard the minister say that there are

moneys available for this. I'm wondering, if there are, how much and where that would be in the budget.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Specific on the compensation, as I mentioned before, in some cases, forestry being one example, there is a specific formula. There is statute legislation because there are times, there have been times over many decades, where a tenure — be it a private woodlot or a tenure held — has been, for various reasons, not able to be exercised. There's a compensation that goes with that.

My friend asked: is there a specific budget for compensation? Those come forward as the land use plan comes forward. Part of the land use plan obligation is to do the socioeconomic impact. "This is the plan. Here is what's going to be set aside for conservation. Here's what's going to be allowed for industrial use, etc." It's agreed to, government to government, along with other interest groups informing it. It gets signed off. We bring that forward, and as we bring it forward, we say: "Here are the socioeconomic impacts that we think are likely because of our analysis."

That decision, and I want to be clear on this, ultimately gets made either to agree to the land use plan at all.... One assumes it's agreed to. That's a Treasury Board decision in terms of if there are specific compensations that are borne out. That's exactly how it happens.

There may be other cases, outside of land use planning, as I mentioned before — a Species at Risk Act type of thing — where again, because the statutes don't contemplate things like compensation, one is left with the courts or other recourses. It points me back to they need to do land use planning rather than have more blunt instruments that aren't required to consider socioeconomic at all. They're just simply enforced.

I'll leave it there.

**The Chair:** At that point, I will call a recess for 7½ minutes.

The committee recessed from 4:55 p.m. to 5:04 p.m.

[R. Leonard in the chair.]

**L. Doerkson:** Just before we had that little break, we were talking about compensation. I do have a couple of questions, and then I'm going to turn it over to one of my colleagues. But I want to.... We did sort of touch on a specific situation, so maybe I'll just go back to that.

Again, I don't.... This is a specific situation, but it is impacting lodge owners and residents in our communities in the exact same way. Again, I understand what we're doing with the MPA, but my question is around a lodge. That would be a fishing lodge.

[5:05 p.m.]

I guess my question is: is there any contemplated compensation while that fishing lodge waits because decisions

have been made? I can appreciate the benefit, so I was hoping we could skip that part of the answer. I can appreciate the benefit to waiting, but for many of these businesses, waiting two or three years could be the end of their business. That is clear to me. My question is: is there any interim compensation while people wait?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Just a point of clarification. My friend is describing that an MPA has been announced or that it's being contemplated, and a lodge is sitting there. The waiting piece is my question: waiting between when an MPA is being considered to when it's finally announced, and the uncertainty in that gap of time?

**L. Doerkson:** I'll explain exactly what I mean. When sport fishing and commercial fishing and those types of things are put into a document like this as being areas of concern, it's not clear what that means.

Now, we've had conversations with the ministry with respect to short-term pain for long-term gain. I can appreciate that, and I understand why we're doing it.

Again, I do not want to get focused specifically on fishing. I'm using this as an example, but I can expand that example to a guide-outfitter that might be told that they are unable to guide in an area that is undecided right now. Really, this is the question, because there's a lot of indecision on the landscape. When a guide-outfitter is unable to guide for the last six or seven years while they wait for decisions to come down from the Crown, that's an issue.

Frankly, I could actually provide specific examples of businesses that are very near bankruptcy because they are waiting. I guess what I'm asking is: is there any way that the province or this ministry is considering, during that wait, compensating these businesses?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Within the provincial jurisdiction.... My friend talked about guide-outfitters. As a land use plan is being contemplated, until there's actual change in land use policy, there isn't a change.

[5:10 p.m.]

If there are specific examples.... Again, we can do this offline, or we can do this in the estimates process. If my friend knows of a specific permit holder running a guide-outfitting operation that has been encumbered in the midst of a land use planning exercise, I'd be interested in understanding that. If that's a message that has come from government, we can talk to those specific issues.

On the MPA side of things.... I see my friend has got maps of areas of concern that get identified in the MPA network.

Interjection.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Yeah. Ultimately, it depends on what the area of concern is and what the mitigation effort may

be. There may be an area of concern that has been identified through the MPA process.

An example we were just talking about is halibut conservation. There's a concern about halibut in this area. It used to be very predominant and no longer is. That is a very specific measure. Then what activities get recommended will be specific to whatever concern has been lifted up. Ultimately, on the MPA, to be specific to that example, that rests with the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and they can contemplate compensation.

That's over decisions that that have been made. I think, to get back to the specific question, my friend was talking about essentially a gap — uncertainty, if I could use that word — where there has been a change in designation but there's a feeling of uncertainty, and that inhibits tenure holders' ability to do their business.

On the terrestrial side, on the land use planning side, until the land use designation has changed, the permits that exist, exist. If there are cases in which people see a different experience — they see an infringement, or they're no longer able to take people out on a guided hunt or something — I'd be interested in what those specifics are. That's on the terrestrial.

On the marine, where there's an MPA standing, it's very site-specific. Ultimately, though, in my conversations — and I'll end on this, Chair — with the federal Fisheries ministers and others that we do collaborate with on some conservation efforts, I'm constantly beating the drum, publicly and privately, about the federal government always doing the socioeconomic assessment when they're talking about conserving and, second, that they have solid compensation policies in place for the people, whether we're talking about an MPA network aquaculture policy, which is of great interest to many of our coastal communities....

The federal governments historically have not had, I would say, a strong socioeconomic policy when making tender decisions. That has been an afterthought as opposed to a primary thought.

Our government has spent a lot of time and interest on things like the Broughton Archipelago — we could talk about that — in making sure that we have a people up conversation. What's the impact going to be in this conservation effort to protect wild salmon with regard to the communities that may right now be depending upon aquaculture? That is a philosophical orientation of our government, and it's one that we're constantly encouraging our federal partners to do.

Ultimately, though, on the MPA, they do have the authorities around compensation. Whether there's a gap or there's an actual change in permitting and fishing opportunities, it rests with them and their ability to compensate out those that may be affected.

**L. Doerkson:** I might come back to this. I would be shocked if the ministry has not heard from a number of

people that I actually have put in touch with the ministry. So we'll come back to that.

I have one more question, and then I'm going to turn it over for a moment to one of my colleagues. How will the minister ensure access to private properties in this province that are landlocked by either title lands or other restrictive measures that have been taken on the landscape?

I don't want to get into specifics, but if the minister would like, I will certainly provide one. I would like to know how access to private land is going to be ensured and guaranteed by the province.

[5:15 p.m.]

**Hon. N. Cullen:** There have been cases over many, many years, in fact, where a land use decision gets made by the province where, inadvertently, for a landowner or somebody who has a cottage of some kind that hadn't been contemplated, their access gets cut. That has happened.

I guess the advantage in land use planning is that you get to contemplate those things before you make the decision, because you're sitting down at the table and you're saying: "Well, we're going to put this piece into conservation, and we're going to decommission a road that's having an impact on wildlife." At that moment, someone says: "Well, did you see that there's a property at the end of that road? It hasn't been used, but the family is of interest."

I've seen this — again, back to the '90s, the early 2000s — in some of the land use planning tables that I was involved in where the province had come in and had some interest in doing this, that and the other. Someone was able to tap on the shoulder and say: "Oh, no, you've got to realize what the offset effect is."

I don't want to overstate it. But part of the reason I'm an advocate for these things prior to being in politics and now, sitting and trying to shepherd this ministry, is that informed land use planning is way better than the alternative, which is not informed land use planning or poorly informed. We seek, in these land use plans, to give every opportunity that we can, either through associations or individuals, to participate and have their voices heard when there's going to be impact.

Now my friend has referred to a very specific case. Again, we can take that offline or direct. But the hope of land use planning versus, say, court-ordered or court-directed land use planning, which happens in this province as well, is the distinction between what's happened in Blueberry River....

That negotiation, which took many months, was attempting to accommodate the interests of various user groups and also push back on what some of the traditional practices were in order to help on things like conservation or rehabilitation of the land base. We can get into those specifics that were negotiated out, which I would argue came to a much better net benefit than the previous model,



in which landowners had very little voice, particularly when going up against an oil and gas lease.

The subsurface rights, as my friend would know, are very powerful in this province. The contemplation for the impacts on the land — somebody ranching or somebody farming — fall below, generally speaking. A good, solid land use planning process that really does incorporate the government-to-government obligations that we have and then the interests that come alongside are meant to avoid those circumstances.

That being said, it has happened over many years. I have many constituents.... Not many. Occasionally. I'd say it's rather more rare than common. I have constituents that have interest in a land property holding or.... I wouldn't go so far as somebody who's got a Mineral Tenure Act claim, but potentially. They seek compensation because there was a decision made by the province or the feds that's now impacted their interests. Then they come and say: "I was never even contacted when this happened." We're trying to change that dialogue when it gets to land use planning, which is meant to be much more comprehensive and inclusive.

**L. Doerkson:** Thank you, Minister. I can appreciate the landscape planning and the benefits to that. I certainly think that our residents will agree with that.

For the residents that have not had the benefit of that conversation or that foresight that are, for instance, at Shawnigan Lake, in the title lands of the Xeni Gwet'in, their access is somewhat questionable. There are private landowners there that are very uncertain of how they will access.

[5:20 p.m.]

For all of the people in British Columbia.... Because we've talked about courts a lot today. Certainly, the minister has mentioned that that's not a great place to solve things. I agree that it's not a great place to solve things. But residents want answers to this. I have read into the record a number of times things that have been lost by residents — for instance, range land.

I'm not speaking out of turn. I mean, I have mentioned the Harris family that lost their opportunity to ranch in the Tatlayoko Valley. They lost that opportunity. They were compensated \$42,000 and change. It's not enough to replace what they built out there. There's no way to recover from that.

I guess, through this line of questioning, I am trying to impress upon the minister how serious some of these decisions are. Now, there are people that would like to perhaps sell a piece of property that are caught in this situation. What is a piece of property worth? I'm not just referring to that territory. I'm referring to all other territories, all other businesses, that all of a sudden may be on a no-fish clause or something, or a no-guide clause. And how does that impact everybody on the landscape?

In my opinion, the \$42,000 that was given to the Harris

family was not even close to what they have built in that valley. They carved a living out of, really, nothing. And they were generational ranchers. We're not talking about somebody that just went and opened up a farm.

I guess I'll go back and I'll say specifically, because I have tried in vague terms to have the conversation, will the access to the Shawnigan Lake private property be guaranteed by this minister?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** I might seek some clarity from my friend on the specifics of this case, because I may get it wrong, which certainly wouldn't be the first time, and I don't want to. So we can come back to the specific case and get more information from him either this afternoon or whenever we like.

Around the Chilcotin lands, this is an interesting.... Not interesting. It's a reality of a different, contrasting point of what happens when a court-ordered land use plan, essentially, is imposed versus doing the land use planning together outside of the court system. We talked about it earlier; courts are incredibly important but not always the best tool — and judges will say this — to settle out complex and layered questions around land, traditional title and the rest.

My understanding of this.... Our ideal would have been, if we'd a solid land use plan and process set up in that area at the time, that these are the exact kinds of things that you bring to the table. There are interests here from the First Nations, there's a property group, there are landowners that have property up at a place like Shawnigan Lake. Can we do a land use plan that guarantees that access, right?

My experience has been with neighbours to neighbours. There's always conflict, especially in small communities, but reasonable minds ultimately. The province would have interest in arguing for that.

[5:25 p.m.]

I believe that there's a gate on the specific road up to Shawnigan that my friend is referring to.

Interjection.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Not a gate? Okay. We might be referring to two different examples, then.

What we might do then is get the specific case file or the examples from my friend. Then we will get that.

The case I was thinking of was.... There were some property owners at the end of a road. There was a gate put across it. The remediation, at the end of the day, was that the nation gave everyone who had property at the end of the road a key to make sure that they maintained access.

The larger point is.... Court-ordered versus community-driven.... Nation-to-nation negotiations over land use planning are preferred.

Maybe give us some time, and we can return back to the specific example. I'll ask staff to do a little bit more digging

in the meantime. I know we probably want to move on to some other topics.

**L. Doerkson:** Yeah. Those are two totally different circumstances, each of them very serious. I'm glad the minister brought that up. Maybe we can talk about that as well.

For now, Chair, I'd like to turn over some time to my colleague from Kelowna-Mission.

**R. Merrifield:** Thank you to my colleague for the time.

I'm going to try and give as much context as I can at the beginning and then ask the questions at the end. I apologize for the length. I'm just trying to get through it all.

I've been working with various organizations within my riding, all dealing with watershed issues. It actually spans quite a wide area but all underneath one watershed.

By way of context, the Joe Rich community — they have a very well-organized group, so big kudos to them — has noted a major shift in the water paths due to both forestry and forestry practices in the area as well as recent fires. Flooding from Mission Creek has been frequent in the last years, both in the creek as well as on the highway. Culverts have been washed out during the spring freshet, and there are areas of the highway that are flooding, actually, from above, where fires have devastated the hillside.

I want to shout out kudos to both Gorman Bros. and the Ministry of Forests staff who worked with the Joe Rich community to preserve one of the last areas of natural forest before the creek just to help with the water flow that was coming from quite a large area from above. But the issue of the watershed continues.

The Mission Creek area, further down on KLO, has equally experienced repeated flooding and is bracing for flooding again this year. The headlines all this week have been about the flooding that has been announced and that will probably happen.

As a former resident of this particular area for almost 15 years and as a resident of Kelowna for over 25, I can tell you that places that are flooding now in that creek bed were areas.... I used to be able to walk under the bridges. I couldn't even crawl under those very same bridges, with barely two feet of clearance that is going underneath them. Obviously, as the capacity of the creek is minimized by the sediment that's coming down from farther upstream.... Now it's just turning into one large floodplain.

I've got farmers who are losing arable land that they've had in their families for generations — literally, almost 100 years. I also have other area residents who are trying desperately to do whatever they are able to, to prevent the flooding, but it's causing considerable damage.

That's not all. There's more. In recent meetings with the Okanagan Basin Water Board and conversations with the residents that live along not just Mission Creek or Mill Creek, which also floods, but also along Okanagan Lake.... Conversations about the actual flow of water in and out of Okanagan Lake have come to the forefront, as some of

my riding borders on Okanagan Lake. It's apparent that the flooding incidents of the last few years are due to the water flow and how much is being predicted and what's not being adequately predicted.

We had, about a month ago, complaints that the water was so low that many of the properties along there were losing some of their amenities. But not just amenities. It's also this fear of.... Where is it going to go to? Now they're predicting flooding, just one month later, because we are going from 6 degrees to 27 this weekend.

Sorry for the long preamble. Hopefully, it will help to give my question some context.

[5:30 p.m.]

I'm looking for a mechanism to have the entirety of the watershed studied. I have willing participants, but no one is really clear on who will guide that process. Obviously, because the watershed is quite large.... We're talking about multiple regional districts, many municipalities. We've got First Nations. We've got community groups. So it's quite complicated. I do have organizations that are willing to bring all of those to the table.

My question is: (1) how do we actually get funding for the study, and (2) how do we get funding for the repairs that will need to be taking place? Last year when the flooding occurred, I was trying to work alongside both the regional district and the city, and both of them kind of threw their hands up and said: "It's not us. You know, we don't have any money for that type of an endeavour." Obviously, yes, we can say climate change. We can say emergency readiness. We can say the fires have caused it, or can we? It's a very complicated situation but one that's growing in urgency every single year.

Obviously, the flooding continues. With that, I'll leave my question to the minister and hope for an answer.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** I thank my colleague for bringing the example forward. It was recently said that climate change mitigation is all about carbon. Climate change adaptation is all about water. We were canvassing this earlier, where we've had stage 4 and stage 5—level droughts at the same time in the same region, just one valley over, where there was a major flood crisis. Yeah. As somebody said, welcome to climate change.

[5:35 p.m.]

This is why the estimates of what the impacts in terms of cost would be are stratospheric, because just in the region my friend referred to, I don't know, but I could imagine, that the costs for repair of damaged infrastructure run far beyond the capacities of any regional district to be able to do it. That's just one year, and it's unlikely to change.

A couple of things. I see the Minister of Forests is with us today. Forests has launched a very good flood-mapping and strategy program. That might be something to contemplate in terms of resourcing. With the estimates that we used to have of what a 100-year flood experience would be in my part of the world, in the northwest, we'd be

very frustrated, because you could see that they were no longer true, yet if the province doesn't issue new maps, then people are buying properties in what are now 20-year floodplains. They're not 100, because they would be happening over and over again.

Our friends at EMCR have the responsibility. It's often done, as we saw with the atmospheric river and the impacts that it had, particularly in the Lower Mainland. That's a joint provincial-federal repair initiative. The effects were so devastating on our infrastructure. That's why that ministry has been stood up — Emergency Management and Climate Readiness. I would suggest, and the minister would have much better insights and be more thoughtful about it, that you don't create a ministry for nothing. The creation of that ministry was because of the exact examples that are happening all across the province.

The last thing I would point to is a potential opportunity.... There's an invitation to come talk to us if the area, the region, is looking for some watershed planning-level conversation. It sounds like the scale is large, that players are large, so let's scope it. Let's find out what it is.

Recently our ministry announced a \$100 million watershed security fund, which we talked a little bit about earlier. It's meant to grow. It starts at \$100 million, but we've already heard from the federal government, from philanthropic groups and others that this is now a good container in which to put money because it has that enduring quality, which is the second point: it's meant to last in perpetuity. It's not a fund to spend out in a year. The Real Estate Foundation of B.C. are our partners in that and have been excellent.

The last thing I'll say is that we ran the healthy watersheds initiative, about \$57 million over a couple of years. That was about restoring the resiliency of watersheds. We have some amazing examples up-Island here, where a watershed had received funding and support and had rehabilitated its resiliency. There was an atmospheric river. In the valley over, the watershed over did not. The experiences, particularly on things like salmon recovery and the ability of a watershed to absorb that flood event, that rain event, were just night-and-day contrasts.

We have living examples, even in just the last few years, of what that investment does for communities like my friend represents when work has been done to restore and recover the resiliency of those watersheds. Whether it's farming, mining or forestry, they've had impacts on the absorption rate of these watersheds, and we see the downstream effects, so to speak.

That's why the restoration economy — we haven't talked a lot about that here today — is a growing part of the so-called blue or green economy, depending on what you want to frame it as. I think our ability is only going to grow.

I welcome the.... See this as an invitation. Come talk to us about this. Let's scale and scope it out. Know this, though: the list of communities coming forward and desir-

ing watershed plans is significant. As soon as we announced it, the calls started coming in, because local governments, First Nations, residents are seeing the change and are rightly concerned with their ability to have a good plan, going forward.

**R. Merrifield:** Thank you, Minister, for that answer.

The Okanagan, as a whole, is very large, and the area of our watershed is very large. It would be difficult, I think, for any one organization to come forward and say: "Well, we want this planning to be completed."

In further clarification — I am going to absolutely take the minister up on the offer to continue this — of the lead on this type of an initiative, I recognize, as well, that the watershed planning is different than the repair work that needs to be completed.

[5:40 p.m.]

My concern is: how do you actually draw the direct link between either the Ministry of Forests and the watershed issues that we're having today in Mission Creek, the fires and the issues that we're having in Mission Creek and on the highway, etc., in the floodplain or in the KLO area? How do we draw that direct correlation and gain access to emergency funding? Or is this maintenance funding that we need to accelerate because of climate change?

There were two questions in there. One was: which organization leads it? The second was: how do we actually access emergency funding, if it's actually funding that needs to be done on an ongoing basis to mitigate climate change?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** We were talking a little bit earlier about the nature of this ministry, its design and its design principles that we got when we created the ministry. One of them is to help convene government, when necessary, when there are multiple government interests at play.

My friend outlined it very well. EMCR, Forests, we ourselves at WLRS, probably Municipal Affairs and some others will be implicated by this. That, I think, would be the scoping conversation that we would have. We would be the ones committing to the convening part. First Nations partnerships are going to be critical in this, as they are right across the board. I don't know if we mentioned or canvassed that particular piece in the region.

The general framework, in the modernization of the Emergency Management Act that this government has gone through, is to agree to a couple of really important principles — one being the Sendai principle, just in terms of what comes back. Also, there's the build back principle, build back better. We saw this in the Fraser Valley when we sought partnerships with the federal government. Initially federal funding was restricted to only building back to the standard of what was there before.

[5:45 p.m.]

In the midst of an emergency, in trying to bring crews in and make sure that whatever infrastructure we were going

to leave in place would be able to handle the next major water event, we ran into a policy barrier with our Ottawa partners, who said: “Well, you can only build the culvert to same size that it was — the one that blew out and wiped out Highway 1. You’ve got to build it to the exact same size.” Well, that’s an outdated policy. The feds have moved on that, gratefully. It’s an unfortunate experience.

When you start to line up those principles and dealing with something where it doesn’t just feel like things have fundamentally shifted.... Things have fundamentally shifted. The infrastructure, the policies that we had in place 30 years ago didn’t anticipate this properly, and some still don’t. In terms of the Okanagan experience and people just not being aware of what it’s going to look like, not just in 2023 but 2033 and ’43, this is why the watershed planning has to incorporate that as well. I’ll end on that.

When we bring those groups together, when we can help convene the provincial ministries that have an interest in a watershed security plan, one doesn’t do it for today anymore. One has to do it anticipating these highly varied climate events, where the rain doesn’t fall the same way or at the same time or with the same intensity that it used to. We’ve seen this, so the impacts of everything have to be contemplated as best as we can. Again, the invitation is there.

In terms of what the community sends to us as leads.... I think that was part of the question. I don’t know if my friend was asking for the leads from the province side or from the community side. We don’t dictate. We don’t say that for a watershed security plan to come forward, it has to be the so-called usual suspects. Even over a large area, we’ll hopefully create a much more durable and thoughtful plan, rather than a small non-profit trying to do their best but not including local government, not including First Nations. That wouldn’t be as encouraging for us.

So thank you for the question.

**R. Merrifield:** Thank you, Minister, for the answer. I welcome the invitation. I will take you up on it, aggressively, and I will definitely be moving on this, because time is clearly not on our side.

Just as my final thought, the Okanagan is home.... Just the Kelowna CMA is home to almost 250,000 people. So it is a very beautiful area with all of our natural resources like water and our agriculture, and we’re looking forward to protecting that as best we can. So I welcome that, and yes, we’ll definitely get those people at the table.

**A. Olsen:** I look forward to the opportunity and this exchange with the minister.

We’ve seen United Nations reports warning about global biodiversity declining at an unprecedented rate. We’ve got about one million species facing extinction. Our province needs to establish conservation and management of biodiversity. It had been in the previous mandate letter

of the Minister of the Environment, going back, I think, to the beginning of 2017, maybe 2018 as well.

I asked the Minister of formerly LandWRS now WaLRS about biodiversity legislation and the priority within the ministry, knowing that the ministry had only been around for about 50 days. So it was early days for that. The minister basically suggested that she felt next year’s estimates might get a better answer.

Well, we’re now at next year’s estimates. So I’m just wondering if the minister could describe what progress has been made in this past year on biodiversity legislation and conservation and management of ecosystems with sensitive biodiversity needs.

[5:50 p.m.]

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Welcome to my friend from the Green Party. In terms of this question, as we all know, but it bears repeating, within the Canadian context, B.C. is the most biodiverse-rich province. By extension, then, we have a large number of the species that are of concern — some that make the news, some that don’t. As one ecologist friend of mine said, if they’re not sexy megafauna, don’t have the big eyes and make the posters for fundraising, they’re still equally important because of the requirements that we have.

A couple of things. Even as of this week, I was just told we’re in the consultations with First Nations on a two-step process. Right now our commitment is through our partnership with the First Nations Leadership Council to do that consultation, not just with First Nations but a number of other interested parties, and by June, to have co-developed the framework.

We used to call it the declaration. We were asked not to call it the declaration anymore, understandably. It might be seen as a diminishment of the Declaration Act. So fair enough. Just in case folks at home are wondering, for those that follow this. The language change doesn’t change the substance of it. The language change was out of respect, which felt more than appropriate to me and to others.

The framework will prioritize conservation and management of ecosystem health and biodiversity across all sectors and ecosystems. That framework — June is my expectation, unless something comes up otherwise — then leads to the co-development of the legislation. The framework is brought out of those more than 300 conversations that we’ve been having, and again, as recent as yesterday. Then we move to the legislation right after that. So I’m feeling encouraged by it. I’ll leave it at that. It’s incredibly important.

Outside of the actual framework and then legislation around biodiversity health, there are enormous efforts the government is making into conservation, habitat restoration, a whole number of things, but I won’t canvass them all today, just in the interest of time.

This is a good structure around which to talk about biodiversity conservation. The things we need to do as that

is being built is to also do the work, because some of the species that we're talking about don't have time.

**A. Olsen:** One of those non-sexy megafauna species that is in trouble is the specklebelly lichen, for example — the many lichens that there are.

I appreciate the timeline and look forward to debating that legislation as soon as possible. I would say that as we're going through this process, as much as the conservation efforts are needed and necessary, the reality is that every single decision that's made by this ministry and perhaps mostly by other ministries is having an impact on those listed species that we know are in trouble and, indeed, the many species that we might not know are in trouble because we haven't identified the situation that they face. So the timing is very important. That was the point of that comment.

The government has recently concluded, just this month, the coastal marine strategy and watershed security strategy consultations. Can the minister provide, in a similar way, what the timeline is and the next steps that the public can expect with those two important consultations?

[5:55 p.m.]

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Thanks for the question on both. Following a somewhat similar past, both the watershed security strategies.... It's gone out. It's come back. The public have had the opportunity to engage on that. The B.C.–First Nations Water Table has been co-developed, this part. We're going to co-develop the next stage, which is to develop the policies.

We're hoping this all fits within this mandate — to actually develop the policy for a watershed security strategy and launch it prior to the next election. That is also true for the watershed security strategy. So it has gone out to some public.

The only element that might be different is on the coastal marine strategy. We're hoping for some local town hall engagements, as well, as we go ahead, opportunities for people to come together as communities and talk about the coastal marine strategy.

As my friend would know, because I think we've talked about this, B.C. somewhat doesn't stand alone but stands somewhat apart from other maritime provinces in not having a coastal marine strategy, and decision by decision, permit by permit is not ideal in terms of landing on something that feels and is much more sustainable with regards to the increasing complexity and pressures that are on our coastal environment. I don't have to tell him.

So this is something that I'm very keen on seeing. I don't want to say as quickly as possible, but as I said, within this mandate, to have it developed, co-developed with First Nations and then launched, and real and on the ground and tangible, and also get it right. If this is our first opportunity on the coastal marine strategy to do this, getting it

right matters a lot for its durability and people's sense of confidence that we're moving away from a transaction-by-transaction piece.

I'll probably leave it there. My friend might have more specific questions on either, but I'm feeling good about it. Of course, the watershed security fund and the work that was done in the healthy watersheds initiative are good indicators of the government's commitment to this work, and the community buy-in has been so incredibly high. The interest level is so high to do the actual work, on the ground, of restoration, which, in too many of our watersheds, is long overdue.

[6:00 p.m.]

**A. Olsen:** As an MLA that represents a lot of coastline with a bunch of islands making up most of that coastline, really, the challenge we face is the interaction between the different governing bodies: the federal government, the provincial government, the local government, the First Nations governing bodies. All of the space between them becomes very, very challenging to where we've got situations in our communities where there are pieces of water that seemingly, apparently, are completely and totally unregulated. And if there is regulation, they're completely and totally unenforced.

We were just having the conversation here about how oftentimes we face the cross-pointing of fingers where, "You should go over there" and then, "You should go back over there," and we end up just going around and around and around in circles until we're dizzy. Nothing is solved. The problem continues to grow. My hope is that the federal government is at that table as well in terms of what our coastal marine strategy is. There's no end of frustration trying to address these kinds of grey areas of jurisdiction where we need and, I think, would benefit from clarity.

I remember my dad saying when I asked him: "What happened to the Saanich Inlet? What happened?" He's been around a lot longer than I have, so I tried to get an understanding from him. He was about 70 at the time that I was asking him. And he said: "Well, as soon as they figured out that they were going to manage this place from Ottawa was when we started to see the decline."

I really think from the coastal marine.... The communities that I represent really want to have a say in what's happening on their shorelines. They really want to be involved, to some extent. So the idea of going out to communities is great. The idea of solving these problems sooner rather than later is even better. I recognize that it's complex, and you can't just solve it without having those conversations.

We run into challenges all the time. In Saltspring, the number of live-aboards, for example, that have taken harbour in Ganges. It is a form of housing, and we recognize that it's a form of housing, but in some cases, these are dangerous and very, very marginal in terms of housing. There are no services there to provide septic removal. There are

all sorts of problems and challenges with it. And there's just nowhere to look for money. There's nowhere to look for support. Nobody wants to enforce it. So it ends up just being this place where nothing happens, and that becomes incredibly frustrating.

I'm just going to switch gears here a little bit. The minister has said a couple of times now that the healthy watersheds money is sought after by communities. I think that it is an indication that this fund was greatly needed. We talked about this in budget estimates previously. But it's also an indication of just how hard we've hammered nature in this province and how far we've degraded that. There have been no resources in place previously for this kind of restoration.

We've been talking about the restoration economy. The minister mentions it. We've seen a lot of degradation of our forests. We see landslides and those landscapes now threatening the communities that are around them. Other than the \$100 million that was previously approved in the watershed fund, in the supplementary budget estimates a couple of weeks ago, in Budget 2023, can the minister maybe profile how we're building on that investment to continue to invest in restoring nature and biodiversity in our systems outside of watersheds?

We've got the watershed fund, but it's more than that. I'm just wondering how Budget 2023, from the minister's perspective, continues to build this restoration economy, an economy that's going to be so important over the next decades.

[6:05 p.m.]

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Thank you to my friend for the question. It's an incredibly important one. I was just reminded that in part of our work as a government, towards conservation, there is an implicit and stated desire and need to do restoration as well. I think traditionally, conservation was seen as stopping an activity or managing for certain interests. Because of the degradation of so many of our — particularly in some regions, which I'll talk about — areas of the province.... Just allowing it to conserve, nature will often bounce back, recover itself. But some of the degradation has been so significant that we have to put investments in.

I'll start in the northeast, which I think is a pretty important example. We've talked about this a little bit earlier, the Blueberry River First Nation and the Treaty 8 First Nations. One will see the contemplation of all sorts of aspects of that agreement — the recognition of cumulative impacts and what that has meant, which was, of course, the core of the court case that was brought by Yahey to the province successfully. I believe it's a \$500 million restoration fund we've stood up now to heal back the land because of the impacts there. I don't know if it's global setting, but certainly I can't think of another restoration fund within Canada of that size and scale, so it's outstanding.

As well, the much-anticipated Canada-B.C.-First-

Nations nature agreement is well on its way. I'm headed to Ottawa in a little bit. We're feeling confident. I went and sought mandates from all of the First Nations Leadership Council partner groups. They all endorsed their representatives working with B.C. and Canada to land that fund, which has a strong conservation element but also a restoration piece.

We also doubled the BCSRIF, the salmon restoration fund, very specific restoration work to bring back salmon. The happy conclusion on that is that for every dollar B.C. puts in, we're getting \$1.60 from Canada, which is not bad, in terms of what the magnitude is.

My friend is right. We spent \$57 million on the healthy watershed initiatives already out the door, run by a number of different groups, but one of them was the Real Estate Foundation, which was co-developed with First Nations, and then the projects were done in partnership, either exclusively by a First Nation or a local interest group along with First Nations.

A very interesting.... No, more than interesting. It's a quite revolutionary development of restoration work, which is as much about relationship as it was about the work itself. Those are the reports that we were getting back. New relationships formed, and new commitments formed at a very localized level, which is outstanding.

I think I'll leave it there. There's \$2 million a year we spend on caribou habitat restoration. Again, it's not just conservation but knowing that.... What we hear from the biologists and First Nations is that in order for caribou to come back in certain regions, it's just not enough to stop activity. You have to do the restoration work back.

Those are some pretty significant examples, along with the \$100 million fund — which we anticipate to grow, by the way — for the watershed security. We've heard from the feds and we've heard from philanthropic groups that the structure of that fund is very attractive as a place to put restoration and conservation money because the impact of each dollar is so significant. So we feel very proud about that program.

[6:10 p.m.]

**A. Olsen:** I recognize that some of this ground might have already been covered by my colleagues here, and I'm only going to slightly hazard to step on some ground that may have been covered.

The minister will answer it how it is, but we've got the ministry that's responsible for water, land and then resource stewardship, and then we've got other ministries that are responsible for, basically, the extractive aspects of it. I don't want to just suggest that energy and mines are only about extractive or forests is only about extractive. Their policies require there to be, also, kind of a stewardship relationship with nature, but less so. It is the primary focus of this ministry.

I'm just wondering how, with the extractive and the stewardship parts of the work that government's trying

to do.... We're, on one hand, spending money in WaLRS here, in the stewardship aspect of it, to try to rebuild nature, to protect biodiversity and to rebuild biodiversity in areas that it's been denuded. But then there are also decisions that are being made about forests that are being cut and mountaintops that are being removed for the minerals.

There are all of these things going on all at the same time in different ministries and in different silos across government. Then there's also B.C. Parks, which is actually the protected areas. This minister that I'm talking to today is responsible for 25 percent by 2025, 30 by 2030. These commitments are in WaLRS's mandate letter.

I'm just wondering exactly how we are coordinating all of this in a way so that we're not, on one hand, spending money to build something when maybe a decision in a different ministry is being made to reduce it. I guess further to that, what's the tracking system within government to ensure that we are protecting...?

We've set a specific number — 25 percent by 2025, 30 percent by 2030. So on one hand, we're trying to protect this, and on the other hand, we're also undermining that work, to some extent, because there is going to be some economic development and resource extraction. So how is this all balanced?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** We did canvass a part of my friend's question earlier. It's okay to go back, but I'll maybe be a bit shorter than I was in the first section, in the interest of time.

[6:15 p.m.]

The word "stewardship" is in this ministry quite intentionally. That actually came from the first engagement we had on how to build this ministry. It came predominantly from a coastal First Nation's leader who said: "You guys are all about the extraction. You've got to talk about the stewardship more. Put it in the name." So we put it in the name. Words matter. Names matter. The implication is to think about the province, the land, the water in a different way.

What I'd say is that we talked quite a bit about modernized land use planning earlier. We have 18 tables set up across the province that are government-to-government tables at various stages of advancement, as my friend would know. The reason I point to that, in terms of the balance question, extraction versus conservation and restoration, is that my faith goes there, in that government-to-government engagement, when talking about the entire land use question within a territory.

Nations will have different interests in terms of extraction. My experience has been that it's quite typically different than historical extraction policies and practices. But when we do those land use planning tables, all the ministries and interests that my friend mentioned — Mines, Forests, Environment and Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation — are present. This goes back again to the DNA of this ministry, which is to convene.

If you're going to do proper land use planning from the Crown side, the government side, we have to bring a convening mentality so that when we engaged with Blueberry River First Nations to negotiate that settlement, it wasn't just WLRs at the table. Clearly, it had to be the other ministries, as well, so that we could talk about extraction. We could talk about remediation and healing of the land and then enable the resources to be brought to bear that we now see.

That was a court-mandated activity. Not ideal. We have other examples. We've talked around the province. The courts are an important function but are not great at doing land use planning. That's not what judges are there for, generally speaking, but they're an important place for rights and title to be established.

The last thing I would say is that on the 25 by '25 and 30 by '30, which sits within my mandate and which people were very happy to see codified, black and white, all of that is through Indigenous-led conservation. It's a very easy thing for me to talk about, regardless of the group.

I said this to the B.C. Business Council in the exact same way I said it to a group of ecologists and philanthropists: Indigenous-led conservation. It's very consistent. It's very easy, but hard for some groups to understand, frankly, because conservation mentalities, historically, many have said, and I think quite accurately, are colonial in nature. We draw a line on the map. It's not all that different than extractive policies, just different outcomes, same theme, which is the *terra nullius* and all the rest.

We're feeling it's an ambitious target — we can talk about those targets, if my friend would like — but I believe possible and only possible through things like IPCAs, Indigenous protected and conserved areas. I'm feeling positive about that.

Changing that philosophical practice, I may be.... No. Modernized land use planning is the pathway forward. I really sincerely believe it. We've got examples where we can see how predictability comes out the other end for local interest groups. As an action of DRIPA....

Oh, the last thing I would offer is the collaborative Indigenous stewardship forums. These are the ESIs and CSFs that existed in the past. This is where there are multiple nations sitting down together with the Crown. There are a number of them. There are four ESIs around the province; 32 nations sit at those four tables.

This is where we do the data. This is where our technicians sit down from the province and First Nations and agree on that. I'm getting this from Wet'suwet'en friends and Gitksan friends of mine, who have been quite skeptical when they see the word "reconciliation." They've said that is the best activity that they have seen so far in terms of resolving something that has historically been always in dispute. How many moose? What's the strength of the forest? What's the resiliency of the watershed? Arguing over the data, and whose data is believable. How do you incorporate Indigenous knowledge?

It's happening at those forums. I'm very glad that we're continuing to support them. I want to get more because that's where you can then settle the data question, incorporate the knowledge that's from different cultural perspectives. Then have the debate about the land use, right? As opposed to trying to have that debate at the same time, which is what we've done in the past. The suspicion and fear and cynicism are understood when the data points haven't been agreed to.

Sorry if I went on a little bit. This is good stuff.

[6:20 p.m.]

**A. Olsen:** Yeah. I appreciate the response. Thank you, Minister.

You've kind of led into the next question I had around IPCAs. We will leave it for a conversation maybe in the hallway or somewhere else, just around Indigenous-led conservation. I know I've had the conversation with your staff previously, as well as with members of your team, in various briefings we had. The minister noted it's not.... The relationship with nature, the one that I grew up in, wasn't: "We're going to protect this over here so that we can go and eviscerate over there and everywhere else that's not here." That's kind of the conservation mentality. We'll conserve so then we can.... It's the soft pillow we lay our on at the end of the night.

The ideas of Indigenous-led conservation — I have this natural reaction to it. "Oh, that's putting together two things that whole world view is different." So how do we reflect that world view in the decision-making? I appreciate the minister noting it.

One of that is Indigenous sovereignty. The former Premier mentioned it a lot. We had lots of conversations, talking about inherent rights and title and sovereignty. We have some experiences with the Taku River Tlingit and the Simpcw First Nation declaring IPCAs and then the provincial government saying: "Well, we're going to continue to make land use decisions as we have over these territories."

I'm wondering. What is the approach for the for the government on IPCAs? When a nation claims that this is now an IPCA, what's that process? Does the province just agree, or does the province just disagree? What happens from there once that declaration is made?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** My friend brings up some important examples when it comes to Indigenous protected and conserved areas. We will have to have that coffee shop conversation about conservation. That is a different thing, a different notion, in terms of.... The soft pillow comment was well taken.

Our approach so far, and it's been noted in the media as well, is that the first declaration, the self-declaration, of an IPCA is the beginning of a conversation. It's an intent from a nation saying that this is a desire that they have. The reason it begins the conversation is that, as we would

know, there might be multiple interests in certain territories. I've had some examples — Taku would be an example — around the province where other nations have strong and declared interests as well.

[6:25 p.m.]

Our effort, then, as the Crown is, if required — and it's different case by case, by the way — is to play a convening role in which we participate in the conversation between nations. There are other examples where nations want to have the conversation amongst themselves on an IPCA or other land use planning initiatives.

One's ideal is that an IPCA or any other land designation coming from a First Nation exists within the broader territorial conversation. That can be complicated, depending on which nation we're talking about. I would say.... The Gitksan, for example, have a complex governance system. One might not wait for an entire Gitksan strategy before one moved ahead on some IPCA initiatives and conservation efforts. We see it as the beginning.

The last thing I would add is.... It's often overlooked, within the public, maybe, not so much conservation groups, although some.... IPCAs — conservation, in general — are not cheap, not only in the initiation of it, the negotiation of it, the input, the biology, the Elders' knowledge, all of those things that you have to bring in. But even once established, it needs to be sustained.

I've seen, through the old federal park system, for example, the propensity to just declare things and then barely minimum fund and all the rest. Just another bit of the colonial legacy, frankly, for me. They just weren't thoughtful about what it is to be more incorporated into a place. That's my philosophical rant on that.

We see it as very much a starting point. We're seeing some desire from First Nations for some legal structure around this. So some predictability on their end. What is it? How does the province view these legally?

Again, our preference is very much within a larger land use planning conversation, which is sometimes the same thing. A nation declares an IPCA. What they've said they're asking for is to start the conversation and to have a much larger land use dialogue and negotiated settlement with the province.

**A. Olsen:** My time is coming to an end. I appreciate the opportunity. With the amount of paper that I see over here.... We're not going to get to the number of questions that we have for the minister. So I'm just going to rest my case for this time now.

I'll just say, I guess, for the record, in the context of the different world views.... My dad has always said: "You only take what you need." I think it's a fair statement to make that that has not been the policy of resource extraction for the provincial or federal governments. We've taken much more than we need. We've taken much more than, perhaps, we should in some areas and in ways that don't reflect that principle.



My dad told me a story about his grandson, my nephew, who's six or seven years old, standing in a creek, fishing in the fall for some winter fish. There are some Cowichan community members, much older, adults, standing in their hip waders in the creek as well. My nephew turns to them and says: "Now, you remember. You only take what you need, right?" My dad is: "Well, the teachings have set in pretty strong." I think that's what the reflection is.

I'll, finally, just say this. It is encouraging to know.... In the past, things only happened if the province brought these initiatives to have a conversation. That was where, in the past, 100 percent of the conversations started.

Now there are mechanisms, which are put in place, where Indigenous nations can request a table. They can make a public declaration, a public statement. There's a number of tools, which are evolving through this difficult process, that are balancing the conversation and providing First Nations, Indigenous communities, options that were not there in the past.

As sharp as some of my criticisms are on the finer points, and always will be in this to keep things moving, I think it's always important to acknowledge the really important and progressive steps that we've been taking to have a conversation that is more reflective of the way it should be. I appreciate that and just want to acknowledge that.

**L. Doerkson:** I just quickly want to move along to some permitting questions. I want to talk about this for a little bit.

[6:30 p.m.]

The minister's mandate letter asked him to "lead cross-government work to improve timing and transparency of permitting processes." What can the minister tell us about the state of permitting timing in his ministry, which has required this to be a part of his mandate letter?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Thank you for the question.

This is incredibly important for so many different things that are important to the people that we represent. Permitting on housing, natural resource development, reconciliation, municipal affairs, on and on. What we established were a couple of things. One is that the backlog, the permits in holding, in the natural resource sector and the Ministry of Transportation.... It was a little north of 21,000 permits backlogged. So significant.

Our solution to this was threefold. One is bringing resources. So 175 new people, across eight different ministries, initially tasked with two things: taking on the housing permits, lifting those up, specifically, and expediting them, as well as taking the lessons from this experience — Where are the choke points? Where are the main challenges in getting permits through the door? — and then transferring that out to the larger natural resource sector, more broadly.

What we heard, when we did the organizational review

that created this ministry, was that First Nations were not particularly interested in this permit-by-permit transactional relationship, which had been established with the province. Many of the things we've talked about earlier, land use planning, and then dropping the permits down that are not needing that type of attention.

The last thing I would say, for some early examples, is.... I'm about results. I've got to see the change. There's one permit, the riparian areas protection permit, that those who have been involved in getting permits done would know about. The average wait time, process time, was nine to 12 months. We're getting 90 percent of the permits done within a month.

In a month's time, our expectation time for those permits will have dropped from that nine to 12 month range, for the vast majority, to within the 30 day range. So this is a tangible thing that folks that are going through a permitting process are going to see from us. Again, taking those lessons that we're learning in going through this housing engagement will, then, extend out across the broader natural resource sector to improve the predictability and efficiency.

The last thing I'll say is.... We must also maintain our high standards. As we seek to move the backlog down and get more predictability and more timeliness on permits, we have to also keep the standards high so that we don't permit things that will later cost us, as government, individuals, municipalities, a lot of money because permits were issued for activities that should never have taken place.

**L. Doerkson:** I guess I'll seek a little bit of clarification.

[6:35 p.m.]

It's my understanding that there are 328 day waits right now on active water applications. There are around 1,780 current active land applications awaiting decisions that, on average, are taking around 324 days. Obviously, those are very significant delays. Obviously, there's a number of things being held up because of those delays.

I guess I wanted to clarify.... A month down the road, we're going to see a massive improvement. Is that on one section of permits, which you were referring to, or are we going to look at a massive improvement on all of these?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Thank you for the question.

My friend hit on the ones that are the hardest. The water and land act permits are the ones that are most challenging and have taken the longest. They are part of that significant backlog, which I talked about, of the 21,000 permits.

The one I mentioned earlier — by June, bringing down the wait time from nine to 12 months to one month — is the riparian, specifically. That being said, the resources that we brought in, and the large number of staff, are to deal with the backlog, which will lower the times on all permitting, across the board, starting with housing and then moving on to the lessons learned.

It's not just more people. Throwing more people at it helps. You've just got one staff person sitting with 70 permits. Each one takes a certain amount of time, and the backlog keeps growing.

B.C. has also been incredibly busy as a province. We have seen the increase in permits sought from the province as we are building more housing than we ever have before. Industry has had significant.... You look at the mining and exploration sector having its best year ever in 2022.

We know the province has been economically incredibly busy. Part of that is permitting. The challenge is a backlog that has been built over many years. To tackle it, you need resources. We're doing two things. One is bringing new people in to handle what is there right now and also, and importantly, doing a systems change so that the way that we handle permits is done much more expeditiously.

Lastly is all the work we're doing with First Nations governments to know that the referrals we're doing.... Which ones need to be referred to First Nations governments? Which ones can we get agreement with First Nations, to say: "At this level of permitting, you don't need to see it" or "You can handle it, at this level, with technical staff within your agency"? We know, in a lot of First Nations, the capacity and the number of people they have on their side of the table are not nearly high enough to deal with all the referrals they're getting. Sorting that out with the nation, nation by nation, is incredibly important.

It's hard work, but there's no other way. There's just simply no other way but to improve our permitting by getting our systems better in place and having more people, frankly, doing the permitting so that we can get much lower timelines.

The riparian one, which I pointed out, was just some early indicator of positive success in changing the system and having more people working at it to get our numbers down to what I would say is a reasonable time.

**L. Doerkson:** With respect to the riparian permitting that we are talking about.... I just want to be very clear on that answer. I think I heard the minister say a month on some of these.

We do have a number of residents that are quite concerned about this, particularly in the Shuswap, possibly in Sea to Sky as well. There's a very short building season in many parts, as the minister would well know. When we're faced with these delays.... What might be a 60- or 90- or 120-day delay to the minister, of course, can translate to a two-year delay for building. I want to be clear as to when this is going to happen and how long?

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Thanks for the opportunity. I was not clear in my answer earlier.

I live in the North. I very much know about building windows and how they get blown by waiting for that one

last permit and the costs it has for developers, governments and everybody else if you lose a year and inflation.

[6:40 p.m.]

Very specifically, on the riparian permits that we talked about.... As of December of last year, the average time was between nine and 12 months for a permit to be issued. By the end of June of this year, 90 percent of permits will be done within 30 days.

**L. Doerkson:** Just maybe one last question on this. During the budget speech, the Finance Minister stated that delays cost money, and I think we would all agree with that comment. I'm just wondering if the ministry would be able to point to just how much these delays are costing the province right now and how they're impacting us economically.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** It's a very good question. It's one I've asked myself. When arguing, as we have to, for more resources, one has to make the argument publicly as well as within government.

One rough estimate out of forestry is that permit delays were costing as much as \$1 billion in investment. That's a rough estimate. Take that out to mining. Take that out to housing development. We very much know that time is money, as I think the Finance Minister referred to it, when it comes to permitting. So we feel very confident with the resources that we've been able to bring in from, again, eight different ministries. We're staffing up to get the permits done more quickly.

We use the idea of investment quite a bit in government. This is without a doubt an investment, bringing up the certainty level just in terms of timing, never mind seasons closing. But how many years does it take? Again, living in the North, I see what the impact is of a good mine being permitted, in terms of revenue to the province, local economy, the workers that are able to go to work and feed their families. Sometimes a project is unable to come to fruition just because it takes so long through the permitting process.

Again, when you're dealing with a mine, the impacts of permitting a bad mine can be in the hundreds of millions, as well, in terms of cleanup that then lands on the public. One has to be smart about this. But the sense of urgency from my ministry and from our government on this question is significant. I think we're seeing that with the estimates and the numbers of people that we're able to bring in.

Again, it's not just the people, though. We've got to change the systems, got to change the way we do things. And then what our relationship is with referrals to First Nations and local government and making sure that they're expedited in a thoughtful way.

**L. Doerkson:** That's a staggering number — \$1 billion. Shave 10 percent off; add 10 percent. That's a staggering

number, and we're talking about one industry, right? Definitely I can appreciate why we need to focus on this.

The minister's mandate letter asks him to improve timing and transparency. I'm just wondering what the specific plan is around transparency.

[6:45 p.m.]

**The Chair:** Minister, just noting the hour, if we can be as brief as possible.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Have you got somewhere to be? This is good stuff.

The transparency component of this, to be able to show communities, show individuals, who either have a permit in the system or who are observing permits go through — two things. We're creating a dashboard tool, an authorization application insight tool. That's an aggregate that shows how long each permit is taking within the system in real time. You put a permit in for this; right now the system is processing it this quickly. That will be up this year.

The second tool we're bringing in, and I think it's a very important one, is individualized, almost like UPS, tracking. "Where are the permits that I've placed in...? What are the expectations within them, and where are they at in the process?" One of the frustrations for people going through the permitting process is: "I simply don't know where my permit is at. Is it at this stage, or is it at this stage? What is the expectation?" Then, "How are we doing across the system?" is what the dashboard is meant to say.

This permit you're looking at is, on average, taking 65 days right now. You're sitting here; my application is sitting at day 33. Got it. I have a rough estimate. I can now do some planning, which is what people have been asking from us for a long time. "How can I have the predictability so I can hire the right people at the right time — if, more or less, I know the permit is coming about this far as opposed to what has historically been a bit of a black hole? The permit is in; I just keep phoning and asking, and I don't get answers." That's the uncertainty that industry is concerned with, which we share.

**The Chair:** Recognizing the member for the wrap-up questions.

**L. Doerkson:** Thank you, Chair. Yes, I am aware of the hour.

Two questions that I'm going to ask for a written response to. I'll try to make these as clear as possible. These are not my words necessarily. These are from constituents that have concerns.

Given the serious damage to the sea floor in B.C.'s most

heavily used marine parks due to anchoring by recreational boaters, has the ministry contemplated any kind of restoration to those damaged sites or solutions with respect to anchoring in marine parks?

[The bells were rung.]

The constituent has suggested that they would advocate for sufficient mooring buoys to accommodate recreational boaters in those marine park areas.

The other question here is.... I need to provide just a little bit of background. FLNRO Ministry, on January 1, 2023, extended the 2015 two-year moratorium on float homes for the fifth time. The provincial government needed two years to establish a policy for float homes after Port Metro Vancouver's river had a lease expire in 2015. The two-year ministerial order withdrawing disposition of Crown land for new float home use took effect January 1, 2015, though the government has extended in 2015, '17, '19, '21 and '23. Now in '25, as well, they've extended.

[6:50 p.m.]

This constituent is concerned about the future of permits that would allow them to live in these float homes. They of course are advocating that this is housing, and they can't seem to get a solid answer to the future.

Chair, I just would like to thank the staff. I look forward to the responses on that. I thank the minister for the time here.

**The Chair:** Seeing no further questions, I'm going to ask the minister if they'd like to make any very brief closing remarks before I call the vote, because the bells have rung and we need to get to the main chamber.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** Fearing the wrath of my colleagues, I will make no final comments.

**The Chair:** Seeing no further questions, I will now call the vote.

Vote 46: ministry operations, \$124,009,000 — approved.

**Hon. N. Cullen:** I move that the committee rise and report resolution and completion and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 6:51 p.m.



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