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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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

SECOND SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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Honourable Bill Barisoff

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CONTENTS

Thursday, April 27, 2006
Afternoon Sitting

Routine Proceedings

	Page
Tributes	4119
John Goyer	
Hon. J. Les	
Working dogs in B.C.	
C. Wyse	
Introductions by Members	4119
Introduction and First Reading of Bills.....	4120
Education (Learning Enhancement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006 (Bill 33)	
Hon. S. Bond	
Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act (No. 2), 2006 (Bill 30)	
Hon. W. Oppal	
Statements (Standing Order 25B)	4121
Bhimrao Ambedkar	
R. Chouhan	
Day of Mourning for workers	
I. Black	
Centre for Child Development in Surrey	
S. Hammell	
Working dogs in B.C.	
J. Nuraney	
2007 World Cup soccer in Canada	
R. Fleming	
Mandatory minimum sentences in justice system	
D. Hayer	
Oral Questions.....	4123
Emergency services in health care system	
C. Puchmayr	
Hon. G. Abbott	
Emergency services in Fraser region	
R. Chouhan	
Hon. G. Abbott	
D. Thorne	
Availability of beds in health care facilities	
D. Cubberley	
Hon. G. Abbott	
Hon. G. Campbell	
Health care services in Fraser region	
B. Ralston	
Hon. G. Abbott	
Health care services in interior B.C.	
K. Conroy	
Hon. G. Abbott	
Petitions.....	4127
K. Conroy	
Ministerial Statements.....	4127
Referendum on electoral reform	
Hon. G. Campbell	
L. Krog	

Tabling Documents.....	4129
WorkSafe B.C., annual report, 2005, and service plan, 2006-2008	

Committee of Supply.....	4129
Estimates: Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts	
Hon. O. Ilich	
N. Simons	
G. Coons	
S. Simpson	

Proceedings in the Douglas Fir Room

Committee of Supply.....	4144
Estimates: Ministry of Community Services and Minister Responsible for Seniors' and Women's Issues (<i>continued</i>)	
Hon. I. Chong	
D. Thorne	
R. Chouhan	

THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 2006

The House met at 2:04 p.m.

Tributes

JOHN GOYER

Hon. J. Les: I rise in the House today to pay tribute to Const. John Goyer, a member of the Abbotsford police department. Constable Goyer passed away recently after a long and courageous battle with ALS. Tragically, his disease was caused by injuries that he sustained during an on-duty fight while arresting a suspect. John had been a member of the Abbotsford police department since April of 1998, and he will be missed by the entire detachment.

Police officers like Constable Goyer are a thin blue line that stands between those who are law-abiding citizens and others. John was one of those good guys. He was a good police officer, the best kind of officer — motivated by a sense of duty, honour and integrity. Police are sometimes asked to make the ultimate sacrifice to keep the rest of us safe. I can't imagine the sense of loss that his parents, his sister and his fellow officers at the Abbotsford detachment must feel.

Const. John Goyer made a difference. As a police officer he accomplished great things in both big and small ways every day. Perhaps most important, he led a life that was significant because every day he helped to make the people of Abbotsford safer. For that, he will always be remembered.

[1405]

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you convey to Constable Goyer's family condolences on behalf of all members of this House.

WORKING DOGS IN B.C.

C. Wyse: I would like to draw to the House's attention how impressed I was with the working dogs and the demonstration they put on outside of the House today. I was so impressed with their skills and with their ability to take my colleagues from the opposite side of the House and work them through their paces. They did it so efficiently. I would ask the House to recognize the service these dogs do throughout British Columbia.

Introductions by Members

D. MacKay: It is not every day I get a chance to stand up in this House and introduce some guests or friends, but I'm pleased to do it today. I've actually got two friends in the gallery today. One of them is from southeast Alaska. His name is Terry Otness, and he's from the city of Wrangell, Alaska. He is the community coordinator for the city of Wrangell with regards to the Alcan and Intertie. Accompanying Terry is Tom Fischer from Bellingham, Washington, from Tollhouse Energy Co. I would ask the House to please make both of these gentlemen welcome.

K. Conroy: It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce two constituents who are actually in the press gallery: Lana and Dan Rodlie. Dan was one of the recipients who were recognized yesterday with the B.C. Community Achievement Awards at Government House. Dan has a very long history of community accomplishments, which was so deservedly recognized yesterday.

Also with Dan is his wife Lana, and the reason that a couple from Trail is in the press gallery today. Lana is a reporter from the *Trail Times* who is tenacious in ensuring community issues are brought to the forefront in the daily news. It is an honour to introduce them in the House today, and I ask you all to join me in welcoming them.

Hon. G. Campbell: It's my honour today to introduce to the House a special school from my riding: Ms. King's grade five students from Queen Mary Elementary School. That's the school my sons both went to. There are 60 students in the House today to learn about the history of government and parliamentary process here in British Columbia.

Queen Mary, as I'm sure everyone in the House knows, is known for its commitment to social responsibility — not just at Queen Mary. The Queen Mary Shares program is a sharing program for all students to participate in. It's intended to develop a greater awareness and contribution to the local and international communities.

I hope the House will make them all welcome, and say thank you to Ms. King and all of her students for coming and joining us today.

R. Chouhan: I would like to introduce Craig Langston. Craig is the president of the Cerebral Palsy Association of B.C and vice-president of the B.C. Aboriginal Network on Disabilities Society. Please join me to welcome Craig.

J. Nuraney: We have in the precincts today some people who are involved in training and working with working dogs. We have Allison Pringle, the director of communications from the Pacific Assistance Dog Society, shortly named PADS, and her dog Rex. We have Lilly La Mar, a client who uses a dog partner called Aspen. We have Bill Thornton from B.C. Guide Dogs. We have Derek Nicholls from Search and Rescue. We have Don Wrigley, the chair of advocacy communication for PADS. We have Pam Zimmerman, a dog instructor from PADS. We have Audrey Hill and Cora Thomson from St. John Ambulance brigade. May the House please join me in welcoming all these guests.

L. Krog: In the gallery today are two very active British Columbians, Jane Dyson and Margaret Birrell from the Coalition of People with Disabilities. I would ask the House to please make them welcome.

R. Cantelon: Visiting us today in the gallery are Bernard, Beverly and Jacquie Priveau, visiting us from Halifax. They're here to check out our weather and apparently some other things too. Let's please make them welcome.

[1410]

J. Rustad: Yesterday I tabled a report of the Special Committee to Appoint an Ombudsman. Yesterday, too, was the final day for Mr. Howard Kushner, Ombudsman for British Columbia, who served this House and our province admirably for nearly seven years. As Mr. Kushner enters another phase of his life, I'd like all members of the House to congratulate Mr. Kushner for the passion he brought to the position of Ombudsman and best wishes for the future.

Hon. J. van Dongen: Today in the members' gallery we have a special visitor from Chile: Maria Eliana Cuevas, the newly appointed consul general at Vancouver, making her first official visit to Victoria. I ask all the members to please join me in giving her a warm welcome.

H. Bloy: Another member in the gallery today who joined us for the proclamation is Louise Crowe. She is manager, member services for British Columbia Veterinary Medical Association and a former neighbour. I ask the House to please make her welcome.

Hon. J. Les: I have the pleasure today to introduce some friends from Chilliwack. They are Ruth and Paul Friesen and Maxine and Corney Kurtz. They were in the House yesterday and apparently enjoyed themselves so much that they came back for an encore. Would the members please make them welcome.

J. McIntyre: I just wanted to introduce to the House today a class of about 70 students who will be arriving shortly from Mulgrave School, in my riding of West Vancouver-Garibaldi. They're being accompanied by their teacher Mr. Mark Steffens. I hope the House will make them welcome this afternoon as they do their tour.

R. Lee: Today 28 students, led by their teacher Ms. Sabina McCloskey from the Holy Cross Elementary School in Burnaby, are visiting the House. Would the House please join me to welcome them.

D. Hayer: We have in the precinct today over 100 grade six students from Erma Stephenson Elementary School in my riding of Surrey-Tynehead. Joining them are their teachers Ms. Heather Briske, Jennifer Visnjak, Mark Vilio, Maya Wingate; and Michelle MacFarlane, vice-principal, as well as 12 international students with their teacher Jules Verne from Mexico City. We also have many volunteering parents with them, helping them come over here to learn about our government system. Would the House please give them a round of applause and make them very welcome.

Hon. G. Abbott: It's a great pleasure to welcome to the members' gallery today an old friend and old hockey teammate of mine and — I think I can say without reservation — one of the finest left-wingers ever to be produced by the Sicamous Blues.

He has moved on from hockey to politics. He has done well. He is now the mayor of Salmon Arm, so it's a great pleasure for me to introduce His Worship Mayor Marty Bootsma of Salmon Arm. With him is Wendy Hunter. I ask the House to make them both welcome.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

EDUCATION (LEARNING ENHANCEMENT) STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

Hon. S. Bond presented a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: a bill intituled Education (Learning Enhancement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

Hon. S. Bond: I move that the bill be introduced and read a first time now.

Motion approved.

[1415]

Hon. S. Bond: I am pleased to introduce Bill 33. This act introduces legislative changes that will address class size and composition in British Columbia schools, and meets our throne speech commitment to ensure that all school districts live within class-size limits established in law. Amendments to the School Act will also define and recognize distributed learning and help school boards offer more choice to students who are taking their courses electronically. Finally, amendments to the Teaching Profession Act will enable the B.C. College of Teachers to collect statistical information for the release of its annual report.

The amendments set out the following: (1) new class-size limits for grades four through seven and for students with special needs, as well as new requirements for consultation and reporting and a mechanism to ensure that boards comply with the legislation; (2) a requirement that school boards enter into an agreement with the ministry in order to offer distributed learning courses; and (3) the kind of statistical information that school boards, the Francophone Education Authority and the independent school authorities will be required to provide to the B.C. College of Teachers.

These legislative changes deliver on government's commitment to build on our students' record of excellence, to balance the needs for smaller classes with the need to maintain flexibility, to ensure that there is accountability and transparency in the system, and, most importantly, to continue to improve our students' achievement.

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

Bill 33, Education (Learning Enhancement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, introduced, read a first time

and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

MISCELLANEOUS STATUTES
AMENDMENT ACT (No. 2), 2006

Hon. W. Oppal presented a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: a bill intituled Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act (No. 2), 2006.

Hon. W. Oppal: I move that the bill be introduced and read a first time now.

Motion approved.

Hon. W. Oppal: I'm pleased to introduce Bill 30. This bill amends the following statutes: the Balanced Budget and Ministerial Accountability Act, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Land Act, the Land Survey Act, the Land Surveyors Act, the Land Title Act, the Oil and Gas Commission Act, the Personal Information Protection Act and the Utilities Commission Act.

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

Bill 30, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act (No. 2), 2006, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Hon. M. de Jong: The tabling of Bill 30 represents the culmination of the government's legislative agenda for the present spring session, with one notable exception. That is legislation flowing out of the Hughes report, which members will have heard reference made to earlier.

I can advise the House that the Opposition House Leader and I have begun discussions around finalizing a schedule that would see the work completed before the scheduled adjournment date of May 18. Those discussions will now continue, and I will have more to report to the House in due course.

**Statements
(Standing Order 25b)**

BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR

R. Chouhan: I rise today to commemorate the life of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. Born on April 14, 1891, Dr. Ambedkar was the champion of human rights and responsible for drafting the constitution of India.

In 1923 he founded the Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha, with the main objective of supplying education and improving the economic conditions of the depressed classes. With the slogan "educate, agitate, organize," he led a social movement to eliminate the caste system and rebuild Indian society on the basis of equality of human beings. In 1927 he led the march at Mahad Ma-

harashtra to establish the rights of the untouchables to drink from the public charter lake. This marked the beginning of the anti-caste system movement, launching an era in which India's rigid class system began to be challenged.

[1420]

As a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council from July 1942, he was instrumental in making legislative changes to protect the rights of untouchables and workers.

One of his greatest contributions was in respect to fundamental rights and the directive principles of state policy, enshrined in the constitution of India. Fundamental rights provide for freedom, equality and the abolition of untouchability. The directive principles enshrine the broad guiding principles for the fair distribution of wealth and better living conditions.

Dr. Ambedkar continued the crusade for social progress until the end of his life on December 6, 1956. He was awarded the highest national honour, Bharat Ratna, in April 1990.

Please join me in celebrating Dr. Ambedkar's contributions to society and to human rights in the world.

DAY OF MOURNING FOR WORKERS

I. Black: I rise today to make a statement on a very sombre and very serious subject. Tomorrow flags will fly at half-mast at buildings across our province to mark the annual day of mourning for workers who have lost their lives or who have been injured as a result of their work.

Every year on this day we publicly renew our commitment to improve health and safety in the workplace. I know I speak for all members in this House when I say that we mourn the loss of the men and women whose lives have been cut short by work-related accidents or disease, and when I extend my deepest sympathies to their families and friends.

In 2005, 188 B.C. workers lost their lives to workplace accidents and occupational illnesses. Lately there has been much attention paid to forest-related deaths. Between 2000 and 2005 we've seen 146 fatalities and nearly 600 serious injuries in the forest sector.

These numbers concern me greatly. We've responded by implementing a number of initiatives to address forest injuries and deaths. For example, in 2004 the B.C. Forest Safety Council was established. It is made up of representatives of both forest employers and those who work in the industry. Certification programs that emphasize safety have been implemented through the council. WorkSafe B.C.'s truck safe strategy focuses on all aspects of the trucking industry, including logging trucks. A special forestry coroner has been appointed, as well as a forestry ombudsman. We will also see more safety officers in the woods over the coming months.

Nevertheless, we must never forget the tragedy of the loss of even one life, regardless of the industry. All of us must be unwavering in our determination to prevent workplace accidents from happening. I would ask

all members in this House to now observe a moment's silence to remember those workers whose lives were taken much too early from their families, friends and colleagues.

CENTRE FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN SURREY

S. Hammell: I recently had the pleasure of touring the Centre for Child Development in Surrey, a regional neurological facility that provides services to over 1,700 children and their families. The mandate of the centre is to serve children with developmental disabilities and special needs.

This is an amazing 40,000-square-foot building. In it there are wheelchairs with more gadgets than my new Smart car. One of those modern, adjustable, padded wheelchair marvels can cost as much as \$20,000. I saw a variety of machines and computers that help children talk, write and hear. There is a large therapeutic pool where these children often feel their first sensation of physical freedom. This facility has small rooms, gyms and spaces with one focus: to help in the developmental issues of special needs children. Their motto is "Therapy, care and support under one umbrella."

[1425]

The presence of this facility, the equipment it houses and the service the staff provides tell us as much about ourselves as a society as it does about the children it serves. It talks to our value of inclusion, of including in our society the most vulnerable. Much of the money to build this treatment facility was raised through B.C. residents' donations to annual Variety Club telethons. Operating funds are provided mainly by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the United Way and the centre's own fundraising campaigns.

I'd like to mention that we're on the eve of their big fundraiser. Next Sunday, April 30, the Centre for Child Development is hosting its fifth annual "run, walk, and roll for our kids" event at Bear Creek Park in Surrey. The event starts at 9:30, and the centre would like to see as many people as possible come out and join the fun. Everyone is welcome.

WORKING DOGS IN B.C.

J. Nuraney: Throughout history a certain animal has been chronicled as a source of legends and praised for its courage and devotion towards mankind. Today not only do these animals offer companionship and loyalty. They are also a lifeline for many people who need their help in everyday situations that we often take for granted. I'm talking about man's best friend, the dog.

Today at noon I had the honour to share the stage with the Solicitor General and proclaim 2006 as the year of the working dog in British Columbia. This proclamation recognizes not only these specially trained dogs but also the trainers and organizations who prepare the animals for years of dedicated duty enhancing independence for thousands of British Columbians. Working dogs act as eyes for the visually impaired,

ears for the hard of hearing and assistants to the physically challenged, and provide emotional therapy to many, including hospital patients, nursing homes, residents and special needs students.

In addition, they help police protect our society, assist search and rescue teams to locate victims of disaster, and help our military operations, both at home and overseas. Without complaint, they carry out their duties, often with marked consequences in dangerous situations. Earlier this year a police dog named Nitro was killed in the line of duty in Vancouver. The grief over the death of this dog was as sincere as if a human officer had been killed instead.

Please join me in paying tribute to working dogs. They are more than just pets. They are skilled professionals who often go unrecognized and overlooked in providing physical, mental and emotional assistance to those whose lives are touched and improved.

2007 WORLD CUP SOCCER IN CANADA

R. Fleming: It's my pleasure today to speak about an incredible sporting event that will be hosted by Canada next year. In 2007 Canada will host the FIFA Under-20 World Cup of Soccer. I'm especially proud that the tournament includes a venue in Greater Victoria. The competition is going to take place in six Canadian cities. Along with Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Montreal and Ottawa, Greater Victoria will host matches in Centennial Stadium at the University of Victoria.

FIFA is soccer's world governing body. The under-20 men's is the second-largest global tournament of its kind — second only to the World Cup, which is being hosted by Germany this summer and which begins in 43 days and four hours from now. The Under-20 World Cup event gives us the opportunity to see some of the world's best young players. Many of today's biggest soccer stars made their first international appearances at under-20 tournaments. A preview of the calibre and quality of the game will occur in a month's time here in Victoria, when Brazil's under-20 team visits Centennial Stadium to play Canada's under-20 team before a sell-out crowd.

In 2002 Canada hosted the hugely successful FIFA Under-19 Women's World Championship, a tournament that profiled the talent of Canadian women players like Kara Lang and Christine Sinclair. I'm very pleased to say that FIFA's vice-president, Jack Warner, recently toured Centennial Stadium and expressed his confidence in Victoria's ability to host the tournament.

The World Cup Under-20 Tournament kicks off on Canada Day — July 1, 2007. TV coverage will reach almost 200 countries. The eyes of the world will be on Canada and British Columbia, and I urge everyone to attend matches and take part in this great event.

[1430]

MANDATORY MINIMUM SENTENCES IN JUSTICE SYSTEM

D. Hayer: I was very encouraged last week to hear that the federal government intends to get tough on

criminals, particularly in the area of mandatory minimum sentences. I have been advocating for minimum sentences for quite some time, especially for those convicted of using guns in their criminal activities.

Over the past few years there has been a marked rise in the number of gun-related incidents. In the South Asian community since the 1990s, almost 100 young men have been killed. Mandatory minimum sentences and getting tougher on gun-related crime hopefully will send a clear message of deterrence to reduce the number of deaths of both those who are involved in crime as well as innocent victims.

Sadly, there seems to be little in the judicial system to discourage thugs, because currently the deterrence simply isn't sufficient in our judicial system to scare criminals away from gun use. But if the Prime Minister follows through on his promise, then perhaps we can curb some of this violence and avoid some of the tragedy that is an inevitable cause of grief to so many innocent family members.

By establishing mandatory minimum sentences, we can hope to reduce the plague of drug trafficking, gun smuggling and gun-related violence. The only way to deter repeat offenders is to ensure that there is a deterrence beyond house arrest or community service. We all have to work together to send a strong and clear message that repeat offenders and violent crime are unacceptable — that if you are going to do the crime, you are also going to do time in jail.

Oral Questions

EMERGENCY SERVICES IN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

C. Puchmayr: Today we learned without a doubt that the crisis in the health care system was created by design. For years the government and successive Ministers of Health have known about the crisis. Instead of taking steps to fix it, they made it worse. On top of that, they covered up the information. Doctors have been sounding the alarm bell for years. This government has not listened. This Minister of Health has called them alarmists.

Can the Minister of Health explain why this government ignored warnings from doctors in March of '03, December of '03, January of '04 and February of '04?

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the hon. member for his question.

Emergency rooms are a very important part of our health care system, and they are frequently one of the most challenging areas in our health care systems. Certainly we work each and every day, as do about 120,000 people in the health care system, to provide the best of service — quality service, timely service — to British Columbia's patients that we serve.

There is much to be done — no question about that. We do receive submissions from medical personnel on a regular basis which would encourage us to improve the system, and we do. We work with them. I believe

that notwithstanding the fact that British Columbia has a very good health care system — the Conference Board of Canada in its very comprehensive report pointed to that — there's plenty of room for improvement. We're going to work with all of the health care professionals, all of the health care workers, in this province to make it an even better system.

Mr. Speaker: Member for New Westminster has a supplemental.

C. Puchmayr: Earlier this week the minister denied a link between ER overcrowding and premature mortality. He said he didn't have the data, but as early as March of '03 the ministry began receiving evidence. In a 2003 letter from the BCMA, it states: "Some patients are dying due to emergency department overcrowding."

To the minister: what more did the government need? Why did they cut one in five acute care beds and throw the ERs into this crisis?

[1435]

Hon. G. Abbott: If the member wants to answer his own question, he need only look in the mirror to get the answer to that question — 3,334 acute care beds cut by the NDP government during the 1990s. That, I think, points to part of the issue.

I thought another part of the answer to the member's question came from Dr. Jack Burak of the B.C. Medical Association this morning on the Bill Good Show. "I think we have to look at the results of poor planning decisions by health care administrators in the past, for example. In the early 1990s a decision was made to reduce medical school enrolment by 10 percent. We're still seeing the effects of physician supply shortages not only in B.C. but across the country, and I think the same thing applies to nurses." That is from Dr. Jack Burak of the B.C. Medical Association.

Mr. Speaker: The member for New Westminster has a further supplemental.

C. Puchmayr: Many of us weren't in this government in the '90s, but I'll tell you.... I had children growing up in the '90s. I coached sports in the '90s. We frequented the emergency wards when incidents happened with our young children. I have never seen the emergency wards the way they are today — never.

On January 26 of '04, ER chiefs at the Fraser health region met with the former Health Minister. At that meeting the government received the following warning from ER chiefs. "It is our unanimous opinion that patients are sustaining morbidity and mortality as a result of poor access to care." The Minister of Health has denied this.

My question to the minister: are the ER chiefs alarmists? Are they making things up?

Hon. G. Abbott: We have received recently, and I'm sure we have received in the past, thoughtful and

constructive suggestions from medical personnel across the province in relation to the emergency rooms in which they work. Most recently I received the planning document from, I believe, two doctors and a nurse who work at Royal Columbian Hospital. That report contained a number of, again, very thoughtful and constructive suggestions.

The one passage which was of concern to me and of concern to my deputy was the reference to morbidity and mortality. We have been reviewing that suggestion with the Fraser Health Authority, with the Ministry of Health and with the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

We have been unable to find any indication of accelerated morbidity, mortality as a consequence of conditions in ERs. Perhaps the member knows better, and if he has evidence or data or documentation, I would be glad to receive it.

EMERGENCY SERVICES IN FRASER REGION

R. Chouhan: We know the government was warned in 2003 and 2004 about systemic problems in the Fraser Health Authority. We also know they were warned about the growing crisis at Royal Columbian Hospital on December 23, 2003. Dr. Haggard, head of the Royal Columbian ER, sent a letter to the former Minister of Health. That letter states: "We have had a very large number of documented cases where the delay in treatment actually caused harm. In some of these cases, it is our opinion that the delay was contributory to death."

Does the minister stand by his claim that there is no evidence linking overcrowding to patients dying unnecessarily in ERs?

Hon. G. Abbott: I just responded to that question, and I won't repeat the answer. I will point out, though, that in relation to hospitals around this province, we have made over the past four years an investment of over \$100 million in emergency rooms alone. We will be making, in the three years ahead, a capital investment in hospitals across this province of \$1.8 billion.

[1440]

As well, we have dramatically increased the number of health care professionals that are going to be available in this province after a decade of absolutely no increases in nursing spaces, 2,511 new nursing spaces in this province — a 62-percent increase in nurses. A doubling of the number of doctors that we're educating in this province.

If the member wants to talk about warnings, how about this one from a former Premier of this province, Premier Dan Miller, *Vancouver Sun*, December 17, 1999: "You can't deny that there were some problems this past week in emergency rooms. I don't think that constitutes a crisis. I think it constitutes a problem we've got to try to fix." That's from Premier Dan Miller in 1999.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Burnaby-Edmonds has a supplemental.

R. Chouhan: We have heard the minister ad nauseam self-congratulating about an overall increase in funding for health care. We also know the minister likes to stay in the past, but the time has come for the minister to come back to earth and face reality.

In 2004 the Fraser region ER chiefs took their concerns one step further. They wrote to all the local Liberal MLAs. In that letter, the doctors told the MLAs the problem was "as bad as ever." Perhaps some of those members, like the one from Burquitlam or Burnaby North, can share the letter after question period.

The B.C. Liberals were warned again and again that overcrowded ERs were jeopardizing patient safety. Can the Minister of Health explain why the B.C. Liberals ignored these concerns and neglected patients?

Hon. G. Abbott: Far from ignoring concerns, we actually assigned the highest priority as a government to providing quality and timely medical care to all British Columbians.

We have a very good health care system in this province, one that we can all be enormously proud of. Is there room for improvement? Yes. Absolutely, there's room for improvement. We are going to work, particularly after the successful conclusion of agreements, with the B.C. Medical Association, with the B.C. Nurses Union, with B.C.'s paramedics, with health professionals, with health care workers. We are going to work with all of those to build a better, stronger health care system for all British Columbians.

D. Thorne: We also learned today that Liberal MLAs actually met with the ER chiefs to hear their concerns. It would be interesting to hear from those MLAs after question period as to what they thought of that meeting. I bet some reporters would probably be interested in that as well.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.
Continue, member.

D. Thorne: Perhaps the member for Surrey-Tynehead would be willing to share his thoughts, when he heard doctors tell him that the crisis at that time in the Fraser Health Authority was the worst in Canada.

I know that the Minister of Health wasn't actually at the meeting, but perhaps he can explain to the rest of us why those MLAs were unable to convince their own government to take doctors' concerns seriously.

[1445]

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for her question, provocatively posed though it is.

I'm glad she asked this question, because the member for Surrey-Tynehead is remarkably proud of the commitments we have made with respect to improving the emergency room at Surrey Memorial Hospital, including the addition of a minor treatment unit, which

now sees over 40 percent of the pressure at Surrey Memorial Hospital moved through the minor treatment unit. The member is also proud of the over \$200 million commitment that we have made for the years ahead to see a tripling of the emergency room, the addition of an out-patient hospital and a massive expansion of the services at Surrey Memorial Hospital.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

The member for Coquitlam-Maillardville has a supplemental.

D. Thorne: I thank the minister for his most provocative answer.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

D. Thorne: Mr. Speaker, it looks like everybody knew there was a crisis, but nobody did anything about it. Two days ago the Minister of Health denied the existence of any evidence. He denied all the information that doctors have been giving his own government for over three years.

In January 2004 doctors told government that "the Fraser Health Authority is predicted to have a large growth in population in the next ten years, and we can't even cope with our current resources now." Despite that warning, the government has closed one in five acute care beds across this province, including a net loss of 200 beds in the Fraser region alone. Does this government really believe that fewer beds mean fewer people in need?

Hon. G. Abbott: I know precision is never the strong point of question period question-writers, and one should often expect to be taken out of context. In fact, just so we're really clear, what I have said over the past week and over the past year is that we very much welcome the thoughtful and constructive suggestions of doctors, of nurses — of all health care professionals and all health care workers — as we move forward to providing more timely and better-quality health care to British Columbians. That is something we will always try to do.

What I have corrected earlier on — and I won't repeat it here today — was that there is no data or evidence around the suggestions of mortality and morbidity increases. Again, what we are going to try to do, though, because emergency rooms are challenging places.... And let's be blunt about it. They can be very challenging places at times when there's an unexpected surge in illness or accidents.

We need to work to ensure we have the best possible flow of patients through emergency rooms. We are working on that each and every day, and I'm proud that we are working with all people in the health care system to build a stronger health care system.

AVAILABILITY OF BEDS IN HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

D. Cubberley: The minister says that he responds to thoughtful and instructive suggestions, and yet he turns a closed ear to the suggestions coming from 12 ER chiefs about a crisis in the hospital system. Those warnings have come repeatedly from this sector in this part of British Columbia. The message was clear. It was: don't cut the beds. Add beds. Put beds back. We don't have enough bed capacity for the people showing up at the ER.

To hear this House make light of how long people are waiting to get care in emergency rooms across this province is shameful. You should be ashamed of yourselves — every one of them.

[1450]

You know, I'm sure you have wonderful accomplishments, but it's time to stop bragging and boasting about things that you are not getting done and problems you are not facing. You cite the Conference Board. I'll cite the Conference Board: "lowest female patient satisfaction rate for overall health care services in Canada, lowest female patient satisfaction rate for hospital care, lowest female patient satisfaction rate for physician care, lowest male patient satisfaction rate with community case care."

There is a message there, minister. Not everything is well in the hospital sector. When are you going to acknowledge that one in five bed cuts have created a crisis in the hospital sector?

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Member.

Hon. G. Abbott: Based on the question that I've just heard, I think if anyone should be ashamed about bed cuts, it is this group over here. It's this group over here, Mr. Speaker. This is the former government. This is the former NDP government of the 1990s that undertook the mother of all bed cuts in this province — 3,334 bed cuts.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members from both sides, the Minister of Health has the floor.

Hon. G. Abbott: To hear their Alice in Wonderland rejection of their own record is pathetic at best.

To have them misrepresent my words I find offensive as well. I have never disrespectfully rejected the advice of anyone in the medical care system — be they a health care administrator, a doctor or an orderly. I am proud to hear from each and all of them. They all have something to add to making this a better health care system in British Columbia.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Saanich South has a supplemental.

D. Cubberley: Well, earlier in the same question period I heard the Minister of Health say that the NDP reductions in beds in hospitals were the reason this government cut one in five beds in hospitals. Now, that suggests to me the minister is standing on such a small piece of ground that he's going to fall right off it.

You have a crisis in the hospital sector which came about because of the cuts you made to beds. Crises demand leadership and action.

Interjection.

D. Cubberley: Well, was cutting more helpful? Did it make it better, member?

Crises demand leadership and action, and action and leadership can only occur when you acknowledge the problem you've created. When a government, a Premier and a minister are so heavily entrenched in denial, so willing and eager to avoid responsibility for their choices in the hospital sector, so eager to blame everyone else for the problems that they have created, no progress can be made in hospital emergency rooms.

Must people continue to die?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Does the member have a question?

D. Cubberley: Should hospital staff continue to endure deplorable working conditions?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members, please.

Does the member have a question? Could he pose his question.

D. Cubberley: Yes. Must British Columbians accept that access to quality care in British Columbia hospitals is deteriorating just because this government is too proud and too arrogant to admit that you have mis-managed the hospital sector?

Hon. G. Campbell: Let's all recognize in this House that we're trying to build, and build on, the fact that we have one of the best hospital and health care systems in the country. Let's listen to the messages from doctors and nurses.

The message was this: we're not training enough doctors. So this government is getting it done. We've doubled the number of doctors we're educating.

The message was this: we're not training enough nurses. So we've added 62 percent to the number of nurses we're training in British Columbia.

The message was this: in the 1990s when the previous government cut medical technologists, we had to increase the number of medical technologists. We've increased the number of medical technologists.

The message was this: we had to improve the Ambulance Service and increase their training and make sure it was happening across the province. We're im-

proving the Ambulance Service and increasing their training across the province.

[1455]

The message was this: there is no plan for equipment; there is no plan for capital plants. So what we have is a plan for equipment, and we're increasing equipment. We're increasing diagnostic procedures. We're investing in a new hospital in the Fraser Valley — \$300 million. We're investing in a new hospital in Surrey, we're investing in a new hospital in Vancouver, we're investing in new emergency wards in Kelowna, and we're investing in new emergency wards in Prince George. This government is acting, and British Columbians are benefiting.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members.

HEALTH CARE SERVICES IN FRASER REGION

B. Ralston: Perhaps we can return to the reality of this Premier's first term in office. In November 2004, Fraser Health Authority submitted a report to the Minister of Health stating that Surrey Memorial Hospital's emergency ward was "truly in a crisis situation." The government did nothing. They ignored the problem. They cut more beds at Surrey Memorial. In January 2005 the Fraser Health CEO sent out a memo stating that Surrey Memorial was short 110 beds. The government ignored the problem again. Instead of adding more beds, they fired the CEO.

When will the minister admit that his government ignored the warnings, denied the problem and actually deepened the crisis?

Hon. G. Abbott: I do thank the member for his question. I'm a little surprised it wasn't asked a year ago, but that's great. I'm glad to respond to it today, because our government is taking action on precisely the problem the member has just laid out. After a decade of neglect in what is one of British Columbia's fastest-growing areas of Surrey, we have seen huge investments in Surrey Memorial Hospital — \$28 million allocated to date to improve the emergency room and to expand services at Surrey Memorial Hospital.

Further, as I noted earlier, there's over \$200 million to move Surrey Memorial from a hospital that was built to serve 50,000 to a hospital that will serve several times that population in the future — tripling the ER, adding acute care beds and adding the biggest out-patient hospital in the province. What doesn't the member from Surrey like about that, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: The member for Surrey-Whalley has a supplemental.

B. Ralston: Well, Elayne Brenzinger was here a year ago, and that's probably the reason why I'm here now. Surrey MLAs....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

B. Ralston: Brenda Locke was here a year ago. She didn't ask the question either.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Surrey-Whalley, please take your seat.

Will the government members....

Member for Surrey-Whalley, continue.

B. Ralston: Back when other MLAs represented certain parts of Surrey, in February 2005, Baljit Bains died after being sent home from hospital because there was no bed for him. It was only after this tragedy and in the context of a looming election when the Premier began to visit Surrey for the first time in four years. The government finally took notice of the crisis in Surrey.

Apparently, the minister didn't learn from Mr. Bains's death. If he had, he wouldn't be brushing off the concerns by doctors at Royal Columbian as alarmist. How many more doctors need to sound the alarm before this government takes action?

[1500]

Hon. G. Abbott: Again, I'm surprised to hear these comments from a member who represents the Surrey region. I met yesterday with the Surrey Memorial Hospital Foundation. They are absolutely delighted by the now close to \$230 million that will be invested in Surrey Memorial Hospital by 2008-2009. They're absolutely delighted by it. Yet the member continues to cast aspersions on that principal hospital, which I think has served Surrey remarkably well.

The member raises a case which — while sad, unfortunate and in some respects tragic — was in no way a reflection on the way in which Surrey Memorial Hospital has done business and continues to do business. Surrey Memorial Hospital is served by a wonderful group of dedicated doctors, nurses, orderlies and related health professionals. They do a wonderful job, and that member should be proud of Surrey Memorial Hospital, not castigating its performance.

HEALTH CARE SERVICES IN INTERIOR B.C.

K. Conroy: Well, let's go back to the Interior Health Authority again, where hospitals were hit the hardest. The worst acute care cuts and the worst residential care cuts. Kelowna hitting code purple. Kamloops lurching from one crisis to another. Trail consistently overcapacity. Just like the Fraser region, the government ignored the warnings. According to Dr. Ralph Behrens from Fruitvale: "They have been given a lot of input, advice and warnings and have seemingly ignored them to date. Why did this government choose to ignore the desperate warnings from doctors for so long, and why did they deepen the crisis with massive bed cuts?"

Hon. G. Abbott: I'm from the interior of the province. I know well the challenges of serving a diverse range of communities across a large geographic area. It's very challenging. One of the great things about the Interior Health Authority — and I suspect the member would agree with me — is that they have been very good and very forthcoming about meeting with all members of this Legislature, regardless of what party they come from. But it's challenging. It was challenging in the 1990s as well.

I can tell the member that when I heard that my constituents in Armstrong-Spallumcheen would be losing their hospital in 1997, it was a very difficult time. When I learned in ministerial estimates for the Ministry of Health in 1999 — where the Opposition House Leader may have some remembering of this.... When we found out that Enderby and District Memorial Hospital would be closed, that was a very tough day as well.

There are not a lot of easy decisions to be made here. The Interior Health Authority and its many thousands of employees work very hard to provide the best of care to residents of the interior each and every day, and that member should be proud of it too.

[End of question period.]

Point of Order

Hon. M. de Jong: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

I know the member for Surrey-Whalley would not want to leave comments on the record that would mislead the House and his comments about the presence of the Premier in Surrey, as it stands, would so do. So I'd invite him to correct the record and withdraw the remarks.

B. Ralston: What I was referring to, Mr. Speaker, was the timetable of the Premier's visits to Surrey, beginning in January of 2005, which continued weekly. That was certainly unprecedented in his visits to Surrey. He perhaps visited occasionally, but certainly there was a noted stepping up of pace after January 2005. So if that's a misleading impression, I'll withdraw it.

K. Conroy: I seek leave to present a petition.

Mr. Speaker: Leave granted. Proceed.

Petitions

K. Conroy: I have a petition from 1,627 residents of the greater Trail area supporting the purpose of proactive Citizens Responsible for Organizing Winning Education.

[1505]

Ministerial Statements

REFERENDUM ON ELECTORAL REFORM

Hon. G. Campbell: I rise to make a ministerial statement. I rise to inform all British Columbians of an

important change with respect to the timing of the referendum on electoral reform. That referendum will give all voters in British Columbia a second opportunity to choose between two models for electing their MLA — the current first-past-the-post model, or the single transferable vote model recommended by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

As all members know, the government had announced in the throne speech of September that it intended to hold the second referendum in conjunction with the municipal election in November 2008. The timing of that referendum had been proposed to enable the newly created Electoral Boundaries Commission to complete its work and present two electoral maps, one for each voting system.

The commission's work and schedule in this regard will remain unchanged. Its mission is clear: to produce an updated electoral map for our current electoral system and to produce an alternate map that would enable all citizens to know how British Columbia's electoral boundaries would be reconfigured under STV. The intent was to put those two maps clearly before the public at the same time as they vote on their preferred electoral system.

The government still feels strongly that when British Columbians next get a chance to vote on changing their electoral system, they should have a clear sense of how it would apply in practice. The STV system envisages larger constituencies with multi-member representation. One of the lessons of the last referendum on the electoral reform is that it will be of importance for people to know how many MLAs they would be responsible for electing under STV, and how their constituencies would be configured.

The government had expected that it would be possible to get this work done and resolve voters' preferred electoral map and model in tandem with the next municipal election in 2008, such that whichever model was chosen, it would apply for the next provincial election. This was a tight time frame that left only about five months to put a chosen electoral system and map into effect for the May 12, 2009, general election.

Since that time, the Chief Electoral Officer has raised a number of concerns about the practicality and cost of this timing. The Chief Electoral Officer is concerned with regard to the adequacy of facilities, a shortage of trained voting officials and differing voter eligibility requirements for local and provincial voters lists. He estimates that the costs of conducting a referendum in conjunction with local government elections in 2008 will be between \$25 million and \$30 million. This is slightly more than the cost of administering a referendum as a stand-alone event and considerably more than administering the referendum in conjunction with the next provincial general election, which is estimated to be from \$1 million to \$2 million.

Finally, and most importantly, the Chief Electoral Officer has expressed concern about the short time between the referendum and the 2009 provincial election. This timing would require significant duplicate advanced planning and reinvestment in order to im-

plement either outcome of the referendum. Elections B.C. would also need to be prepared to implement both sets of new electoral boundaries following the report of the 2005 Electoral Boundaries Commission. As a result, the Chief Electoral Officer feels that there is a risk that preparations for the 2009 general election would be compromised, there would be confusion with voters, parties would have difficulty and candidates may have difficulty regarding appropriate voting procedures, electoral boundaries, candidate nomination procedures and financing limits.

By holding the referendum in tandem with the municipal election, the government had hoped to substantially reduce costs and to encourage a substantial turnout compared to a stand-alone election. It now appears clear that holding the referendum as either a stand-alone referendum or together with municipal elections would cost about ten times more than if it was simply held in tandem with the next provincial election. The government had wanted to be able to put a new electoral system in place, if it was so chosen by the people, in time for the next provincial election.

I recognize that this decision may disappoint some. However, the government believes it is best to heed the advice of the Chief Electoral Officer. As such, it is the government's intention to move the date of the referendum to May 12, 2009, in conjunction with the provincial general election. The new electoral map for the current system that will be produced by the Electoral Boundaries Commission will apply for that general election.

When British Columbians vote on STV on May 12, they will have before them the new electoral boundaries and representation plan that would apply. The government maintains its commitment to equal funding for active information campaigns for supporters and detractors of each model. We maintain our commitment for applying the same rules and thresholds for passing an STV system that applied during the 2005 election.

[1510]

If STV is chosen by the voters to replace the current electoral system in that referendum, it will now be implemented as scheduled for the 2013 general election.

L. Krog: Clearly, the leader of the government has listened to the Chief Electoral Officer. What is surprising is that this information has been available to the Finance Committee and therefore to the government for many months now, so the timing of this does come as a bit of a surprise.

The government should have been well aware that the increased cost, literally a doubling of costs — tens of millions of dollars — in order for the Chief Electoral Officer to prepare for the provincial election in 2009 was the result of this government's decision to put it in the form of a referendum so close to the upcoming provincial election in 2009.

However, having said that, the opposition compliments the Premier for listening. Listening is a very important thing in government. Without wishing to

sound sarcastic at all, the government now has a golden opportunity over the next three years to listen once more around a couple of areas that might actually result in the enhancement of the confidence of the people of British Columbia in our electoral system.

The Leader of the Opposition last fall — the member for Victoria–Beacon Hill — introduced the Campaign Finance Reform Act, 2005. British Columbia, if it passed similar legislation this year, would only be 28 years behind the province of Quebec, only five years beyond the time the province of Manitoba wisely chose to bring in true campaign finance reform, and only three years past the government of the federal Liberal Party that brought in true campaign finance reform.

We on this side of the House suggest to the Premier: in the next three years — only three short years — bring in true campaign finance reform. Eliminate....

Mr. Speaker: Can the member direct his comments directly to what the Premier's comments were.

L. Krog: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Also give an opportunity, I would suggest, for the people in 2009 to vote in an election in which they have confidence.

Let us also consider the Lobbyists Registration Act. Let us remove the pall that lies over this Legislature after the raid on it.

Tabling Documents

Hon. M. de Jong: I table the 2005 annual report for WorkSafe B.C. and also the 2006 to 2008 service plan for WorkSafe B.C.

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. de Jong: Committee of Supply in both chambers this afternoon. For the information of members: in this chamber, the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts; and in Section A we'll be continuing with estimates debate on the Ministry of Community Services.

[1515]

Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF TOURISM, SPORT AND THE ARTS

The House in Committee of Supply (Section B); S. Hammell in the chair.

The committee met at 3:20 p.m.

On Vote 40: ministry operations, \$200,695,000.

Hon. O. Ilich: Before I begin my introductory remarks on my ministry's 2005-2006 estimates, I'd like to acknowledge staff from my ministry joining us today. With me today are the acting deputy minister, Jim

Yardley; the assistant deputy minister for management services, Shauna Brouwer; and Linda Beltrano, also with my ministry. Other ministry representatives and those from the Crown agencies for which the ministry has responsibility will join us as appropriate.

Before discussing the detailed estimates for the ministry, I'd like to give a high-level overview of what we as a ministry are endeavouring to accomplish in the year ahead. Our province's renewed economic performance and confidence will provide a strong foundation for growth in our tourism, sport, and arts and culture sectors. By taking advantage of synergies among these sectors and developing strategies that enhance their capacity, we can reach new levels of achievement.

Our ministry is still relatively new — only 11 months old — but we are taking some significant strides towards our goal to double tourism in this province by 2015. As we look forward, it is just as important that we look to where we have come from, to celebrate the journey we have collectively shared as a province.

The year 2008 will mark the 150th anniversary since our founding as a colony. It's a time to celebrate 150 years of progress and positive change. It's a time to celebrate 150 years of hard work, vision and personal sacrifice. In every part of this province it's a time to showcase our rich arts and culture, to share our cultural diversity, to explore our cultural roots and heritage, and to come together in a renewed spirit of inclusiveness and tolerance.

Our ministry will lead our government's initiatives to bring together the resources, the community spirit and the creative energy to make this upcoming birthday an event to remember. This year's budget provides a \$1 million lift to our heritage branch to support our 2008 celebration planning activities. We will work with all of our government ministries and agencies, we will involve our first nations communities, and we'll engage our community organizations in arts, culture, heritage and sport. Together, we'll develop the celebratory activities and legacies to mark this event in a way that invites every individual to share in the excitement.

The 2008 celebrations will identify undiscovered potential and new and creative ways to showcase our province. It will also provide an opportunity to focus on the heritage resources for which my ministry has responsibility. It will serve to celebrate the Cariboo Trail and Barkerville, which played such a vital role in our province's establishment as a colony. It will provide a basis for engaging British Columbians in their own rich history and heritage. From historic Hat Creek in the Cariboo to Fort Steele in the East Kootenays, we can work to enrich the exciting rediscovery of our pioneering days and make these heritage resources an even bigger part of our tourism product.

We will also continue to ensure the protection of our archaeological heritage. We will continue to exercise our authority through the Heritage Conservation Act to protect, wherever possible, and to educate communities, developers and citizens on how to best preserve this vital cultural resource.

Our government has set as one of its key goals to dramatically improve the physical fitness of our citizens. We want to be the fittest jurisdiction in the world by 2010. One of the keys to encouraging more active lifestyles in our young people is to instil an early love for sport and physical fitness. That's one of the reasons we have been exploring innovative new partnerships to make more resources available to our amateur sport system.

Through Sport B.C., PacificSport and other province-wide sport organizations, we will dramatically expand funds available for Kidsport, sport travel assistance programs, support for coaches and coaching, and new resources to give our most competitive young athletes a winning edge. Since 1993 Kidsport has provided more than \$1.6 million to help 16,000 children in our province overcome financial barriers that would have prevented them from playing organized sport. We hope to help as many as 2,000 more children each year so that they can learn the joys of participation and fitness through sport.

Limited financial means shouldn't stand between a child and the benefits of amateur sport and fitness. Anyone who has raised a family outside of the lower mainland can tell you about the costs associated with attending tournaments and sporting events outside their home community. New resources will be available to help young athletes and their families meet the increasing costs of traveling to and attending major regional and provincial competitions.

[1525]

This is particularly important to those who live in our smaller and more remote communities and to our promising first nations athletes. We want to bridge the distance these young athletes must cover to achieve excellence and personal success, and we also want to provide additional training and support for our thousands of volunteer coaches.

There are more than 5,000 coaches currently registered with the Coaches Association of B.C., and 98 percent are volunteers. Whether a young athlete participates for fun, fitness or medals, each and every one will have their experience shaped by the men and women who coach them. Providing new financial resources to these individuals and the organizations that train and certify them will go a long way to recruiting, training and ultimately retaining them and their skills.

Our ability to move forward and implement new initiatives to enhance sport participation and competitiveness will rely on volunteers. Today our amateur sport and athletic system relies on the efforts of 140,000 volunteers. But this is just one part of our broader volunteer sector. This week is National Volunteer Week. It's an opportunity to recognize the contributions of our volunteers to our quality of life. Here in B.C. our arts, culture, heritage, health, education and social support systems rely on more than 845,000 provincial volunteers. These individuals give of their time and energy in every community, in every possible way.

The ministry budget this year includes new funding to work with the volunteer sector. We want to ensure we are able to maintain and build on this signifi-

cant contribution to our province in the years ahead. The volunteer sector is facing some significant challenges. One of these is the demographic shift to an aging population. We will work with volunteer organizations to find new and innovative approaches to attracting and retaining volunteers. That's one of the reasons we are contributing \$100,000 to Volunteer B.C. to help this provincial organization to increase its capacity and take on a greater leadership role in our volunteer sector.

We also want to develop new ways to recognize and value the contributions of our volunteers. Simply stated, there are many vital organizations and services that could not survive without the contribution of volunteers. Our province's strong volunteer sector was one of the key factors in our winning bid to host the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, and it has also been this past year, as we have hosted some very high-profile sporting events.

The FIS World Cup for cross-country skiing at Sovereign Lake, near Vernon, is just one example. It attracted an estimated worldwide TV audience of 60 million and generated nearly \$10 million of economic impact for that community. It brought out 700 volunteers, who are now experienced in hosting world-class international events.

The recent World Junior Hockey Championships in Kamloops, Kelowna and Vancouver drew international attention to these communities. They attracted 26,000 out-of-town spectators and generated \$41 million in economic activity.

When Vancouver hosted the Grey Cup, more than 100,000 fans and participants joined a week-long celebration that pulled in \$40 million to Vancouver.

Our government has been proud to provide financial support to these and other sport-hosting events. Our demonstrated success attracts even greater interest in the very competitive sport-hosting sector. We've increased our funding for sport-hosting activities this year and in coming years leading up to the 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympics.

Planning for these events is already underway, but we are developing new strategies and tools to help our communities and our sport facilities attract even more events leading up to 2010 and beyond. I'm talking about the FIFA World Youth Soccer Championship in Vancouver and Victoria in 2007, the North American Indigenous Games in Cowichan in 2008 and the World Police and Fire Games in Burnaby in 2009.

I mentioned that the business of attracting high-profile international sporting events is a very competitive one, and it will require innovative and creative approaches. We are committed to providing this kind of support to our communities and sports organizations.

The *B.C. Sport Event Hosting and Resort Guide* is a new on-line tool that catalogues B.C. sports facilities and resorts. It provides extensive information about the capacity and features of facilities, resorts and communities, as well as key contacts at each. The response from the international sport decision-makers about the

usefulness of the new tool was overwhelmingly positive. We will continue to help communities, and this will help choose them for hosting international sporting events. The investment in this new on-line promotional tool was cost-shared with Tourism B.C., 2010 Legacies Now and my ministry.

[1530]

Earlier this month a group of 150 leaders in our arts and culture sector gathered for a summit in Vancouver. I asked the assembled leaders to help my ministry develop a road map for the future that would better sustain our arts and culture sector. I'd also asked them to propose some priorities for building the kind of creative communities that will help attract and retain the bright, creative individuals who will drive our economy in the future. Their feedback and more discussion in the future will help to flesh out our strategy.

I share with them the strong conviction that arts and culture are activities that not only enrich our lives and reflect our society but generate significant economic value. This sector contributes more than \$5 billion to our economy each and every year. It employs more than 78,000 people, and it's a growing sector.

The film and television sector alone last year contributed \$1.2 billion to our provincial economy, and I want to point out that this represented a 50-percent increase over the previous year. Much of this increase is attributable to the critical mass of talent and expertise that has developed in Vancouver and throughout the province and to the tremendous job that has been done by the B.C. Film Commission. They've done a fantastic job marketing our diverse locations. It's also attributable to government's continued support of the sector through highly competitive film tax credits.

When we talk about gateways, we too often think about them as physical structures and infrastructure. Improved and expanded ports, airports and road networks will substantially increase our ability to attract even greater numbers of visitors. It will make it easier to move them freely to all parts of the province and country. Equally important are the cultural gateways that serve to attract and welcome visitors and new investment. Cultural attractions and a service orientation will provide quality experiences that keep visitors coming back year after year. A renewed focus on training and development in our hospitality industry will help us fill the 84,000 new tourism jobs that are expected to come available in the next ten years.

This year we'll be providing funding to continue improving our network of Gateway tourism centres with construction of the Peace Arch and Merritt centres. B.C. serves as the Pacific gateway to Canada, and in the coming years we will be challenged to provide the type of visitor experience that will appeal to the growing Asia-Pacific tourism market. This means drawing on the cultural history we share with the Asia-Pacific, strengthening our ties and our understanding.

In 2004 Greater Vancouver welcomed 71,000 visitors from China. With approved destination status just on the horizon with this vast market, we can expect to see a dramatic increase in coming years. The prospect

of 500,000 Chinese visitors per year by 2015 requires that we make changes and strategic investments today. With the tourism industry, we will develop specific strategies that will enable us to capture and derive tremendous benefits from this emerging new market.

We know that visitors to our province are looking to enrich their experience, to share in the wealth of arts, culture and history that we have to offer. We want to make full use of our competitive advantages in cultural tourism, ecotourism, agritourism, aboriginal tourism and resort tourism. We therefore recently announced a provincial contribution of \$5 million towards the cooperative planning process to create a cultural precinct in downtown Vancouver. The planning will advance our goals to establish a new provincial Asia-Pacific museum of trade and culture and a new national gallery of aboriginal art, and we will further develop plans for a world women's history museum.

British Columbians travelling within our province currently represent more than 50 percent of our nearly \$10-billion-per-year tourism industry. Growing a market we already know well — those British Columbians travelling within our market — makes sense. This year we will direct more resources to build innovative market campaigns to encourage more British Columbians to see more of B.C., both summer and winter. An increase in this domestic market of only 5 percent would represent a \$250-million increase in our tourism sector.

The dramatic growth of B.C.'s resort sector has been an incredible success story in recent years. Today nearly \$2 billion is spent each year by resort tourists — about 20 percent of total tourism expenditures. This is projected to keep growing as resorts expand from single-season to all-season use and new resort destinations and products come on line. There is currently some \$4.5 billion in potential investment under review for major resort projects, with an additional \$2 billion investment in the pre-approval phase of development, and our existing alpine ski resorts are projecting an additional \$1 billion in new capital investment over the next two to five years.

[1535]

This is a significant sector that is key to delivering substantial revenue growth and employment to some of our most economically challenged communities. But resort development growth faces some significant and complex challenges. These include conflicts over land use, environmental activism, first nations consultation and negotiation, and competition for natural resource access. All of these factors impact an orderly development process and timely decision-making by various levels of government.

There is enormous financial capital tied up in these long-term investments, and the potential economic benefits to communities in our provincial tourism sector are substantial. We are committed to developing new approaches to help guide and support sustainable development for this sector and new processes to encourage timely review and input from various levels of government. At the same time, we'll help shorten the review and approval process.

Review harmonization is another streamlining objective we are actively piloting with communities. So, too, is establishing new and innovative measures to ensure first nations issues are addressed and to provide new mechanisms to facilitate economic participation by first nations.

Increased certainty for proponents and investors is essential if we hope to continue to attract new investments so vital to our economic growth. We are committed to providing the resources necessary to continue to improve our administrative processes. At the same time, we want to do this in a way that continues to protect and responsibly manage our natural resources.

British Columbians enjoy an unparalleled access to nature. There are more than 1,200 forest recreation sites and 600 recreation trails located in all parts of the province under the management of the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts. The Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts has set a course for the future that will build on our strengths and draw on our potential and promise.

As we move forward, we want to use all of our resources strategically and efficiently. We want to organize ourselves in a manner that will best accommodate and support the activities of the many partners that we have in these sectors, and we want to continually focus on improving our own practices to ensure they deliver the best value for the taxpayer resources with which we have been entrusted. We have every reason to move forward with confidence, with optimism and with renewed vigour and sense of purpose.

N. Simons: To the minister: I think you've answered all my questions generally, but I'm going to go down to some specifics.

Interjections.

N. Simons: No, this isn't a bill.

I appreciate her presence here, and it's kind of nice that we're actually being able to talk about these important issues during B.C. Arts and Culture Week and B.C. Book and Magazine Week. It just seems like a nice coincidence. I'll be canvassing this very broad-ranging ministry in sections, starting with tourism and sport development.

I know that in recent weeks and months there have been some concerns about the challenges facing the tourism industry in terms of the number of visitors that will be attracted to B.C. — not because we don't have the natural assets but because of other issues such as high gas prices, the strong Canadian dollar and the recent tragic sinking of the *Queen of the North*. What's the minister's response to the suggestion that the tourism industry is facing challenges like no other that it has seen in the past, and what might the minister be doing to address these problems?

[1540]

Hon. O. Ilich: I think that we do recognize that there are some challenges facing the industry at the

moment that have been brought about by external forces such as the strong Canadian dollar vis-à-vis the American dollar, high gasoline prices at the moment, some of the other things that are limiting people from travelling, as well as the border initiative. We're working on all of those fronts with our tourism operators and with our tourism agencies such as Tourism Vancouver and Tourism British Columbia.

Some of the things that we're looking at and that we're working hard on are potential improvements to the 1995 Canada-U.S. Open Skies agreement to provide American airlines and tourists with greater access to Canada. We are looking at improving our product positioning that protects the uniqueness and freshness of our tourism products, and we're dealing with Aboriginal Tourism on that.

Making sure that our products are compatible with changing traveller demographics and preferences. For instance, we're taking a look, more, at helping people develop products that appeal to our changing demographics — such as spas — that some of our older and, perhaps, well-off clientele would like. We are looking at strategies to target the 2.16 million California residents who have been identified as ideal tourists but who have never visited B.C. We are continuing to work on the approved destination status with China which, obviously, will open up a whole new market for us.

N. Simons: In the operating budget, tourism and resort development has seen another increase over what was originally projected to be \$9.3 million in 2006-2007, to what is now projected to be \$13.6 million in this fiscal year. Can the minister explain — and this is just part of the vetting process that allows us to understand fully what the plans are in the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts — what can account for this particular increase?

Hon. O. Ilich: The increase in the budget, obviously, is due to the fact that when we were first here, last time, we were a completely new ministry, and now we have some bigger plans to do things. The \$13.6 million is due to a \$1.5 million increase in resort development, a \$1.3 million pro-rated transfer from Land and Water B.C., \$1 million for recreation sites and trails, \$1 million for advertising and \$800,000 for tourism hosting.

N. Simons: In this year's plan, it appears that the \$1 million for advertising is in comparison to nothing in the last year. Why is the tourism and resort development being allocated a million dollars for advertising this year?

[1545]

Hon. O. Ilich: That, actually, is some money that we've asked for in the budget to promote British Columbians travelling within British Columbia. That is in recognition of the challenges that the member opposite talked about earlier. We are going to try and promote people moving around the province a little bit more and seeing their own province.

N. Simons: This is the section of the budget of the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts that seems to have seen the most dramatic increase. I'm just wondering: why isn't the funding for advertising being channelled through Tourism B.C.?

Hon. O. Ilich: The \$1 million for the domestic campaign for advertising is because Tourism British Columbia focuses mostly on international campaigns. So we are going to be working closely with them, and we have increased their investment last year, as you may remember. In fact, we doubled the amount of money that we were devoting to Tourism British Columbia last year, but they had plans for that money, and they were doing mostly international marketing. We felt that if we added some money to that we could do some domestic campaigns.

One of the campaigns, quite frankly, that we're looking at, at the moment, is doing something to help with what has happened in the north coast with *Queen of the North*, so we wanted some money for a domestic campaign.

N. Simons: Presumably, the \$1 million funding was allocated prior to the sinking of the *Queen of the North*. Has any particular sector in the tourism industry lost funding because of the reallocation of funding toward that area?

Hon. O. Ilich: No. Nobody has lost any funding because of the reallocation.

N. Simons: Can the minister describe what specifically — and with what measurements of success — that \$1 million spending will result in to the ministry? What is anticipated in terms of programs for the \$1 million? How will that be measured in terms of whether it is successful or not?

Hon. O. Ilich: The program is still under development. It's \$500,000 for a winter campaign and \$500,000 for a summer campaign. We're still working on what we're going to be doing with that, so it's still a work in progress.

N. Simons: Can the minister outline or discuss the status of the tourism charter that was mentioned in last year's service plan? What progress has been made on that charter to date?

[1550]

Hon. O. Ilich: As with many of the things that we have in the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts, we have a lot of things that are still under development, and we're working on them. The charter is going to consist of two parts. One of them is a statement of the government's commitment to improve the foundations on which tourism is based. The other is the operational plan identifying ministry responsibilities and impediments and opportunities for ministries to work on, including a mechanism for annual assessment of progress. We are working on that. We're expecting that that will be finished later this year.

As the member opposite understands, tourism is influenced by many ministries in government that do not have specific responsibility for tourism. We're trying to identify those cross-ministry to make sure that we have buy-in from the whole of government, as well as other levels of government — such as municipalities — and businesses. We are still working on that.

N. Simons: Could the minister also describe the status and progress of the sustainable tourism summit mentioned in the 2005 service plan?

Hon. O. Ilich: We decided that the money for that summit could be better spent on other things. We decided that the tourism industries themselves, the tourism businesses themselves, were well organized, and they had a forum for dialoguing with government. We were not as fully committed into the planning of a tourism summit as we had been for the arts summit, which the member opposite attended. We have figured out some other ways that we can dialogue with tourism industries, and we're not going to be having a tourism summit this year.

N. Simons: In the 2005 service plan there is a performance target set for the percentage of commercial recreation land tenures processed within 140 days in 2005 and 2006. I'm wondering if those targets have been realized.

Hon. O. Ilich: The target was that 90 percent would be met within 140 days, and we are slightly under the target.

N. Simons: I'm curious to know whether or not the inability to meet that target has influenced the decision not to include it in this year's service plan.

[1555]

Hon. O. Ilich: It's not in this year's service plan, but we're still intending to meet that target.

N. Simons: Not to just shift gears but to speak a little bit more specifically about particular areas and the coastal tourism industry in particular. Has the ministry designed or developed any plans to address the hardship that will be experienced by tourism operators on the coast of British Columbia that are affected not only by the sinking of the *Queen of the North* but also by the massive increase in the cost of ferry travel?

I wonder if the minister might be able to explain.

Hon. O. Ilich: Obviously, the sinking of the ferry is a relatively recent event. We have been talking to tourism operators there to see what we could be doing to help. I have had several conversations with people there. We are participating with COTA, the Council of Tourism Associations, in an impact study that they are going to be doing to see what the long-term impact of this is.

We also recognize that that area is obviously going to have a greater impact because of the sinking of the ferry than even the rest of the province has at the moment, because of those challenges we talked about earlier. So we are looking across ministry — across this ministry and with other ministries — at the moment to see what we can do to come up with a plan to deliver to that area.

G. Coons: Thank you, minister and staff, for being here.

Being the MLA for North Coast and the last couple of weeks traveling through the central coast and Haida Gwaii and being based in Prince Rupert.... It's a major concern, what's happened. When we have half the number of trips on the Prince Rupert to Queen Charlotte run happening, and we have a 60-percent reduction of core services on the Port Hardy to Prince Rupert run, along with a ferry that will bring half the number of tourists, it's devastating not only to my riding but — as you know and you've heard — through the whole circle route right through from Prince George, Williams Lake and all through the ridings up there.

I came here, hopefully, looking for something — either an aid package, some initiative or some strategies that we could discuss and bring back to the constituents. On Massett, the mayor talked about the island's blossoming tourism industry being set back ten years. The economy of the northwest may be at the bottom of Hecate Strait along with the *Queen of the North*. We're talking millions and millions of dollars, and that's from northern British Columbia tourism. I think it's time to get some action together.

[1600]

A B.C. Ferry spokesperson indicated on April 20 that as far as B.C. Ferries is concerned, it's too early to push the panic button. I disagree, and I disagree with the minister. They're looking at long-term impacts, and I think it's imperative that we look at the short-term impacts, especially this summer coming up. I would hope that the minister and other ministries do push the panic button, contrary to how B.C. Ferries is feeling.

The B.C. and Yukon Hotels Association talks about the devastating consequences for tourism. They voted unanimously in favour of demanding that all levels of government cooperate immediately and that the provincial government demonstrate leadership in addressing this crisis. My question to the minister is: in your searching out of initiatives and strategies — and what are they? — are you seeking out other governments to help out in this?

Hon. O. Ilich: Yes, as a matter of fact, we are. We do know that this is an issue, that it's a crisis for the people there. We have been talking to them. We have been talking to COTA. I have been talking to other ministries, and we have kept in touch with B.C. Ferries as well. What we're trying to do right now is finalize the plans. You'll probably see something coming out shortly from our ministries to help out. But I can't

really tell you much more than that at the moment, because we haven't finalized all the plans yet.

G. Coons: I appreciate that. But again, when we start looking at the smaller communities on Haida Gwaii—Queen Charlottes and in Prince Rupert, and we look at the bus tour cancellations, the \$7,000 or \$8,000 kayak ecotourism cancellations, the hotels, restaurants, right down to the summer jobs for students all through the region, I hope that initiatives are put forth to help the region in all those aspects.

As far as the \$1 million, the domestic campaign, the minister indicated some of that was going to go to the northern challenge. I'm just wondering if the minister can pinpoint how much their ministry may be putting towards the northern challenge, and specifically to the tourist associations in the communities, versus going to the whole northern B.C. tourism.

Hon. O. Ilich: We do take this very seriously. We are taking action on that. The money that we're looking at is going to be in addition to the \$1 million. A portion of it will come from that \$1 million, but we are talking to other ministries and other governments to see what can be done there to help.

Part of the issue, obviously, is that when you start talking to a number of people to ask what it is that you can do, you get a number of different answers. It is still a very recent event. We are trying to see what we can do and what would be the most effective and efficient thing to do to help people there. We are taking this very seriously. We're very concerned, and we are working very diligently to come up with something that will help.

N. Simons: I thank the minister for the answer. I wonder if it would be appropriate to have a working group set up, an interministerial one, to address not just the tourism concerns but also the economic concerns of the communities. I know that the member for North Island is very concerned about the impact on Port Hardy. I know that the north coast and my riding of Powell River—Sunshine Coast all feel the effects of what happens in the ferry system.

[1605]

Has anything formal been established in the ministry or in government to address this specific concern?

Hon. O. Ilich: We've had conversations on this with other ministers and staff in other ministries probably on a daily basis. We were talking about this about ten minutes before we walked in here for estimates, so we're well advanced on a plan. We are going to be announcing something shortly, and we are continuing to deal with people there.

I do want to assure the members opposite that we are taking this very seriously, and we are working very hard on something that will help the people there. There are a number of people that, of course, have different ideas, and as I said a few minutes ago, we want

to make sure that what we do is the most effective way of helping.

N. Simons: I respect that the minister is taking this very seriously. I had no doubt. I was simply hoping that I would have a clearer picture, and I do. I thank the minister for that answer.

My next question has to do with the competing interests in some areas of our province between the wishes of tourism operators and tourism industry and the other land base industries such as the forest industry and the mining industry. I'm wondering: is there any formal approach to dealing with these conflicts of land use that seem to perpetually pop up? I'm speaking specifically about, for example, mining in the Sechelt Inlet and the many concerns from tourism operators but respecting the fact that we need other industries to sustain our economy. How does the minister reconcile those conflicts from the government's perspective?

Hon. O. Ilich: We recognize that there are often conflicting uses. I think I talked about that in my opening comments. One of the tools we're using is the land use planning process, and we're trying to make sure that we can resolve many of these conflicts ahead of time.

When they do erupt, we go into a process of consultation with the interested parties and with other stakeholders as may be required, to try and resolve them. What we are paying a lot more attention to is the land use planning process.

I also think that the tourism charter that we previously talked about is going to be addressing some of those issues.

N. Simons: Clearly, the land use planning process is going to contribute to some certainty not just for tourism operators and residents but for the industries that we rely on. I thank the minister for that answer.

[1610]

In mid-November the B.C. Wilderness Tourism Association commented to the minister in a letter that they were concerned about resource tenures. I'll quote specifically. It had to do with "the termination relationship to other resource tenures and compensation for takings."

I'm wondering. The Wilderness Tourism Association says that "these are fundamental business issues that stand in the way of achieving the government's challenge to double tourism over the next ten years." I'm just specifically asking if the minister could answer what the government's response has been to date regarding these issues raised by the Wilderness Tourism Association.

Hon. O. Ilich: We do recognize the importance of access to Crown land for tourism businesses, including the resort sector, and the need to have realistic and fair tenure provisions to facilitate financing, increased investment and, also, long-term commercial viability for

the people that are involved in the tourism sector. Ninety-four percent of B.C. is still public land, and we have hundreds of back-country, nature-based tourism businesses depending on legal tenures to carry on their businesses.

What I can tell you is that we have, along with the Attorney General Ministry, already addressed four major industry issues. One was increasing the standard tenure terms from ten to 30, 50 or 60 years to facilitate financing of assets such as buildings, etc. We've implemented a clearer, fairer and more transparent process for government to exercise its right to change tenure management plans. We've changed to a system where rental payments are based on actual client day use rather than projected use. That's helped them a bit. We've increased tourism business compliance with the Land Act from 40 percent to over 75 percent as a result of the commercial recreation tenure incentive program and through proactive compliance enforcement activities.

We are working with tourism operators. We understand that there are often conflicting tenure uses and demands. What we're always striving for is balance and fairness in the system so that people continue to be able to operate their businesses. We have to be balanced and fair about how we go about dealing with people and with their businesses.

N. Simons: Has the ministry developed an adventure tourism tenure security working group, as was requested by the Wilderness Tourism Association, or any similar working group?

Hon. O. Ilich: In answer to the member's question, yes, we have, in fact, set up that working group.

N. Simons: Can the minister tell the House who that group is made up of? Excuse the grammar.

[1615]

Hon. O. Ilich: I can tell you the members of that committee are Evan Loveless, Jim DeHart, Brian Gunn and Dave Butler — they're from industry; from our ministry, Linda Beltrano; from the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, Ward Trotter; Dave Bacon from the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts; and two people from Parks, Ken Morrison and Karen MacDowell.

N. Simons: I appreciate that.

If I may move on to all-season resorts. You don't need a line change, as they say in hockey parlance? Very good.

Interjection.

N. Simons: You did? I'm the sport critic so...

The 2005 service plan update notes that the ministry will be developing an integrated resort approval process to harmonize provincial and local regulation review processes. What work has been done to date on the integrated resort approval process?

[1620]

Hon. O. Ilich: This is a process that was started a number of years ago, so we've done a number of projects already. One was a couple of publications. We've published *Best Practices Guide for Resort Development in British Columbia*. We've published a report called *Transitions: Planning, Servicing, and Local Governments in B.C.'s Resort Communities*.

What we're trying to do is harmonize the processes. Once we've had the lengthy process that we talked about yesterday on our approval process, what normally happens now is we send people off to go and talk to regional districts or municipalities. We're trying to bring in those people much earlier — first nations, as well — so that we have a much more comprehensive discussion and workplan at a much earlier stage. We harmonize our processes by not doing our process and then sending them off to another level of government. So that's one of the things that we're doing.

I can tell you that we continue to work with local governments and resort developers to come up with ideas to make the process a little simpler for people to get through, because we do believe that our process is too long. When we're taking a look at investment of the kind that the resort industry is capable of delivering, then we want to make sure that we're capable of giving answers in a timely manner.

[J. Yap in the chair.]

N. Simons: Can the minister tell the House when this process is likely to be completed?

Hon. O. Ilich: The process is complete. It has been signed off by the UBCM. We are implementing it with the Juliet Creek proposal.

N. Simons: For the benefit of those who've joined us in the gallery, I'm asking the Minister of Tourism, Sport and the Arts questions about the plan for the upcoming budget, the budget that's in place. My question has to do with resort development and whether or not one of the performance measures in tourism and resort development was to have these resorts' revenues reach a total of \$4.2 million in 2005-2006. I'm just wondering. We've just finished that year. Did we reach that goal?

Hon. O. Ilich: We actually achieved \$3.55 million.

[1625]

N. Simons: Has there been any explanation as to why the goal wasn't reached?

Hon. O. Ilich: I'm advised that we fell a little bit short because of two sales that did not complete. We can provide you with those details if you would like — at a future time.

N. Simons: Thank you to the minister for that offer. I'd be happy to see that, just to familiarize myself specifically with this particular issue.

Similarly, another performance measure in this area was for commercial recreational revenues to government to reach \$1.8 million in 2005-2006. Can the minister indicate whether this goal has been reached?

Hon. O. Ilich: The actual came in at \$1.99 million — so a little bit over.

N. Simons: More good news. That's good to hear. I'm refraining from making comments that are inappropriate considering the age of the gallery.

It seems that new targets have not been set in the new service plan. I'm just wondering if there's any explanation that the minister can offer for this absence.

Hon. O. Ilich: What we did was change the measures. We changed them to more effectively capture progress on outcomes.

What we previously had was all-season resorts revenues to government and the economic impact of international events and games. We changed that to a dollar amount of new capital investment and the ratio of incremental tax revenues to investment for major sport events. Both of those were changed.

Measures that stayed the same were the completion of resort development agreements, and two other ones — one that related to adult physical activity, and the proportion of nationally carded athletes training in the province. Those measures were kept and will be important gauges of progress for the ministry in the coming years. What we did was we went to measures that we thought would be more accurately reflective of what we were, in fact, doing.

[1630]

That does not mean to say that we are not continuing to track those other measures. They are still important measures, but we put in the service plan this year measures that were thought to be better measures.

N. Simons: To me it would seem somewhat strange to change the performance measures on a year-to-year basis because, really, what we're trying to do is to evaluate over that time. But if those measures are being recorded and documented and used for planning, but not in the service plan, I suppose that's another way of doing things. It just doesn't seem as out there, as clear to the community.

There's been another performance measure in the tourism area. That's the percentage of surveyed customers who are satisfied with all-season resort and commercial recreation services. The goal for 2005-2006 was to establish a baseline, and that's a good plan. But there's no mention of this performance measure in the latest service plan. I wonder if the minister can explain if this has been established.

Hon. O. Ilich: As the member opposite can appreciate, with a new ministry we took a look first, at the beginning, at what we were doing, and then we decided that maybe we should take a look at other things to see what we could be improving on and how we

would measure that. So some measures were dropped, and some new measures were selected.

The guidelines for the ministry service plans also require that ministries have no more than 12 performance measures in their plan, so the ministry revised its measures to adhere to those new guidelines. The result is a more focused set of measures. There were 16 measures in the old service plan, and there are 11 measures in the new service plan. The new measures are more consistent with our goals and objectives.

I think it reflects the reality of constantly changing — well, not constantly changing.... We are still a new ministry, and we're constantly looking at how we can increase efficiencies and fulfil the goals and objectives that we have for the ministry.

N. Simons: Just to clarify: 12 performance measures per sector? Per strategy? Can the minister just enlighten me, please?

Hon. O. Ilich: The guidelines for the ministry service plans that are required of all ministries ask that we have no more than 12 performance measures. That was in an attempt to focus the ministries on things that were important to the ministry.

N. Simons: That brings me to the question I was going to have about aboriginal tourism strategy, where there are absolutely no performance measures. I'm sure that it's a question of priority. But in this particular ministry there are so many programs and strategies that I wonder if that arbitrary number of performance measures is more for the purposes of simplicity. It casts into doubt the reliability or the usefulness of performance measures, if they're limited to a certain number when, in fact, the issue is quite complicated.

This March the government gave \$150 million to the Aboriginal Tourism British Columbia Association to start implementing its blueprint strategy. The money is to be spent on "coordinating media familiarization tours, publishing a cultural experience guide, updating tourism training guides and expanding the aboriginal tourism website." While the latest service plan mentions plans that the ministry has regarding aboriginal tourism, there are no performance measures directly related to it, despite the fact that there are numerous goals from the blueprint strategy that could be adopted — for example, increasing the number of market-ready aboriginal cultural tourism products.

If it's simply to do with the fact that the ministry had already reached its 12 measurable outcomes or performance targets, why has the ministry not included any specific performance measures in the very important sector of aboriginal cultural tourism in this new service plan?

[1635]

Hon. O. Ilich: Well, we agree that aboriginal tourism is very important to our province, and that is why we did give the council of aboriginal tourism \$150,000. They had completed an aboriginal cultural tourism

blueprint strategy, and they also wanted some funding to further develop that, which we gave them. We're going to be working closely with them in the future.

The aboriginal tourism council provides guidance and support to the aboriginal tourism businesses as they work to become market-ready, and the \$150,000 really was to develop the further strategy. They will probably have some measurables within what they produce. It won't be part of our service plan and will never be intended to be part of our service plan.

N. Simons: If I mistakenly made it seem like the ministry had given \$150 million to develop a strategy, I apologize for that. That did sound rather generous.

If I may move on to the issue of passports. I know it's an issue that the minister has taken very seriously, and I know that's very much appreciated in the tourism industry. I've heard that said to me on numerous occasions. The B.C. government made a submission to the Department of Homeland Security with regards to the proposed western hemisphere travel initiative, which would require American and Canadian citizens to show passports or other forms of secure documentation in order to enter or return to the U.S. In January of this year, the United States government announced that instead of requiring passports, it will issue Americans cheaper travel ID cards for crossing the U.S.-Canada border.

In response to this move, the minister was quoted as saying that she was encouraged by the fact that it's not going to be onerous or expensive for Americans to come here. However, tourism and cross-border business coalitions have stated that they will remain concerned about the impact even these revised ID requirements are likely to have. COTA has said more needs to be done for low-risk travellers travelling by air and by water-based modes of transport. A bilateral business coalition — which is the Borders for Economic Security, Trade and Tourism — has said the plan still has grave implications for commerce, and Tourism Vancouver has echoed that.

My question to the minister is: what steps will the minister take to continue to encourage and lobby the appropriate governments to reconsider or find imaginative solutions to this potentially serious problem?

Hon. O. Ilich: We recognize the importance of the passport issue to our tourism businesses. We continue to lobby our federal representatives. I think our lobbying, along with other people that are concerned about it in other provinces, has been effective in at least raising the level of conversation. It was part of the conversation that Prime Minister Harper had with President Bush. So we have been, I think, successful in bringing it to the attention of the federal authorities.

[1640]

I think that it was made quite clear that the U.S. is not going to back off, and that they are concerned about their security. What we are doing.... Again, this is part of why we want to spend some extra money on promoting internal travel within British Columbia.

We're concerned, obviously, about that situation, and we continue to write to them and press upon them what the possible pitfalls would be of every scheme they come up with, but we do know that they're not going to back off from the requirement to have passports.

Just this morning I saw in the newspaper — and this is obviously where I got this information this morning — that state legislators in the border states were concerned and were lobbying. They're probably the most effective at lobbying their own country. We are concerned about that — more than concerned. We're continuing to lobby. We're speaking to COTA and others as to what we can do to make sure it's not as big an impact. Advertising is one of them. Informing people in the United States who might want to travel here is one of them. The initiative on air travel, again, is one of them. It is something that is very important.

We continue to work with industry. We continue to lobby. We have been, as I said a few minutes ago, relatively successful in raising the level of the conversation and the awareness on that.

N. Simons: I appreciate that answer.

I guess it would be difficult for us to promote Canadians getting passports, and if the other country did the same.... We do want to encourage travel within our country, and there's that conflict as well. I'm sure that the ministry is looking for imaginative solutions that will encourage at least the border states and some — especially this province — to get passports if that ends up being what we have to do.

My next set of questions has to do with sport. Maybe this is the time the minister wants to do a line change — but possibly not. If so, I'll give the minister a few moments.

Under the sport section, last year's service plan lists as a performance measure that in 2005-2006: "The economic impact of hosting major sporting events...exceeds the provincial investment." The service plan also states that a reporting model for this measure was to be developed.

However, in this year's service plan there's a new measure. This measure has to do with the degree to which government investments in major sport and cultural events are leveraged by the private sector. Could this be another example of the ministry changing its performance measures and adopting new ones, making it more difficult to track success or failure of the particular goal of the ministry?

Specifically, why has the government dropped the previous measures?

[1645]

Hon. O. Ilich: You're absolutely right. We've had a line change back here on the team. I just want to introduce Charles Parkinson and John Mills from our sport branch.

In answer to the question: when we first started out, we had a measure that just indicated that we wanted to bring in more money than we put out on

sport events, but that was before we had very good economic impact data.

Now what we've done is sharpened up that measure and the targets to be a bit more aggressive, so we're saying that for every dollar invested, we want to get three or even four back. That's one of the reasons why the measures were changed: because we have better data, better information, and we want to be making sure that we're investing money appropriately where it gets the biggest bang for our buck.

N. Simons: Presumably, on a year-to-year basis, the priorities and the strategies of government will change slightly. Consequently, one would expect that the performance measures may change as well. Is there any intention of sticking to particular performance measures from one year to the next so that the general public will be able to assess the success or failure of particular programs?

Hon. O. Ilich: I think the answer to the question is — and I go back to explaining again, and I know that the member opposite knows this — that the ministry is still under construction. As we look at these measures we say: "Well, are we actually measuring the right thing, could we be doing this a little bit differently, and could we be doing this a little bit better?"

Those are the things that we are constantly trying to improve on. Sport hosting obviously is something that we have been very interested in. I talked about that in my speech. Some of the events that we've been a part of have generated significant economic benefit for the community in terms of dollars that we've invested in return, and as we do more of these, I think we want to be able to refine that measure so that we are, in fact, getting the best bang for our buck.

N. Simons: I don't believe that the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts is in any different kind of position than other ministries, which are probably changing some performance measures as well. I believe that's really part of government: to adapt to the changes in priorities. I don't see that inherently as a problem in and of itself. Thank you for the answer.

I'm just wondering, specifically, if the government was successful in its goal to have the economic impact of hosting sporting events exceed the provincial investment in 2005-2006?

[1650]

Hon. O. Ilich: I can tell the member that we generated over \$100 million worth of economic activity from an investment of about \$3.5 million last year. For instance, the 2001 world curling championships leveraged a \$250,000 provincial investment into a million dollars in provincial revenue. Those are the kinds of things that we're going to continue to be supporting.

N. Simons: I'm informed that we don't have a lot of time to cover a lot of very important subject areas. I'm just wondering if, at this point, I can.... Another line change, but I'm thinking I'd like to turn to the issue of

volunteers and the area of volunteerism. I know that the minister has announced \$100,000 to Volunteer B.C. to help it increase its capacity and "to take on a greater leadership role in B.C.'s volunteer sector." What specifically is expected from the ministry as some sort of measurable outcome in terms of that \$100,000?

Hon. O. Ilich: The \$100,000 that we gave to Volunteer B.C. went out just recently, and we provided that to them to assist in building the organizational capacity necessary for provincial leadership in the sector. One of the things that they're going to be doing is hosting a round-table discussion with key leaders throughout the sector on four key areas: recognition, sector capacity, engagement, and education and training. We can forward you a copy of the report that they're going to produce, if you want.

We've also provided resources to Volunteer Vancouver for their annual awards, because we think it's important that volunteers be recognized for their contributions. We've been meeting with a number of volunteer organizations, such as Volunteer Now, Volunteer Vancouver, Volunteer B.C. and the Centre for Non-Profit Management.

As the member opposite knows, there are approximately 20,000 not-for-profit and voluntary organizations in B.C., and there are almost a million volunteers that contribute almost 114 million hours of volunteer time. This is, as the member knows — because I think you talked about it in the House yesterday — the equivalent of about 72,000 jobs. There's lots of work that needs to be done, and we're still at the beginning stages of some of that.

N. Simons: Thank you for the answer. I suppose that this is not an area where there is a performance measure for volunteerism. Correct me if I'm wrong. The question, specifically, is: has there been a performance measure established in the volunteer sector?

[1655]

Hon. O. Ilich: Not yet. We are still working on what we're going to be doing with that sector and are talking to people about that.

N. Simons: Is that because the limit on performance measures is at 12 in this particular case?

Hon. O. Ilich: We're still in the beginning stages of working with this group. We know that nationally the trend is for decreasing volunteerism. I think, firstly, our simple measure is to increase volunteerism rather than watch it decline. Volunteers, as we both know, are very important. We're still just working with people that are involved in the sector to develop measures and targets, but we're not quite sure what those might be.

N. Simons: This is a question about another area under the purview of the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts, and that is forest recreation sites. I just have a couple questions on that. I'm hoping that doesn't cause any consternation on the part of her team.

In the previous estimates debate the minister said that she would be looking for additional ways to enhance forest recreation sites because she recognized how important they are to British Columbia. How much additional funding has the minister been able to secure for these sites?

Hon. O. Ilich: Our budget last year was \$4,349,000 for operating. This year it's \$5,370,000, so it's gone up a million. In addition to that, there's an extra \$1.35 million for capital improvements.

N. Simons: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Moving right along. The area of arts, culture and heritage will be the next area that I'd like to focus on.

We don't have an intermission. We could have a little league game on the floor here.

In last year's estimates the minister indicated that she would be asking for more money for the B.C. Arts Council in the next spring's budget. In 2005 the Arts Council received an additional \$3 million in funding, as well as in the 2006-2007 budget. However, arts groups say that to catch up to levels of funding similar to the other provinces, the funding should be increased to a total of at least \$30 million a year.

[1700]

Can the minister comment on the discrepancy that exists between the throne speech, when arts and culture were described as building blocks of innovation, invention and understanding, and the fact there was only a \$3 million increase in the funding for arts, culture and heritage?

Hon. O. Ilich: The funding for the Arts Council is at \$13.95 million this year, same as last year. Funding for culture altogether is up \$1.9 million to promote cultural tourism and the creative economy. We recently gave \$5 million to start the planning process for the new Vancouver art gallery, for the precinct in Vancouver where we're going to be doing a new museum.

N. Simons: I think 500....

Interjection.

N. Simons: Oh, \$5 million. Okay, thank you. I think I heard \$500, and I was hoping that was something else.

As the minister knows — and I know the minister has her own views on this — the Arts Council is probably the best suited to allocate and distribute funds to artists of all genres in British Columbia. I'm wondering if specifically, the minister will be urging her government to ensure that we don't remain in the lower half of provincial funding in this country and in fact increase funding specifically to the Arts Council.

Hon. O. Ilich: I think the ministry recognizes that arts and culture are important to our province. I think that we recognize the big role that they play in the creative economy, in our tourism and in all of the things that we do.

The member opposite participated in a planning session that we had — that I talked about in my open-

ing comments — earlier this month where we gathered together 150 leaders of the arts community to talk about strategies to strengthen that sector. We remain committed to doing what we can in order to make sure that we have a viable arts and culture sector, including talking to the federal government to make sure that we get an increased share of money that they give out under the Canada Council.

We're going to continue to work very hard on that. We are expecting to have a blueprint strategy shortly from Max Wyman, which will guide us in doing that. We do believe that it is important, and we're going to continue to work very hard on that.

N. Simons: I applaud the minister for not only the arts summit and for getting people together from the various sectors of the arts community, but also for listening to the concerns that they have about funding for the Arts Council.

[1705]

I believe that lobbying the federal government is part of not only the government's role, but also the opposition's role. I think that we do have an opportunity to access funding from the federal government that brings us up to par with other provinces. I hope that that's a successful lobbying process.

Now, if and when the Arts Council funding is increased, does the minister believe that it would be important to add capacity to the Arts Council, as well, and not just the money that flows through it? The structure of the Arts Council, whether they're.... I understand, and I think the minister recognizes, that it's a very busy organization and an organization that requires people to work above and beyond, sometimes, the time that's allocated to them.

The capacity of the Arts Council, I think, is an important one for all artists in British Columbia, whether they be musicians, dancers or performers of any kind. My question specifically is: does the minister see the importance of adding funding to the Arts Council specifically to give it some more capacity?

Hon. O. Ilich: I want to stress that this is something that is of interest to me personally, as well as to the Premier. We did last year put out \$25 million to the Vancouver Foundation in the arts renaissance fund. That actually put \$5.3 million this year into the arts world in the province that we didn't have before. It was matched by the private sector, so that's an additional \$10 million that wasn't there.

In addition to the Arts Council, there is quite a bit of money — it's about \$14 million, so as much again as we have in the Arts Council — that goes out from gaming money to arts organizations. We also put money through Arts Now; Legacies Now also has money that they put into arts.

Nevertheless, we do know that it is an important part of what we do. As I said, we're going to continue to work on that. We're going to continue to work on trying to get as much money as we can from the federal government.

N. Simons: Is there any sort of written rationale for how money gets allocated through Arts Now, Legacies Now, gaming grants or the Arts Council? Is there any rhyme or reason to why some money gets funded to this particular area? It seems to me that the Arts Council, which actually sustains some of the smaller arts groups in smaller communities, is the appropriate agency to allocate funding. I'm wondering if the same.... I'll wait for the minister's response and follow up from that.

Hon. O. Ilich: We are looking at the programs we have inherited and have right now. We are taking a look at them and saying that we need to rationalize them and perhaps focus them on where we could be most effective with the money we do spend. That's work that's ongoing right now.

One of the things that we're looking at is the economic impact of the sector. For instance, we know there's lots of crossover between the film sector and the arts sector, and so we're taking a look at that. We are looking at the programs that we currently have, and we are going to be trying to rationalize the programs we do have. For instance, we also have money at the Olympic arts fund. We have a host of programs which fund the arts, and it would be a good idea for us to take a look at that and see whether we can do a better job.

[1710]

N. Simons: I know that arts councils across the province are probably pleased to hear that this process is being undertaken. As a former president of a local arts council, I know that it always seemed like there was a major competition for small amounts of funding, and that didn't leave a lot of time for the creative process. There was a lot of time spent trying to outbid or out...

Hon. C. Richmond: Manoeuvre.

N. Simons: ...out-manoeuvre — thank you, minister — for the funding. I believe this new spirit of cooperation is certainly helping me, I might say.

The issue specifically has to do with the expertise that exists within those other agencies in terms of allocating funding that's most beneficial to the communities. I think the arts councils have that local knowledge and — not at the expense of the other funding agencies, which have a role — certainly know the needs of the artist communities. I'm sure they're pleased to know that the process is being examined, to rationalize that whole process.

Now, one of the concerns that some arts organizations have is that there is often money allocated for specific programs, one-time programs or short-term programs that takes away or doesn't allow for funding for just simply day-to-day operating of the agency, or capital investment. I know it's a struggle, because everybody's striving to get the same funding or the same moneys, and there's always a balance that has to be met.

I think it's time for the arts community in British Columbia to have some access to capital funding, as well as operational funding — not to take away from the program funding, which is beneficial. In order to actually be sustainable, there needs to be some sort of certainty and security in funding. I'm wondering if the minister can offer some reassurance to the arts community that that is something on the horizon.

Hon. O. Ilich: Yes, actually, we are working on that. We're currently underway to develop a business case for provincial investment in infrastructure. We've been dealing with federal-provincial-territorial representatives. We were working on — before the change of government — and I think we're going to continue to work on an infrastructure inventory for the province. That is going to be part of the work that we carry out over the next year.

I would like to take the opportunity, actually, to introduce Richard Brownsey, who is our director of our cultural programs. He's just joined us to help with these arts questions. We recognize the importance of not just program money but infrastructure money, and sustaining the arts is something that I said is important to us.

N. Simons: I think that's also something that'll be reassuring to the arts community. The administrative stability of some of the smaller organizations will benefit from the operational funding that is potentially one of the future goals of this ministry.

[L. Mayencourt in the chair.]

I thank the minister's staff for being here and for being patient and for offering assistance. It certainly is a very broad ministry, with little areas that are all sort of small little silos, but I guess there's some obvious coordination as well.

If I may ask a few questions about museums.... I'm not sure if the minister needs to call in extra staff. These are some questions about the proposed new museums. I think it's exciting to see that there's continual development in the artistic resources and the museum infrastructure that exist in the province.

There was a *Globe and Mail* article talking about why our museums are dying. I'm not saying that I agree entirely with the article, but it certainly sets a stage for some important discussions. It seems to be that the heritage collections in Canada are in a crisis. It cites the Canadian Craft Museum in Vancouver, which closed in 2002, and the South Similkameen Museum, which can't afford a curator.

[1715]

What comments does the minister have on the concerns expressed in that article? I'm not sure if she is familiar with it in particular, but it certainly addresses the fact that the integrity of some smaller museums is at risk. I think the implication is that it has been sort of the neglected sector, and I wonder if the minister can comment.

Hon. O. Ilich: I recognize the importance of museums, and I think the rest of the ministry does. I know the Premier does as well.

We are going to be doing more, I think, with B.C. 2008. Museums are the repository of our shared history. There will be focus on that in the coming years as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the colony.

Museums, at the moment, get funding through the Arts Council and through some of the other programs we previously talked about — through the gaming money and others. We have already made a commitment to work with the national aboriginal museum to establish that in the cultural precinct — that's part of the \$5 million we have put forward towards planning, which was matched by the city of Vancouver; and a site has been identified for the national aboriginal museum — also, the museum of Asia-Pacific trade and culture.

We've been working with other museums as well, such as Victoria's own RBCM, to make sure they're viable. Their service plan is of interest. We recently transferred their land over so they can implement a business plan they've been working on.

Last year we gave operating assistance to museums of \$1.6 million. As we move into B.C. 2008, I think we will be taking a more comprehensive look at that whole sector. That's also part of the infrastructure study we're doing with the federal government. We're looking at museums and other cultural infrastructure, so this is something we will be focusing a little bit more on in the future.

N. Simons: Can the minister offer any reassurance that the budgets of existing museums won't be detrimentally affected by the creation of the three new institutions mentioned in this year's throne speech?

Hon. O. Ilich: We don't have any plans to reduce funding to the existing museums in order to get these other new museums up and operating.

One other museum I forgot to mention, which we did announce and we're working on, is the women's history museum. We're interested in that one as well.

As I said, we do recognize that museums are a repository of our history. We're interested in that. We're interested in the cultural programs associated with museums, and we have announced that we will be doing that as part of the B.C. 2008 initiative.

N. Simons: The throne speech mentioned that the world women's history museum would be initiated, but in this service plan this year there is only reference to a feasibility study for a women's history exhibition and treasury.

[1720]

Can the minister clarify this apparent contradiction between the throne speech and the service plan, and confirm whether an actual museum or just an exhibit is being planned?

Hon. O. Ilich: To the member: we are working on that particular women's history museum with RBCM.

We're in discussions with them as to how we can go about doing that, and work is just ongoing. I continue to stress that it's still a new ministry. We have not been in existence for even a year yet. We have a lot of initiatives and a lot of things that we're looking after, and a lot of work is ongoing and yet to be defined.

N. Simons: I'm wondering, at this point, if we can ask the staff if they're willing to stay till nine o'clock tonight, but I guess that's not in order. No, we'll be out of here by six.

Interjection.

N. Simons: The minister and the staff would be appropriate. However, it's certainly a lot to cover.

I'm going to, at this moment, just allow my friend the member for Vancouver-Hastings to ask one question, or a couple of questions. We'll see who stands up first after. Thank you, minister.

S. Simpson: Thanks to my good friend from Powell River-Sunshine Coast for being so gracious with me.

Actually, I will tell you, as I said to the critic, I had two questions, and only two. The minister will know this issue. It relates to an issue in my constituency: the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. I know the minister and I have spoken about this, and I know the minister has visited the facility and toured it. We've had discussions around this. I'm very thankful that I know that she understands the importance of this facility, and the importance both of the role it plays in Vancouver as a significant cultural facility, the only one on the east side of Vancouver, and the role it plays particularly with children — kids who come from families where there are challenges, who have opportunities at the cultural centre to engage in programs that the cultural centre puts on. It also is a facility that pays a lot of attention to new and emerging companies that are trying to put on performances.

As the minister knows, they have a pretty desperate need for some capital improvements. They have a \$10 million capital plan for improvements. I do know that capital's not a big part of this ministry's portfolio or budget.

The question I have for the minister is: could the minister tell us how a facility like the Vancouver East Cultural Centre goes about looking for dollars at the provincial level? She will know they're looking for about \$2 million out of a \$10 million budget. I just wanted to know if she can kind of explain, so I can better understand, how they should go about doing that, and where they should be looking for that money within the government for cultural purposes.

Hon. O. Ilich: The member is right. I have been to visit the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. I do see that the need is pressing. We made a commitment to work with them to come up with whatever we could find in our government. I will be happy to find out what we can and let the member know what we find out.

Our ministry does not have capital money available. We are going to look at where we can find that and give support to that request, because the need is very pressing there. The day I was there — I don't know whether they decided that it would be a good show just for me — the sewers actually were backing up, and it was not a great scene. It is a building that is owned by the city of Vancouver. I've talked to them already about this, and I will continue to talk to them and look for some money for them within government.

N. Simons: A question on heritage. At the AGM of the B.C. Museums Association in October 2005 a resolution was passed reading: "The BCMA communicate the pressing need for the development and implementation of a heritage strategy for the province, and further that this strategy address policy, legislation, funding and sectoral relationships that underpin the B.C. 150 sesquicentennial celebrations in 2008."

[1725]

What steps, if any, is the minister taking to develop a new heritage strategy that addresses the concerns raised by the BCMA?

Hon. O. Ilich: Much of the work in this ministry, as I keep saying, is a work in progress. That's one of them. I see that the member has difficulty with 150th anniversary. That's called "sesquicentennial." We had to practise that for a long time.

As part of the sesquicentennial — the 150th anniversary of B.C. in 2008 — a lot of the heritage strategy relates to that, and we're working on that. We're working with our federal counterparts and provincial counterparts on that as well.

N. Simons: Luckily, this question doesn't contain that word.

In this heritage section, last year's service plan lists as a performance measure the number of places entered in the Canadian Register of Historic Places. This goal hasn't been carried forward in this year's plan. My question is: why would this performance measure and the number of places entered into this registry be dropped from the service plan?

Hon. O. Ilich: I think the answer relates very much to what we said earlier, that some measures were dropped and some measures were added where we thought that the new measures were better targeted. That does not mean that we have dropped that work internally. We're continuing to place importance on the things that were being measured, such as historic places. Also, I can just tell the member that we are working with the federal government on the historic places initiative, which is a partnership of the federal government, other provinces and territories and local governments to develop a national register of historic places.

With some of those things, again, work is in progress. We're finding our way on some of these, and so we're substituting and making sure that what we con-

tinue to do is most effective for the amount of money we're spending on that.

N. Simons: Another goal in this section is the number of community-based heritage properties meeting or exceeding standards. This goal hasn't been carried forward, and I'm wondering if the minister can comment on that.

[1730]

Hon. O. Ilich: We recognize that we had a percentage target of 100 percent of community-based heritage properties that meet or exceed site management standards, and we do recognize that there is a variance there. A number of the sites are experiencing financial problems which relate to their inability to cover their operating expenses. We are looking at that. That's part of what we're continuing to do to make sure that we don't lose our heritage sites.

N. Simons: In terms of overall funding, the capital expenditures for the core business area of art, culture and heritage jumped from \$23,000 in 2005-2006 to \$251,000, as my friend says, in 2006-2007. Can the minister explain where this money will be spent?

Hon. O. Ilich: As with all new ministries, we've got to... We said last time, in our last service plan, that we're establishing a base, so some of the major projects and initiatives we're spending some money on this year are: B.C. art collection; that conversion; development and use of Canadian Register of Historic Places; the archaeological site permit system for land use developers; the review and use of mapping services for various tourism activities; some financial management tools for Crown land tourism projects; we're upgrading the film commission database system; we're doing some electronic document management; and, we're creating an internal Internet site for this ministry so that we can share that information.

The majority of the capital budget has gone into forest and trails.

N. Simons: I'm just wondering: is it possible to get a list of that particular breakdown? I appreciate it if I am correct in assuming that that will be alright.

Is any of this increased capital funding, just for the record, designated for capital funding? Are any of the amounts you've listed for capital funding?

Hon. O. Ilich: The ministry's total budget moved from \$1.4 million for capital to \$1.79 million or almost \$1.8 million, so most of that is in that list I just gave you.

[1735]

N. Simons: Still on the issue of funding — the question around the SportsFunder lottery: can the minister describe how that funding is received and disbursed or whether the ministry has any role in that and how it's allocated?

Hon. O. Ilich: The allocation from the gaming branch for the SportsFunder... This is, as I noted at the time, the very first time we have a lottery where the proceeds are dedicated to amateur sport, but we are never going to take that money into our ministry. It's always going to stay with the gaming branch. We're going to actually give them the criteria and the guidelines. They'll take in the applications, and they're going to completely give out all that money that comes in. We're budgeting about \$3.5 million extra to amateur sport for that. It'll be in accordance with criteria and guidelines set up by our ministry.

N. Simons: I'm sorry. My questions are a little bit all over the place. It sometimes works out that way.

Will some of that funding be used to assist residents of smaller communities to participate in sporting events? I know that some mention of that was made in the opening remarks of the minister, and I'm wondering: if so, how will that money be disbursed, and how will communities be able to access that funding?

Hon. O. Ilich: Actually, some of that money is targeted for precisely that purpose. There will be a regional travel program that will help athletes in remote areas to overcome higher travel costs for training and competition. Again, we will develop the guidelines; we will set the criteria. The applications will be handled by the gaming branch, and they'll administer the program. But it is intended that the money from Kidsport go to four program areas.

One is Kidsport, which is an organization that helps remove financial barriers for kids that can't participate because of, as I said, financial reasons. That regional support program, and then the other two areas that that money is going to support are coaching development and game-plan funding for high-performance athletes in sport.

N. Simons: I wonder if Sport B.C. has any involvement in the allocation of that funding as well.

Hon. O. Ilich: All key sport organizations in the province are providing input into that program.

N. Simons: I know I only have a couple of questions. I believe we'll be continuing at the next sitting, but I don't make those decisions.

[1740]

I'm wondering if I could ask just one question relating to my friend, the MLA for Columbia River-Revelstoke, who has concerns about the potential use of the Significant Projects Streamlining Act. I'm wondering if the minister or her government has had any discussion about the possible use of the Significant Projects Streamlining Act as it relates to the decision made by the East Kootenay regional district regarding the Jumbo resort.

Hon. O. Ilich: The short answer is no.

The Chair: Noting the hour, member.

N. Simons: Noting the hour, I will have one more question, if I may, relating specifically to the administration, the funding, of the ministry.

Yesterday we engaged in a long discussion about the Resort Timber Administration Act. Has there been any allocation of funding for that particular program area in the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts?

Hon. O. Ilich: Yes, as a matter of fact, we have allocated some funds to that, and it will be in the range of \$150,000 to \$250,000.

Just noting the hour, I move that the committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 5:42 p.m.

The House resumed; S. Hawkins in the chair.

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

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

Hon. C. Richmond moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned until ten o'clock Monday morning.

The House adjourned at 5:43 p.m.

PROCEEDINGS IN THE DOUGLAS FIR ROOM

Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF
COMMUNITY SERVICES AND
MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR
SENIORS' AND WOMEN'S ISSUES
(continued)

The House in Committee of Supply (Section A); D. Hayer in the chair.

The committee met at 3:24 p.m.

On Vote 21: ministry operations, \$236,621,000 (continued).

Hon. I. Chong: Hon. Chair, if you will allow me, as I do at the beginning of every session, to introduce staff

who are with me for the benefit of members opposite, so they have a reference point.

To my right I have my deputy minister, Sheila Wynn. To my left is the assistant deputy minister for seniors', women's and community services, Barbara Walman. Behind me we have Dale Wall, assistant deputy minister for local government and, today, Jim MacAulay, director of finance and administrative services. I look forward to the debates today with the member for Coquitlam-Maillardville.

[1525]

D. Thorne: Thanks to the minister for allowing us to ask these questions.

I just wanted to say a few words about the ministry — or about women's issues, I guess. I wanted to say a few words for the record before I start.

I am looking forward today to asking the questions and trying to figure out some of the answers. I did get a briefing with your ministry a few months ago, and it was most informative. I am going to go over some of the areas again in my questions so that it is in the official record, but since the briefing and since becoming the critic for women's issues, I have visited with some women's groups in some centres outside the lower mainland. I have thought about it a great deal, and I'm still unclear as to why we have, in the province, cut such a small amount of money from the Community Services budget, the \$1.7 million that was cut for women's centres.

I really believe that those centres provide a service of support to women across the province in small communities where there are no other services that they have to use to get information, advocacy, referral to other services, and a host of small programs that were run out of women's centres — like ESL groups, single mothers' groups and different kinds of groups that are lost in some centres.

I am going to ask about that, and we will discuss it further, but I really feel — in light of the emphasis now in the ministry mainly around the violence-against-women programs and other programs in this program area — that the women's centre cuts are not really based on a financial decision. I feel they are based on a philosophical decision, and I can only state my profound regret and the regret of the official opposition and the women's community in British Columbia that this is so.

I think it's a sad day when we let philosophy or a difference of opinion make us stop providing the kinds of services that these women were providing in women's centres for next to nothing, mostly as volunteers. A lot of those centres have now closed, and the women are definitely not better off because of it.

I wanted to make that statement for the record, and with that, I'm going to duck out for five minutes. Another member is going to ask a couple of questions of the minister.

R. Chouhan: First, I want to give a little background and ask a couple of questions about the

women's situation in the South Asian community and some women from the Philippines that I have been meeting with for the last couple of months.

These women, who are the victims of a system under which they have.... There are some men, as well, but the majority of the people who are victimized in this situation are women. These women sponsored their husbands from either India or from the Philippines.

When the spouse comes over here, they sometimes end up in a very abusive relationship. As a result, they would terminate their marital relationship. What happens, in some cases, is that the spouse would then go collect welfare or go on other assistance that he or she might receive from the government.

[1530]

Then the ministry, the government of B.C., would go after the sponsor. In these cases, these are the women who have.... We now have several cases. In one case the woman has now been asked to reimburse the province \$27,000. In another case it's \$32,000. So these are the victims being revictimized.

My question to the minister is: are the women in this category on the ministry's radar?

Hon. I. Chong: In addition to responding to the member for Burnaby-Edmonds, I would like to make some comment, as well, on the remarks by the member for Coquitlam-Maillardville in her opening comments. She made the comment that she felt that there was a philosophical reason as to why the funding allocation had been changed in terms of providing financial resources to women's centres.

I would like to be able to correct her and to state that that is not the reason why the funding allocation has changed. In fact, the women's centres were advised in 2002 and then given a further two years until March of 2004 to look for alternate sources of financing to ensure that they would get community support, that they would work with other community organizations to see if they could not find other areas of financial resources.

What we had said in 2002 was that government was going to focus the taxpayers' dollars in three specific areas — in priority areas, in fact. That was to ensure that the funding of transition houses, including our safe houses and second-stage housing, would be maintained and sustained; that counselling for women who are experiencing abuse would also be sustained and maintained; and that counselling for children who witness abuse also would be maintained and sustained. We made a conscious decision to ensure that those priority areas would continue to receive the funding and also be able to enhance services in those particular areas.

I have said to a number of women's centres around the province — because I, too, did travel around and meet with them — that the services provided by the centres.... I recognized that many of them did good work in their communities. That's not at all what was in question. But because government was ensuring that the priority-service areas needing to be maintained and enhanced.... We would focus on that, and that is one of

the reasons why we said there would be a two-year period in which they could look for alternate sources of revenue.

I also want to state it for the record because I think it's unfortunate that members opposite have alluded so often to the fact that women's centres all over the province were closing. That, in fact, is not true.

I am aware of five centres that no longer operate. Again, they have certain reasons as to why that is the case. In some cases they weren't operating full-time hours and perhaps were not able to continue to operate on that basis. In other cases there are other reasons, and I can't get into those specifics.

What I did say to the women's centres, as well, was that by ensuring that these priority-service areas were maintained, I would still find ways to look to these centres to provide direct services for women. In that regard, when we announced Community Action for Women's Safety grants this past January, I am pleased to say that a number of women's centres applied for these grants, and a number of the women's centres received these grants.

They were to focus on women's safety, particularly for four distinct women's population groups that statistically have higher representation in terms of abuse than what we would like. They are for visible minority women, older women, immigrant women and women with disabilities. We were able to do that for the first time — to provide those available grants.

I am continuing to look at services that we need to provide, and I will continue, at all those opportunities, to ensure that when the opportunity arises, everyone who is a women-serving agency has the opportunity to bid on those particular grants.

[1535]

The member for Burnaby-Edmonds asked specifically about immigrant women, I guess it would be — or visible minority women, particularly in the South Asian community and the Filipino community — who had sponsored their spouses to come to Canada and, in particular, to British Columbia and then, perhaps, were victims of abuse. They were then also required to deal with the matter of sponsorship, which is a financial matter.

I would say to the member that when those arrangements are made in terms of sponsorship, it's an immigration matter — a federal matter, I believe. The federal department does require and does the checks in terms of the sponsorship requirements. Now, based on specific cases.... In these instances which the member has mentioned, I don't know whether they have gone to the immigration department to ask for special dispensation on the matter. If they haven't done so, I believe that would be a good place to start.

If the member requires additional information, especially in regard to sponsorship and immigration, then I would have to ask him to refer those to the Attorney General for specific information in that area.

R. Chouhan: When we are talking about the sponsorship issues, yes, in part, it's federal, but when the

money is collected from those women who are victims of this system, it's provincial. It's not federal.

My question to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues is: has the ministry looked into this matter, or would they be willing to look into this matter — to meet with those women to talk about their issues? It is provincial.

Hon. I. Chong: I want to make it clear that when the member raised the issue about sponsoring a partner, it led to the matter of immigration. That's why I tried to direct him to the Attorney General on the specifics.

However, if he's wanting to deal with the area of women's issues, in particular with the issue of violence — I know that all of us in this House are in support of the prevention of violence against women — I can say that there are a number of organizations around the province which we continue to work with and continue to fund. I think he must be familiar with the various groups in his riding, but in Greater Vancouver in particular, a woman by the name of Tracy Porteous deals with B.C. Specialized Victim Assistance workers. She deals with training workers, as well, who are acute to some of these matters and therefore are able to assist abused women.

I can say that our ministry has been able to facilitate a meeting with the Deputy Attorney General to bring to his attention some of the matters the member has raised and similar matters in that regard, as well as a number of others that have come to our attention. We are continuing with those discussions because in cases such as the member raises, they sometimes do involve the ministry with the Attorney General. Our ministry works with other ministries on a variety of initiatives and facilitates discussion in a variety of ways, and this is one of them.

We agreed to your suggestions. We absolutely believe it's important to meet with women when it comes to issues of violence. As a ministry, we will work with other ministries that have similar areas of responsibility to ensure that there are ways that we can all continue to work towards the prevention of violence.

[1540]

R. Chouhan: We are also dealing with this issue with the Minister of Employment and Income Assistance, and we have heard from the minister that they are reviewing their policy to collect that money from these victims. However, my question is.... As the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, we would request that your ministry also work with the Minister of Employment and Income Assistance to speed up the review of their policy that they are doing so that these women, these victims of these scandals, can get some assistance.

Hon. I. Chong: I want to thank the member for Burnaby-Edmonds for his very strong and passionate efforts in this area. There's no question that our ministry does work with other ministries in government. My

deputy minister, who I've introduced to you, is also prepared, if you wish, to deal with those specific cases that he mentioned. We might have a look at them to see how we might also further their particular case.

We certainly do meet with the Ministries of Employment and Income Assistance, Attorney General, Public Safety and Solicitor General — a variety of ministries — to ensure that the services we provide are better integrated cross-government. But when we hear of specific cases which are particularly disturbing, I would certainly welcome any member of the opposition to feel comfortable in contacting our ministry and our deputy and to make arrangements to have a meeting. We can then look at those cases specifically. I want to thank the member for allowing us to do that.

D. Thorne: To begin with, I would like to ask the minister questions about the service plan. It's opportune that Mr. Chouhan was asking the question, because the first question I was going to ask is about page 5 of the service plan, where it states that the ministry strives to meet the unique needs of women by identifying and communicating emerging trends and by informing policy development and decision-making that affect women.

I do not see any further mention of this anywhere else in the service plan. I'm wondering how the minister intends to identify these issues that have been referred to and then share them with the rest of her government.

The Chair: Member, I just want to remind you: you can't use personal names in the House, please.

Hon. I. Chong: The work that the ministry engages in oftentimes is.... By meeting with women-serving organizations, we do hear of particular trends that are emerging or issues that arise or are brought to our attention where we need to work across government, ensuring that existing services and programs are integrated across government, in addition to looking at enhancing programs and services sometimes. When it's brought to our attention, we're able to conduct some analyses and to collect data and research and, as a result of that — and also, as I say, in meeting with women-serving agencies — determine what those kinds of trends are that women may be looking at.

As an example, we know that we are in an economy that is increasing with a shortage of labour and that one of the emerging trends is that women are wanting to participate in the workforce in a more wholesome way. Women are wanting to participate in non-traditional roles, as an example. One of the reasons this is occurring is because they see that this is a good, family-sustaining job — especially in the construction industry.

We are also finding that because women have made choices and maybe have been away from the workforce for some time, before they are re-entering the workforce, they are also looking at and trying to determine what kinds of parental benefits are available, whether

they are going to be self-employed or part-time workers. We're also looking at interjurisdictional scans on women's issues. That's one of the reasons why, when I meet with other ministers across the country, we share that information.

[1545]

As well as looking at those trends, when I share information with other ministers across the country, the one area that does come up — in the two FPT meetings that I've been at in 2004 and then in 2006 — interestingly enough, is the area of aboriginal women, which many jurisdictions, not just British Columbia, are also grappling with in the sense that more needs to be done on what programs are successful in one jurisdiction versus another. From that, I've been able to work with our new Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation to ensure he is aware that this is an emerging matter, more than ever before, across Canada and that we need to continue to work to ensure, in his dialogues with the leadership council, that he understands that the aboriginal women's issues are also considered.

We are continuing to work across government. We continue to take a look at these trends. We take a look at the kinds of matters that are demanding our attention, and we are developing options on a variety of them. When I work with other ministries, there are deputy ministers who also meet at the same time, and they'll come back and report on, say, which ministry should take the lead on a particular program. As long as we continue to work together across government to ensure that an integrated delivery service model is available.... That's what we'll continue to do.

D. Thorne: Page 15 also lists cross-ministry initiatives that are pursued by the ministry. There were no cross-ministry initiatives listed in the service plan that pertain explicitly to women's services, even though, as the minister says, she does work in a cross-governmental capacity. I'm just wondering why there are no programs listed relating to women.

Hon. I. Chong: As I've indicated, we work cross-ministerially, but sometimes we see that a program may already exist in another ministry. We would allow that particular program to continue in that particular ministry, but we would add to that in terms of an additional or service enhancement that might be necessary.

As an example, we do participate in work that's being done on the payment of a family caregivers policy. Now, the payment of a family caregivers policy, I believe, is with the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Because there is a program there, we continue to work with the ministry staff in that ministry to ensure that the ways of enhancement based on information we receive as a result of our dialoguing with members of the community will take those matters into consideration.

We also are working with the Ministry of Health in terms of women's health strategy to ensure that we can support even better outcomes for women. In that ex-

ample, we were able to work with ensuring additional dollars to support the Women's Health Research Institute to improve understanding and treatment of disease and injury among women. Also, some work has been done with the first nations justice options working group.

As I indicated to the member at the beginning of my comments, by working cross-government, we do provide input. We do provide information that we receive as a result of data collection or analysis that we're able to provide and ensure that the programs that may already exist in a different ministry.... Should they require additional enhancement or changes to them, we provide that input to them. We will continue to work across government to ensure that we keep focused on that. That lens is applied across all ministries when our ministry staff is working with other ministries.

D. Thorne: I have a few questions about numbers and money. It's important for the ministry to track the number of women who use their services. I would like a more comprehensive breakdown of numbers from the minister, if that's possible. Even though I know that we went over some of these numbers in the briefing, I would just like to confirm them and get them on the record.

How many FTEs currently work on issues pertaining to women's services? How many of these are employed in policy-related work and how many in program-related work?

[1550]

Hon. I. Chong: I apologize for the delay. We just wanted to make sure, because the member had the briefing, and now the numbers don't jibe. I just wanted to make sure that it sounds consistent. In the policy area we do have ten FTEs — but I'm advised that even though they're for policy, they're not just exclusively policy for women but also include policy work for seniors, so some people in our policy branch have done that work for both — and in the program area for women, 16 FTEs.

D. Thorne: Last year there was an infusion of \$12.5 million over three years. Was this all one-time grant money, or was some of it core funding?

Hon. I. Chong: I should advise the member that the \$12.5 million was not over three years. It was \$12.5 million each year for a total of \$37.5 million over the three years. This has been added to the base budget for the women's programs that we have. From that perspective, I don't know if the member is wanting, when she refers to core, whether.... Perhaps the best way to say it is base budget. It's an increase to our base budget for transition house services, for safe house services, for counselling services.

As long as we continue to provide those direct services in those areas, that is where the dollars have been provided. If the member would like a breakdown spe-

cifically of what that is, rather than trying to read all that into the record, we can provide that to her by follow-up, if that would be helpful. We can get that to her as well.

D. Thorne: I probably didn't phrase that properly. I meant the percentage of the total money, the \$37.5 million that is core operational funding, ongoing funding or one-time grants that people — centres and things — can apply for.

[1555]

Hon. I. Chong: I had the figures so embedded in my mind, because it was in January of 2005 that this \$12.5 million was announced. That was announced because I worked on it, going to Treasury Board and working on getting the increase, but it's been a couple of years, so I'm just wanting to make sure I have the exact figures.

First of all, I want to confirm to the member that these are not one-time dollars, that they are in fact dollars that have been added to the base budget, so they will continue. What they were providing was: approximately \$7½ million additional to the Stop the Violence program, another \$4 million to the Children Who Witness Abuse program, another \$1 million or so to prevention activities and about \$500,000 to a mentoring program.

That's roughly what it is. Again, I can get those specific details for the member, but they're absolutely for direct services and to enhance services and programs that we currently have in the ministry for women.

D. Thorne: Okay. I'm going to move on now to some questions on transition houses, safe houses and second-stage housing. I'm wondering how much the ministry spends on transition housing.

Hon. I. Chong: Currently the budget is close to \$26 million — \$25.96 million for transition houses, 63 transition houses in 57 communities.

D. Thorne: How many beds are available through these transition homes?

Hon. I. Chong: I failed to provide additional information the member had asked for. When she asked about the transition houses, I understand she also asked for the budget for the second-stage housing as well as safe homes. In terms of our second-stage housing, there is \$1.37 million allocated — nine second-stage houses in six communities. In terms of our safe homes, there are 26 safe-homes programs in 25 communities, and that allocation is \$1.23 million.

In terms of transition houses and the number of beds provided there, I do understand and am advised that it's about 674 beds. But as the member will know, if she's had an opportunity to visit transition houses, oftentimes you do visit a transition house, and they will show you their beds as stated, but sometimes they

have access to more bed units if, in fact, the demand is there on a particular weekend — it is usually weekends — throughout the month. So while a bed that we are providing information on....

In a house, the number of beds may be six or eight. In fact, there can be, at times, up to ten beds which are used, and there could be, at times, you know, less than that being used. I've been to transition houses where I've seen a room vacated for a short time, and then at other times, as I say, they're absolutely full. To extract that information from some of the transition houses is somewhat difficult because they are certainly flexible in making sure that they have the number of beds that they need at a particular moment in time.

[1600]

D. Thorne: Thank you to the minister, and I do recognize that it is difficult sometimes. I've been heavily involved with the Coquitlam Women's Transition House, and I know that the beds are sometimes fluid. The number of women who have accessed the services in the last year — I don't think that's such a fluid number. I'm wondering what the total number would be across the province.

Hon. I. Chong: I'm advised that the number of women and children who were served from the period April 1 to December 31, which is the most recent statistic that we have, and who used the services in transition houses is approximately 8,781. I'm not sure if the member is interested in the second-stage housing. Perhaps I'll just give that to her as well: 591; in terms of our safe home program, the residential: 349. These are women and children, and this is information we received from these particular housing units that the agencies provide us with. This is April 1 to December 31, 2005.

D. Thorne: Are you anticipating that this number is projected to rise due to an increased demand for these kinds of services across the province?

Hon. I. Chong: I would hope or expect that all of us as members don't expect numbers to rise, because we want to ensure that the educational programs in place ensure that people acknowledge that violence against women and children is unacceptable in the society we live in. However, the fact is that violence still prevails.

We have to ensure that we do have people in place who will deal with women and children fleeing abuse if they need a service. It could sometimes be quite temporary; sometimes a longer period is necessary. At the same time, we ensure that there are staff who are trained who also can deal with counselling. That, too, can be fluid at times, but you don't want to remove that particular trained individual and not have them available should there be a particular weekend or a time in the month where more services are required.

We do account for and ensure when we meet with our women-serving agencies and groups and societies that when they deliver a program we have — the Stop-

ping the Violence program or the Children Who Witness Abuse counselling program — they are in place; that we address the number of spaces they need to provide that service for women and children; and in addition, with the transition houses, that the number of beds in particular that they want to at least maintain as a minimum are there.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

Again, it's very difficult to really get a firm number on the number of people using the beds, because each of the transition houses, while they do their very best, do count differently, I've noticed, as to the number of people using their services. When you have a family that comes in and uses the services for a month and then is able to move out and then returns six months later, unfortunately, are they counted again as new clients, or are they the same clients? This is the difficulty in sometimes getting the statistical information. We strive to get the best we can, but we are certainly relying on our program delivery personnel to give us the information.

[1605]

D. Thorne: Thank you for your answer. What are the criteria for increasing funding or capacity at any of these services: transition homes, safe houses or second-stage housing? I'm wondering if it's based on need in a community, population, available funding or some other criteria.

Hon. I. Chong: It is difficult to have a standard calculation in terms of a formula to determine the funding that is necessary in a particular community. What was established, I believe, back in 2003.... I was not yet a part of this ministry, but I understand that a consultant had been commissioned to take a look at the transition houses and, for the first time in a long time, to take a look at how we could possibly address some of the financial pressures they were having.

At that time they had developed some guidelines, I guess — and I wouldn't call them criteria, but guidelines to take a look at — because some transition houses are rented, and others are owned. Therefore, some have rental payments versus some have mortgages, which at some point would conclude. Some also have.... Their staffing requirements were different. And some transition houses did not.... While they had 24-7 access, they didn't necessarily have 24-7 opportunity for someone to show up in the middle of the night. Sometimes women were waiting after they made a call to be able to access a particular transition house and have an intake worker there.

As well, there were other administrative costs associated with running transition houses or safe housing. I think there was a fourth item that sort of escapes me for now. But these were guiding principles that this consultant brought to the table and said this is what we need to take a look at: the staffing that is necessary; the accessibility, to some extent, is what's necessary. There-

fore, based on that, they had developed — again, I wouldn't call it a formula — some determinations as to how transition houses would benefit from increased funding.

Based on that work and based on the fact that in 2004 I had travelled around the province and visited some 20-plus transition houses and spoken to the support workers directly, it was very clear to me that we should and could provide additional dollars to ensure that those additional services they would want to provide could be provided. Then, as a result, the \$12½ million lift to the budget, which previously had been around \$33 million, was provided.

It is difficult, because I had met with transition house workers who said: "We would prefer to have this kind of accessibility because of the neighbourhood or the community that we live in versus another one in a different area." Some do like the fact that a phone call is made, and then a person will be there to greet them and intake. Others have said that they want a person in the house all the time so that if a doorbell rings at night, the women in the house are not frightened by the doorbell, not knowing that there is not a secure person there to deal with it.

In addition, some transition houses run by societies — and run by women's centre societies, in fact — said that they were providing the counselling services outside of the house, in another building, perhaps, further away. They said: "Could we not bring that service back into the house?" In so doing, they may require additional services.

We're trying to be as flexible as possible when it comes to funding these very important and essential services in the communities in their very diverse way. I do intend to meet with them again, when we're no longer kept in this place, to again find out how this has worked and to see what other kinds of programs and services they feel would augment or whether they want to change the kinds of service delivery that they are currently doing. While I appreciate the member's desire to have fixed criteria, it is very difficult in this particular area, because we want so much to be able to be flexible.

D. Thorne: Well, those are all very important services. I can certainly understand some of the reasons that you might want to have fluid criteria. The issue of funding, of course, increasing every year is an issue that I'm sure you grapple with, as well as the transition houses.

[1610]

I do have a few more questions around tracking the admissions. I think I'll do those first, but I did want to put into the record some comments that I have had made to me from some of the different agencies providing services to women across the province and the problems that they are having with the one-time funding — the grants.

I'm just going to finish this section that I have here first. Around the ministry tracking, how many women have repeat admissions to transition housing, safe

homes or second-stage housing? If you do track, how many repeat admissions do you have? And if you don't, have you ever or are you intending to? I guess I'm asking because I think it's a good indicator of whether we're providing services the right way or whether there's enough funding and the programs are the proper programs.

Hon. I. Chong: I want to clarify the comment that the member made. She may be referring to another source of funding, but the dollars that we're providing for our transition house, for our counselling services, as I said, have been added to our base budget for these services. It is not one-time funding. It is there for the long term. It's sustainable, and we made that very clear.

The one-time funding that is offered from time to time is.... When we asked for the increase to our base budget for women's programs, we said that we would like to have an opportunity to take a look on a year-to-year basis at what new programs or pilots that we might be able to encourage. That is where the \$1 million, which perhaps this member is referring to, which was announced in January.... The Community Action for Women's Safety grants were announced.

These dollars were specifically set aside to look at programs or enhanced programs that dealt with safety for women in four specific population groups: immigrant women, visible minority women, women with disabilities and older women. Those were one-time grants that were announced in January. They're sometimes to launch a program that would otherwise not happen or to allow a service agency to partner with other organizations to lever dollars in other ways, whether it be federally or even from their municipal governments.

Once those are in place, we'll be able to say, perhaps the following year, that we'll also take a look at what new ideas come forward. We will continue to do that. In terms of the core funding or the base funding that the member has referred to — for the transition houses, our safe housing, our second-stage housing, our counselling programs — that is not one-time.

In terms of tracking admissions, I can tell the member that while it sounds like a reasonable request, I can tell you that staff have in the past asked for that information, and what we heard back from the women-serving agencies is that they are expressing concerns regarding the collection of names, with FOI provisions, etc. In order to determine if it's the same person coming back, you definitely have to have certain data — the names, similar names. Therefore, you're going to have to make sure that there are different persons with a similar name and, therefore, where their addresses would be. There is some sensitivity.

While sometimes it's possible to get that information when a woman arrives at a transition house, other times the service providers just want to ensure that they secure the safety of the women and children. While they do eventually receive those names, the agencies have been reluctant to provide that kind of

data to us. While we did request it at one time, I do want to tell the member that they've been somewhat reluctant to provide it in a statistical way for us. So we try to just rely on numbers. This is one of the reasons why it was difficult to build permanent criteria as to how we determine the funding that goes out to these programs.

We do rely very much on the particular agency telling us what their needs are, and then we try to accommodate that and deal with it. Safety is always a priority for us and, definitely, for the serving agency.

[1615]

D. Thorne: Thanks to the minister.

I'm wondering whether you've done any analysis on the number of women accessing the aforementioned services. Have those numbers increased or decreased since the cuts to the women's centres or possibly due to the cuts in the women's centres' funding?

Hon. I. Chong: When we looked at providing an increase to the base budget, the \$12.5 million onto the base budget, it was a result of speaking to a number of the women-serving agencies, which said that they wanted increased funding to increase capacity, so that is what we agreed to. The fact that the agencies said they wanted the opportunity to have the increased capacity.... Well, it would obviously give them the opportunity, I guess, to have increased usage, but that cannot be clearly linked or attributable to any one particular instance or change in any kind of funding. When the increased funding was provided, it was because at the time we were advised that they would like to be able to increase their capacity.

D. Thorne: Okay. Last year the minister spoke about contract lengths for the operators of transition houses. As I understand it, currently a contract is one year long. However, the minister stated that her ministry was reviewing the possibility of moving to multi-year funding. This is when I had my briefing. I'm just wondering if this review has taken place, and if so, can we expect to see a policy shift in the near future?

Hon. I. Chong: Yes, absolutely. We were very interested in looking at the possibility of multi-year contracts with our service providers. I understand that the work is still underway, and it's being conducted in a fashion such that we would be looking at three-year contracts in place beginning in 2007-2008 for the implementation of that, barring that there are no significant obstacles. When I say that, it could be that service providers are suggesting a different model or a different kind of multi-year contract. At the same time that we're doing this review, we are taking a look at program standards, performance indicators, performance measures, etc.

[1620]

In conjunction with that — and this is what was very important when I met with service providers — many also said that they wanted to ensure they had the

trained staff and personnel in place. So as I say, with multi-year contracts, perhaps some service providers are looking at their capacity as well, so we want to ensure that when we put this in place, it's going to work. Also, always allowing for flexibility, we are planning on implementing them in '07-08, hopefully, with no problems encountered along the way.

D. Thorne: Well, I'm very pleased to hear that you're seriously looking at going to the multi-year funding. As we in the room all know, one of the biggest handicaps to any small organization or agency is the amount of time that's spent filling out forms, not having any certainty for funding in the years ahead and not being able to do long-range planning like training and professional development and those kinds of things.

That's good news, now, and a move in the right direction. It's one of the things that I wanted to see accomplished in my time here in the Legislature — that it would happen while I was here. I'm very pleased. I do have other things, of course, as you know, that are on my agenda, but that one I'm very pleased about.

I'm looking now at the section around counselling, outreach and Stopping the Violence — which, of course, you also fund. I'm wondering, first of all, how much funding will be spent on counselling services this year?

Hon. I. Chong: I'm hoping the member is not suggesting that she was planning on leaving too soon. She has just got here, in terms of her term. You never know what happens. You love the job so much that you don't want to leave.

In any event, I welcome the member's question in this area, the Stopping the Violence counselling for women. We have about 102 programs, and the number of service hours that we provide on a yearly basis is about 179,000. The number of women and children who were served between April 1, 2005, to December 31, 2005, amounted to about 4,356.

In terms of counselling for Children Who Witness Abuse, there are a number of programs as well, about 88 programs, and the number of service hours provided on an annual basis was 113,481. Again, this is in about 84 communities, and I understand that with children and then mothers, as well, a combined total of about 2,552 women, children, mothers and caregivers have been able to access that service between April 1 and December 31, 2005.

Outreach services — 54 programs, 58,148 service hours. The number of communities involved is 54. Again, in the time period April 1 to December 31, 2005, the number of women and children was 3,145.

Multicultural outreach services. The number of programs that we have in place is 13, with 12,649 the number of service hours, with ten communities participating. The number of women and children served between April 1 and December 31, 2005, is approximately 2,830.

D. Thorne: Where and by whom are these counselling services offered?

Hon. I. Chong: As I indicated, the number of communities... For example, for the STV, there are 86. The number of counselling for Children Who Witness Abuse — 84 communities participate. Outreach services — it's 54 communities. Multicultural outreach services, ten. They are around the province, and I would expect in many of the communities where you have STV, you also have the Children Who Witness Abuse.

There is a list of them. Perhaps it would be best if I got my staff to compile a list, if the member is trying to take a look at where they are around the province and which agency provides the services. I know that Public Accounts will eventually print that all, but we'll try to get in a format so that the member can have a look at that. I hope she'll indulge my staff while they work to get that ready for her in the next number of weeks.

D. Thorne: I'm assuming that a lot of this counselling does take place in transition houses as well as in other agencies. I'm wondering how many counsellors are actually employed to provide these services — how many FTEs or how many specific counsellors?

[1625]

Hon. I. Chong: It's fair to say that a number of the services are provided in the transition houses, but it's also fair to comment that a number of them are provided outside of the transition houses — perhaps in a centre where they rent space. The reason for that is that in some communities the transition houses only have so many bedrooms themselves, so they don't have a private room to do any counselling. I've heard that in some communities they want the mother and the child in different areas so that the counsellors can interact with them.

I've also found, in some places, a centre that offers childminding and ESL services — a variety of services. I think in Burnaby, in fact, there is such a service, the Burnaby family resource centre. They have a variety of services they provide for the community, so it's a community centre. They also may rent space and provide for that. Each community takes a look at those needs and will deal with them as they see fit.

In terms of FTEs. Again, this is a difficult one. I remember when I was up in... I believe it was Prince Rupert where I had visited, and they said that they would like to bring in a program to their transition house because they didn't want to drive into town where there was another resource centre that was providing some counselling services. They asked if we would provide additional support there. I believe that we have — and looked favourably on that.

When I said, "Do you need a full-time person?" they said: "Actually, we don't even have the capacity in terms of the trained person in the community to provide that service." So they had only requested a half-time person.

We will always, when making these decisions, try our very best to determine the needs of that community, rather than just say: "Here's the program. Here's

the one full-time person for you." If it doesn't work, we don't want to do that. We want to make sure that if a community has limited capacity and is not able to expand, then we'll use the dollars to go to another community where perhaps that works better.

We hear from our service providers throughout the year, and we encourage them to contact our ministry to let us know how well they're doing so that they can look at ways to enhance their program. Sometimes it's not a matter of increasing dollars, even, it's just enhancing it and how it works best for them. Sometimes it's bringing programs together, sometimes in a transition house, sometimes moving it out, as I say, to a centre where it works better for the benefit of the child and the mother.

D. Thorne: Well, what I was actually looking for was the number of counsellors that are employed currently to provide these services.

Hon. I. Chong: I was trying to share with the member the variations that occur, community around community. Because of that, it is very difficult to have the actual number of staff or contractors, because some organizations, while they may get dollars for one FTE, may actually do job-sharing. So there could be two people, or it could even be three people that they use. They may hire people on a contract basis because of the community they live in if they don't have the people they need for that particular program.

We do attempt to fund service hours, and then we leave it up to the organization to see how that works out to an FTE. Again, we're trying to give them the flexibility that we can.

If the member feels that she would like absolute numbers, we can try to provide that. But I think they wouldn't add any value to that other than the fact that if we take a look at the number of service hours, monitoring the number of service hours would give us a better opportunity to see how we can deal with capacity or enhance the program, if that's necessary. But if the member is absolutely intent on having that, we'll see what we can provide. I'm just worried that it may not provide the clarity that she is seeking.

D. Thorne: Thank you, and I'll look forward to getting those numbers.

Outreach services are also provided through your department. I'm wondering where these services are housed. Are they found in transition houses or in women centres or in other organizations?

[1630]

Hon. I. Chong: When it comes to outreach services, they are provided in a variety of ways. We contract out to people, and there might be outreach services that a transition house is able to provide, or it could be another women-serving service agency or simply in a centre where a variety of services are provided.

In terms of the multicultural outreach services, in particular, the service delivery is to ensure that we can

help identify a woman's need and then make referrals to other appropriate services, providing her with information that would help her obtain services. It could also ensure that there was public education regarding violence against women. Outreach services can also entail accompanying a woman to appointments, if necessary, and translating for her.

The multicultural outreach services for immigrant and visible minority women are available in a number of communities. Perhaps if I just share that with the member: Abbotsford; Delta; Maple Ridge; Mission; New Westminster; North Vancouver; Richmond; Squamish; Surrey — two services there; and Vancouver — three different kinds of services there.

Again, for this particular multicultural outreach, there are services that are provided in a variety of languages. I'm hesitant to read them all into *Hansard*, because I may not pronounce them correctly myself, but I can tell from this that about 20 different languages are provided for. I'm sure we will hear, from time to time, requests for an additional language, and we will always take a look and see how we might be able to accommodate that.

D. Thorne: Yes, and last year in estimates I was looking through the debate, and I saw that you had undertaken a review of the availability of services provided to women in languages other than English. I'm assuming that the review is complete and that the information from it is what you were just reading into the record. Is that correct, or is there still a review going on?

Hon. I. Chong: As a result of having that review, we now provide services in ten communities and 20 different languages. As a result of the funding increase that we were able to receive, we've added eight new services to bring the total number of multicultural services available to 13 from where it was at, which would have been five.

D. Thorne: I'm also looking at the violence prevention programs which your ministry funds. Those are the programs that I was referring to earlier when I said that I had received some correspondence from a few different... I only have copies of this correspondence that was sent to your ministry, and I did want to refer to it, because I thought it summed up very well my concerns about one-time funding.

It isn't that I think there's anything intrinsically wrong with grants for needs assessment and things like that, but I think there's a real fear in the community that when funds are given on a one-time basis to set up a program, it sometimes in itself almost creates a need.... It doesn't create the need; it creates the capacity to deal with the need, and then the money is gone.

[1635]

The same thing happens in other social service areas, as you know, like around child care issues. Without core operational funding, people are often afraid to actually start a program that would be of benefit to people in the community.

I will refer to the letter in a sec, but I was wondering the total of disbursed funds and the number of grants that were distributed this year. I actually have a backgrounder here. This may be all of the grants; I'm not sure. I have a backgrounder from March 8, 2006. I guess I'm wondering: is this the total number of grants, and what is the total amount of money that was disbursed through the safety grant?

Hon. I. Chong: On January 9 we had announced \$1 million for the Community Action for Women's Safety grants to fund community-based prevention projects. While I appreciate the member suggesting that one-time grants are problematic, if one-time grants were not made available then what you would have sometimes, based on some fiscal challenges that are there, would be that we would only continue to fund existing programs and never have the opportunity to look beyond that to see whether there isn't a new program out there.

This was designed to look at new programs, and we try to make it very clear, as well, when these are awarded, that they are one-time. So while I appreciate that it may be difficult if an agency feels they cannot work on a particular project that with a one-time grant, they may have to look elsewhere for funding that is more sustainable in the long term.

We wanted to encourage a number of agencies to provide women's safety programs called Setting the Direction for new and innovative approaches to address women's safety. Some dollars were available to sustain their efforts, and in other times there were dollars available to create and strengthen their community partnerships. Sometimes, as well, a program does start out; it's particularly successful. They are looking to get community partnerships, but these dollars will come and act as a bridge until that happens. Perhaps the following year they don't need the moneys that we were providing as a one-time grant.

We make it very clear so that the agencies or the organizations know that these are one-time dollars, and the next year we're able to look at or focus on another area. As I say, this year we focused on four particular, distinct women populations: immigrant women, visible minority women, women with disabilities and older women. Next year we may find that another area demands our attention and focus, so I would want to be able to have the opportunity to speak with people in the community to see what happens.

This was the first time that we were able to do this, and from all accounts I do believe we had some very good, positive response. We'll have an opportunity to learn from a number of these projects. We'll have an opportunity to also look at best practices, and we are going to hold a best practices conference in the fall to make sure we bring everyone together, and they can share with us these ideas. Again, it's all about being able to look forward and plan.

The \$1 million ended up actually being \$1,004,340.54 — if the member wants the exact pennies that my staff have been able to provide.

The best practices symposium we are planning to have occur in the fall, in September. As I say, that will be the opportunity for these various organizations to come together and share best practices, and I'm looking forward to learning from what they've done.

D. Thorne: Other than the four target areas — I also got that information in my briefing — are there other specific funding criteria for getting a grant? In other words, who would be eligible to get the grants, and I'm asking now for a specific reason?

Hon. I. Chong: I neglected, when I mentioned the groups.... It was the visible minority, immigrant women, women with disabilities and older women and, also, aboriginal women.

[1640]

When we determined the program and how we would look at applicants, we determined that the eligible applicants should be first nation bands and councils, aboriginal organizations and societies, not-for-profit community organizations and even provincial associations. They were the eligible applicants that we were hoping the applicants would send in their requests for.

D. Thorne: As I said, I have a copy of the grant recipients. I actually was contacted by a woman who was very concerned, wondering under which eligibility criteria three of these recipients received funding — these would be three specific groups targeted specifically for men — and how they fit into the criteria.

I can tell you which ones they are, if you don't have a list right there with you. One was the Ending Relationship Abuse Society of B.C.... No, two were to that society. The other was Deltassist. They were for three different programs for men — educational resources, information bulletins on treatment for men who use violence in relationships; a provincewide analysis of current service delivery systems of services for assaultive men; and reducing and preventing risk of violence to women through teaching men about healthy relationships. These were groups for self-referred men.

I guess she's from an agency that may or may not have received money — I'm afraid I don't know that. Apparently, there have been some questions coming to her agency about this.

Hon. I. Chong: When we set out the criteria, as I say, we wanted to focus and have projects there to support women who are most at risk, including aboriginal women, immigrant and visible minority women, older women, women with disabilities. In ensuring that those projects support those women who are at risk, we wanted to ensure that the projects did exactly that. It didn't exclude a project that may deal with involving men who, in fact, needed to be a part of the prevention of violence against women.

The projects themselves were evaluated based on what they would provide in terms of going towards supporting the women who are at most risk. If it meant

that that particular program would help reduce the violence against those women at risk, then that program would have been eligible to receive a grant.

D. Thorne: Well, I think one of the concerns that this woman told me about is their concern that more of these projects will receive funding in the future. One of the largest grants, \$50,000, did go to a program for men — abusive and assaultive men. Perhaps the women's ministry is not the place to be funding these programs when there is such a shortage of money for women's programs in the province. I mean, there'll never be enough money. I recognize that and we all recognize that, but perhaps the Solicitor General's department or somewhere else might be a better place for funding for men who are breaking the law. Let's keep our funding criteria more for women under this particular ministry.

[1645]

I guess my final question around this would be: do you anticipate continuing to fund these kinds of programs, or do you have concerns yourself and are looking at probably using some of your cross-ministerial initiatives to move those out into another ministry?

Hon. I. Chong: Well, I would hope that the member would agree that there are a variety of organizations that are run by men, that are run by women, that are run by both men and women. But the most important aspect is that organizations that are eligible for funding for particular projects and are working to stop violence against women are deserving of attention and, perhaps, support.

If the complaint that the member received is to do with one specific contract, then I appreciate her bringing it to my attention. When we evaluate — we will evaluate them and have our symposium in September — that will, I would certainly imagine, come to our attention.

As I say, there are many organizations that are working to stop violence against women. I think that is the very basic premise upon which we are going to move ahead. After all, it is about community action for women's safety. This particular program that was announced in January was to encourage community-based programs and was announced as one-time dollars, as she has very rightly stated a number of times.

I want to suggest or provide to her that for the organizations that have received these one-time dollars for these programs, there isn't a guarantee that they would receive dollars in a following year, because we haven't designed what we may be doing in a subsequent year. We have an allocation to look at various initiatives that will allow us to deal with safety for women and prevention of violence. That's why we made it very clear in January that these are one-time dollars.

If the member's concern is that this organization will receive ongoing funding, then she herself has already made the comment that this is not ongoing funding. It is one-time. I appreciate that she's concerned about this particular organization because she's re-

ceived a complaint from someone in her community. We certainly will watch and evaluate how that program was delivered and their measurables and outcomes as a result of the dollars they received. I appreciate her bringing that to our attention.

D. Thorne: You know, I don't want to suggest that there's been any complaint about these particular grants, because it's a more philosophical issue, as I was talking about in the beginning.

I've worked in community social services for practically my whole life, and Deltassist is a wonderful agency. I would never ever suggest otherwise. But I think it's a philosophical issue. I have to agree with the woman who brought it forward, and I guess I'll have to disagree with the ministry's position on this, then. I haven't actually disagreed with that much that's been said today. I think we're all working for the same thing, in essence.

I do believe that a lot of the programs.... I have worked in a lot of agencies that have had programs for men who have been assaultive. It's often part of their sentencing, etc. I happen to believe — and I think there are a lot of women's groups out there struggling with very little funding and doing wonderful work — that if men are sentenced to do these kinds of groups or if they're breaking the law, as I said earlier, the money must be found somewhere else. It shouldn't come out of funding that's available to women's groups. I just want to state that I feel really strongly about that.

I think those groups are valuable. I think that some of the men who partake in these groups probably do benefit. I think some of them just go. We all know that some of them just go because they have to go, because the judge has said: "You have to go, or else you're going to jail."

I think they should pay for it themselves, or the money must come from another source. It shouldn't come out of the scarce resources that are available to women who are struggling to run programs on very little. I just wanted to get it into the record that I feel that way.

[1650]

This letter, which I referred to earlier, is from my women's resource society. Actually, it's the Tri-City Women's Resource Society in Port Coquitlam, which as you know, has a full range of programming and has managed to keep its women's centre open by doing some creative bookkeeping and physically moving some offices around and into one location.

This letter was sent to your ministry on March 8, and it was specifically around the community action grants that we've been referring to for the last little while. The concerns were raised.... You probably don't have the letter with you, but I'm sure you have it. It's a very well-written letter by the executive director of this society, Carol Metz-Murray, who has been doing a yeoman's job at the women's centre and is really keeping things going very, very well.

She is concerned, and the board there is concerned, and I think she sums up very well the concerns of

many other people that I've spoken to in Prince George and Kamloops, as well as around the lower mainland and in Victoria, around one-time-only grants and how they affect the agencies that apply for them. I'm wondering: can I read a few points of this into the record?

Several concerns that I raised with you regarding the initiative. Firstly, increasing women's safety and decreasing relationship and domestic abuse requires the development and implementation of a longer-term strategy at the provincial level. Indeed, it is also required at the national and international levels, with a strong commitment from all governments to the eradication of domestic and relationship violence. It means looking seriously at issues that women face on a daily basis, such as continued gender biases, relationship violence, safety issues, discrimination and stereotyping.

Building effective program and service sustainability over the longer term, including within developed or developing partnerships, that is effective and includes preventative options requires a continuum of dedicated time and effort to harvest results. A six-month program only begins to scratch the surface. Capacity-building within communities and with communities takes commitment, time and ongoing resources.

Just as an aside here, I think this is what we're all looking to do — increase partnerships in communities and between agencies and do capacity-building and community development. We're all on the same page here. She continues:

Too often we find the social service sector overextended, working diligently to address needs and gaps in services with already limited resources, which significantly impacts sustainability of programs. Sustainability requires longer-term action to bring longer-term results.

Finally, the application process was onerous. It required considerable time to prepare each individual proposal. While I appreciate technology, especially when it makes my life easier, I found that I was encumbered.

Women's safety will continue to be compromised until we collectively stop setting women up for failure through initiatives that do not give them the real chance to succeed. Again, I do thank you for the initiative and the opportunities to build partnerships.

Then she goes on to talk about some things in the Tri-Cities that have come out as a result of the women's program. I just felt that Carol really summed up what I was trying to say earlier, and I did want to just reiterate that in case — I know how much paper crosses your desk — you might not have had the opportunity to read that.

That does sum up the concerns for one-time grants, and while I do appreciate the minister's comments that if we didn't do the one-time grants we would miss a lot of things.... There are certain kinds of initiatives that I think are fine for one-term grants, but when we give money for this kind of a program, I think it does create the ongoing need. I think that's a huge burden on these small, underfunded, understaffed agencies.

So with that, I will move on to women's centres — everybody's favourite topic. I'm wondering if the ministry has a number on how many women's centres applied for and received grants under this program? How many actual women's centres? I'll just stop there with that question for now.

[1655]

Hon. I. Chong: I appreciate her reading the comments of the letter that she received into the record. I just wanted to ensure that she is aware — I don't think we would disagree — that the thrust of the letter, which states this is an opportunity to build partnerships, is one that we do support, and I know that the member supports. At the end of the day, I guess, we will have to then evaluate whether or not this kind of initiative, these kinds of one-time grants in this particular objective that we were trying to achieve, is the way we should go.

That's one of the reasons why we're going to have the symposium in September and bring people together and determine that. If it is determined that there is a different way to offer or encourage new projects or new initiatives, and not this way, then I'd be happy to hear it. But, you know, I think it's important that we cannot always sit still and not look for new ways of encouraging the community to be involved.

The intended outcome of a number of these grants was to ensure that we do increase community awareness of domestic violence. It was to ensure that communities are there to address women's safety in the long term in their communities. Again, another intended outcome is that an effective community response to women's safety is achieved through collaborative partnerships involving, for example, non-profit organizations, local governments and even school districts.

We wanted to broaden people's thinking in new ways of increasing awareness and new ways of having partnerships, so that the prevention of violence can continue on. If we were to stay stagnant at what had been done 20 years ago or even ten years ago, I can tell you, we would always just be looking at what we're doing as opposed to trying to explore new ways.

Again, I am supportive of.... This is \$1 million out of our \$47 million budget that we put aside to ensure that we can have opportunities once a year to encourage new projects.

At the end of it, as I say, we'll evaluate that. If it's determined — and, in particular, the one group the member feels might or should have been funded from another ministry — that that should take place, we would be happy to advise the appropriate ministry, as in: "This is a good program. Perhaps you should look at it." But we would never know that if we don't even try to, at least, explore those opportunities.

I do think that we're on the same page here when it comes to wanting to look at many opportunities in as many ways as possible and explore those ways, to be creative, and at how we can create more awareness about violence against women and, of course, therefore move towards breaking the cycle of violence against women.

In terms of the community action grants — the member asked about the number of women's centres that had received funding. I believe there were 19 women's centres that actually submitted applications. Of those 19, seven of them were successful and did receive some funding.

D. Thorne: I guess it's correct to say that the ministry continues to provide funding for women's centres based on specific kinds of services. Would that be true?

Hon. I. Chong: Yes.

Interjection.

Hon. I. Chong: Yes, I know it's hardly worth standing down.

D. Thorne: If the ministry continues to fund women's centres, even in an ad hoc fashion, is this not an indication that centres provide essential services to women in their communities? And if so, why has the ministry cut the core funding to women's centres even though it is clear that these centres provide support services, advocacy and community development work and are often — most importantly, in my opinion — the only places that women can go for help in their communities?

Hon. I. Chong: I had mentioned at the beginning of my comments, when the member first provided her commentary.... In response to that, I had indicated that our government made a decision in 2002 that we would continue to fund initiatives in three priority service areas, and they were for our transition houses, our safe houses, our second-stage housing. It was for counselling for women experiencing abuse and counselling for children who witness abuse, because those are direct services that we wanted to ensure were maintained and sustained in the long term. As a result, that's why there was a lift in the base budget.

[1700]

If it were a women's centre or a resource society or whatever organization that provided those services, then we took a look and determined whether they would be eligible for funding for providing those services.

As I also indicated in my comments, you know, we did acknowledge that women's centres do provide a variety of services — the member herself indicated and listed that variety of services — but because we said we would focus taxpayers' dollars on direct, essential services in three priority-service areas, that was the decision that was made.

The member also indicated that advocacy was provided in women's centres. While that is certainly, as well, an important aspect, it was not a priority in terms of what we were wanting and our government was committed to providing for. When I meet with representatives of women's centres, I have said — and I have been consistent in this — that I was always open and receptive to ideas they had in terms of a program, a direct service that they felt could be looked at. I was willing to entertain those kinds of ideas and see how we might be able to fund that.

To be quite honest, I don't always hear back from the centres, other than the fact that they want the funding restored without necessarily providing a direct service. I maintained that I wanted to look at direct

services, so that's one of the reasons why we put out the Community Action for Women's Safety grants and also, as a result, why I encouraged a number of women's centres to send in an application. If they did feel that this was an opportunity to build partnership and capacity to provide a service, then certainly we would want to take a look at it.

I continue to hear from women's centres. Perhaps the member hears from them more frequently than I do, and I fully understand that. But we want to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are focused on those three priority-service areas. Then on an annual basis we'll also take a look at how we can encourage new projects and new initiatives that, again, will deal with prevention of violence against women.

D. Thorne: Well, it certainly is difficult, I'm sure, for most women's centres to show that they're doing direct service or specific programming. Most of them, I think, do house specific programs. I certainly know that the women's centre in Coquitlam does. You know, they have the Victim Services programs and many other programs.

I know that advocacy is not considered a direct service, but one of the things that immediately springs to my mind where advocacy is sort of a direct service is with all the cuts to legal aid. The women's centres used to provide that service to women. They would go to court with them. They would help them through the process, help them find a source of free legal aid or whatever. But I recognize that advocacy wouldn't fit a direct service, wouldn't fit under the three new criteria, so it would be a problem.

While I'm sure they do appreciate getting a grant — if their centre is still open.... I know that the centre in Kamloops is only open one day a week, and that's a huge problem because they still have to pay the rent, unfortunately. You know, when you start talking about rent and other administrative costs, that's where you run into problems, again, with grants, because usually there isn't money built in for administration. You can't have a resource centre existing on new-initiative money or grant money, because you don't have the administrative costs built into that, so it's a huge problem.

During the estimates process last fall, another thing I noticed when I was reading through was that the minister stated that a number of women's centres receive funding from other ministries to provide programs. I'm wondering which ministries provided those funds.

Hon. I. Chong: It would be a number of ministries that, perhaps, provide victim-based counselling services, so the Attorney General or the Solicitor General's ministry could be part of that. Even the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance or the Ministry of Children and Families may provide dollars for those centres if they're providing a direct service or they have a contract to provide particular services as well. There could be, as I say, child care spaces that could be there.

[1705]

Unfortunately, I don't receive the financial statements of all the various centres. I think that would be, perhaps, the best source to find out where their funding sources are and, also, to see whether in fact the centre has received dollars from donations or from local governments.

I'm not diminishing the work that does occur in women's centres, but we wanted to be very clear that we needed to be able to focus dollars in these particular priority areas. As a result, we have been able to ensure that our government has provided critical new services for women where none existed before and, therefore, also enhance some existing services. It's given us an opportunity to look at that and to do that.

A number of the women's centre societies do continue to receive government funding. They may also receive one-time grants through the gaming proceeds, if they are looking to do some capital improvements. I know that occurs.

Without actually looking at all the centres' financial statements, I can't give the member a comprehensive list of what amounts are received from what ministries. Perhaps when the public accounts are produced it may provide more insight as to what contracts were let to all the various agencies. That might also be more helpful.

Again, I have stated, not just on the record but as I meet with women-serving agencies, that I'm always receptive and open to ideas of new initiatives or programs that will deal with prevention of violence against women and children.

D. Thorne: Well, I'm surprised that the minister is not aware which ministries provided these funds or which women's centres received them. They were referred to specifically in the estimates last fall. I mean, those would be the cross-government initiatives that you're talking about. That's what I had assumed until the minister answered my question — that this is work that would be undertaken. Perhaps I don't clearly understand what cross-ministry initiatives are out of a specific ministry like the women's program. Does that not mean that you're working with other ministries to have services delivered through another ministry or to meet a need for women in a community or in the province?

Hon. I. Chong: Perhaps I misunderstood what she was specifically looking for. I thought she wanted to know which centre received what amount of dollars from what particular ministry, and I don't particularly track that, because if a particular women's centre chose not to apply or request funding from a ministry that they previously had — and that can change from time to time....

What I did say last year is that there are a number of ministries that do provide funding for programs and that those ministries ask for applicants to come forward to provide that particular service. I thought that's what the member was asking for — specifically, who and what centre received what amount from each specific ministry. And if she's wanting a list.... That's why I made the comment that perhaps that would be better

determined by having a look at the actual financial statements of a centre, because they will see all the various grants they receive.

As she knows, these societies are always filling out applications for various sources of income when new programs are there. There are some that do receive ongoing funding, as well, if that particular service is provided. Should a resource centre or society no longer provide the service because they choose not to or they don't have the capacity to, then that would be gone. Again, I'm not tracking that.

When we deal with cross-government initiatives, it is about talking to my colleagues and suggesting to them that while we provide this part of the service, this other kind of service needs also to be considered. This is how we speak or act with our other colleagues and say: "This is a program that you may wish to look at."

[1710]

The member already had stated that, when she was speaking about the letter of complaint she had received about one particular contract that was let. I indicated to her that's after the symposium and the evaluation and alluded to the fact that we determined that perhaps that program should be covered in a different ministry. We're able, then, to talk to another minister and say: "This is what we discovered. This appears to be a program that should be supportable." Then we can go to that minister and to his or her ministry and say, "Here's an opportunity to take a look at this," and suggest that they look at enhancing services in that area.

Working cross-government means, absolutely, ensuring that we don't just deliver one program, not aware that there's an opportunity to take a look at enhancing another service that another ministry has program dollars to provide for.

D. Thorne: Thank you for enlightening me a bit about that. I think I'm going to take advantage of your staff in the future to better understand how those kinds of initiatives work and how, perhaps, I could help to make them work even better. We'll look at that.

Certainly, we know that most women's centres that faced a funding crunch have been required to expand their services in order to keep their doors open. I'm told, for instance, that the 100 Mile House and District Women's Centre has been required to make up for their cuts by expanding services to all genders. Now, I'm not absolutely sure what that means. You may know.

Unfortunately, the member for that region just left, just as I was going to ask the question. I was hoping he would be able to enlighten us as to that. I know that this kind of thing must detract from the services that they are offering and is quite a burden on them. They are one of the centres that has contacted me around getting core funding restored.

I also wanted to make a comment about local governments. I think the ministry has received several requests from local government about restoring funding to women's centres. The Thompson-Nicola regional district has asked that the government restore funding back to 2002 levels. When the North Shore Women's

Centre was threatened by closure after the funding was cut, North Shore council responded by providing the centre with a rent-free facility. Then they passed a resolution calling on the provincial government to also restore funding.

There are a lot of concerns out there in the community, even on the part of local government, that their women's centres were providing a service that has left a gap in their communities and is not being filled by anybody else. In light of all that I have said, I'm going to ask the minister again: will she listen to local governments, the women's community and the opposition, myself as a representative and at least consider getting her government to please consider restoring the \$1.7 million funding to women's centres in the future?

Hon. I. Chong: I appreciate the comments that the member has made. I have indicated on a number of occasions during our debate this afternoon that I have been open to the idea of looking at programs and services that are being provided — whether they be from women's centres or any other organizations that provide direct services in our three priority-service areas — or looking at new programs to deal with the prevention of violence against women.

We made it very clear in 2002 and then provided a two-year time frame for the centres to look at their community and to look at partnerships within their community. I do believe that some have been innovative. Some have been able to look at their space requirements, and some have actually been able to partner with other organizations and find some savings in that regard. That's what we certainly encourage them to do. Others have been able to have foundations that have been supportive of their organizations.

Every community is different. I believe it's important that we can look at them on a case-by-case basis but still with the underlying principle that we want to ensure that the direct, essential services our dollars are being provided for are in that area. I want the member to know that we're willing to hear new and innovative ideas. The fact that she's speaking for women's centres to just return core funding is not, I would say, a new innovative idea.

[1715]

D. Thorne: Well, it doesn't sound as if the minister will commit to reinstating the funding. It sounds as if she does acknowledge, though, that the centres did provide a vital service. Some of them still continue to do so. I'm wondering if the minister would consider conducting a review of funding to women's centres.

Hon. I. Chong: Can I ask the member to be more explicit as to what kind of review she is expecting that we conduct? I'm not clear on what, specifically, she is expecting the outcome to be on such a review.

D. Thorne: To be more specific, I'm assuming — I may be wrong — that the ministry keeps track of the women's centres and the services they are providing in

some way — the ones that are still open. I'm not exactly clear how many that is. I'm going to ask that question as well — if you do know that. I'm assuming that you do keep track of the women's centres. They are offering services that are being funded by the province in different ways.

I'm wondering if a review of funding to women's centres might let us know who is in trouble because of the cuts — who is going to be able to go on applying for one-time-only grants, for instance. Or will they be closed a year from now? Just in general, the general health, I guess, of women's services across the province. Who are providing them? And what bits and pieces of funding are going to the centres that are open and providing necessary services?

Hon. I. Chong: If I understand the member correctly, I think she is wanting, perhaps, an inventory of the women's centres that are receiving funding from our ministry, rather than a review, as she's indicated. I'd be happy to provide her with a list of these women's centres that continue to receive funding and administer the programs in our priority areas — such as our safe housing, our STV program, our Children Who Witness Abuse program and other outreach services.

I have a list of those services being provided out of our ministry, but there are, as I say, centres that exist that perhaps receive funding from foundations or other sources, and because they don't receive money directly from our ministry, it may be an operation doing that. I was aware, when I originally became the minister responsible in this area in 2004, that while the core funding the member refers to dealt with 37 women's centres, there were in fact more than that around the province. The previous government had only funded those particular ones, so there were certainly many other centres around the province that weren't being funded by government sources or through the ministry in a particular way.

There are centres or resource societies, certainly, that currently exist and that receive some funding from our ministry, from other ministries, perhaps from no government sources. Or perhaps they receive federal dollars as well. I don't have all the information on that. I don't know whether it would be possible to get all that information. Some of these societies spring up. Some of them do close down. Or they merge with other community organizations to provide that particular service. So it is rather difficult to try to extract that.

What I do have is a list of the societies or the centres and resource societies that we do fund. I'm happy to provide that to the member if that's what will assist her.

D. Thorne: I would appreciate having a current, up-to-date list of those. I was also wondering about the other women's centres or the women's resource centres that you referred to, and it's clear now that you don't have that information for those centres. It's those centres that I'm most concerned about — that somehow we keep track of where they're at, basically. Are they getting any funding? Are they providing services?

[1720]

I'm coming at it, in my mind, more from a community point of view. I'm thinking of a specific community. Prince George might be a good example, because I was most recently there. I'm just thinking: when I go into Prince George, what do they have? What services do they have for women in Prince George?

If they have a centre or a resource centre, or whatever it's called, and it's not receiving funding from the Community Services Ministry, then we don't really have any information about it. If it's difficult for me to find a service when I go to Prince George — and I have all the resources in the world at hand — I can only imagine how difficult it is for one of the aboriginal women who live along Highway 16 to find a service when they really need it and they're perhaps in desperation.

I guess those are the centres I would like some kind of a review on — just for those community development and capacity-building reasons — in the different communities. If that's not available, then I'm actually finished with my women's centre questions. I'll sit down, because there may be an answer.

Hon. I. Chong: Always an answer.

Firstly, prior to the change in funding allocation, there were 37 women's centres that had received some provincial funding towards their annual operational costs. I've been advised that 32 of those centres still remain in operation, so apparently, they still receive funding from a variety of sources.

What I am looking at, because the member referenced Prince George in particular.... Back in 2004, when we made a list of the 37 centres, Prince George was not on the list. Going back into the '90s, where the member talks about funding for women's centres, back then it didn't receive any core funding. While I appreciate that she was up there visiting in Prince George, they had not received government funding, I guess, in 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999 and up until 2004, because they're not on the list, that I can see, where they received funding.

There might be an agency up there in Prince George that received dollars from our ministry to provide transition housing, safe housing or second-stage housing. In fact, I know there is, because when I visited Prince George, I visited a transition house and a resource centre up there. They were operating and receiving funds from sources but did not have a centre, as such, that received core funding back then.

I hope that helps the member somewhat. Again, it's somewhat difficult to do an inventory of all women's centres around the province and, in particular, when there were some that existed without any government funding even prior to the change that was implemented.

D. Thorne: I used a poor example, because I actually don't believe there ever was a women's centre in Prince George. I mean, there may have been one way, way back, but it just sprang into my mind as an example.

If you come into town, how do you find things? You know, if there's a women's centre, it's helpful, because they do referral and resource referral, etc.

I'm going to move on to another area in your service plan, which is mentoring women reaching their economic potential and, specifically, the mentoring program as a key strategy. I'm wondering how much funding this program is receiving. Does it receive any funding other than your ministry funding?

Hon. I. Chong: Hon. Chair, before I answer that, I just wanted to reference the member's comment — the point that she makes about a woman who comes into a town not knowing where to go and, perhaps, expecting that the women's centre is the first place you go. Well, if some women's centres had office hours that closed at two or three o'clock in the afternoon, the woman coming into that town would still not be able to access that centre to find out where they would go. That's not always the case, but I do know that some centres, even prior to the allocation change, didn't necessarily have office hours that were conducive to the requests that came in.

[1725]

I want to share with the member that a new program being provided for is the new 211 number, the initiative that was announced by the Minister of Labour and Citizens' Services last month and that we're going to implement this fall. This new 211 service will be an easily accessible number that people will remember and recall.

That telephone line, which will therefore be more accessible than an actual physical place, will also provide information as to what service is necessary — that a person is looking for in the community. Therefore, we are working with the United Way around the province to gather a number of service agencies providing a number of services.

That should also provide another important tool for all communities around the province. We will be the only province that does this as a provincewide initiative. I know that some jurisdictions have tried this in a few cities. We're going to do this provincewide. I just wanted to share that with the member so that she also has some comfort, I guess, knowing that we're always looking at ways to enhance services.

The area that she canvassed about the mentoring program. As part of our \$12.5 million base lift, we had set aside about \$500,000 for a women's mentoring program, for empowering women to work — that is, having women have an opportunity to work in non-traditional roles — as well as for women who are re-entering the workforce.

I can just share with the member very quickly one particular program that I was very moved by and just recently attended a graduation ceremony for. It's the HardHats program that is in place. The HardHats program for a time dealt mostly with young men who were on income assistance and helped them get into the construction industry — the trades, which we know there is such a shortage of. We also felt that

women should be able to access that opportunity, so we engaged the particular program service provider to see whether it would take on a class of women to help them into the non-traditional roles as well.

When I attended the graduation ceremony, I can tell the members that the personal stories that were shared certainly left many of us with some.... Well, not all of us left there with a dry eye, shall we say, because there were very moving stories. A woman said that six months ago she was slinging lattes, and now she was working with a Skil saw. She sees this as an opportunity to get her apprenticeship and then go on to a very promising career in the trade.

That's one of the mentoring programs that we've been able to look at, be supportive of and be involved in. We will look forward to any other ideas that come forward that will allow us to support women to participate in the vibrant economy that has been happening around the province.

D. Thorne: I'm wondering about mentors for this program. Have they been selected from a variety of professions — from trades to small business to lawyers and doctors — or are there just specific professions that the program is targeting?

Hon. I. Chong: Because it's new, we have tried to be broad in looking at the needs of women entering the workforce, so there will be some looking at traditional roles, some in non-traditional roles and those who might want to look at self-employment.

The service providers we have engaged are, first of all, Grant Thornton Hiring Solutions. They're the ones dealing with the HardHats program. The YWCA also has a mentoring program. The YWCA of Vancouver, I believe, is the provider. There's the Minerva Foundation which, as the member knows, is a very solid group of women from a variety of professions as well.

The Women's Enterprise Centre is based out of Kelowna but has operations around the province. They are very much encouraging women in the self-employment realm, because some women are finding that balancing work life and family life is very important. Self-employment sometimes seems the best avenue for them.

These are four of the service providers that we are working with now. Again, as with any program, it would be important for us to evaluate that at the end of that time period to see how it's working and what we may do to enhance the program or to make some minor changes, if necessary.

[1730]

D. Thorne: As the minister well knows, the wage gap is still a huge reality for working women across the country — across the world, actually. I know that the Iyer report, which was commissioned by the government in 2002, clarified this wage gap. So far, we have

not seen a response from the Attorney General, the Ministry of Labour or the Ministry of Community Services, which were the three ministries that took responsibility for the report.

I'm wondering if we can expect to see a response to the recommendations that were made and if the Community Services Ministry women's program is looking at pursuing any projects or programs — or strategies, I should say — that might be aimed at shrinking this wage gap for women.

[D. Hayer in the chair.]

Hon. I. Chong: I want to respond to her comments about how there has not been a response. I believe that there was a response. The response from government in regards to the report that she referenced was that government was satisfied that the current section, section 12 of the B.C. Human Rights Code, provides the necessary protection for female workers in regards to wage discrimination. That's what we were attempting to address.

In terms of the wage gap, in part I think it has relationship to certain jobs that have a lower pay scale simply because of the job that they are. When it comes to the wages themselves, as opposed to the gender, they are just lower-paying jobs, which is one of the reasons why our mentoring program was designed to have more women in the non-traditional jobs.

In the construction trades, when you become an apprentice, it doesn't matter whether you're a woman or a man, you're going to get the same salary. But as I indicated to the member, the young lady that I spoke to.... If you were to compare what she was making prior to her entering into the construction trades — she was serving lattes — you can imagine that her salary serving lattes was a lot less than what she's going to make now as a woman in the trades — a very powerful, very positive woman. I was very happy to hear that.

I do want to also share with the member that based on the annual average hourly wage rate for full-time employees, the wage gap in 2004 has now been provided at 13.3 percent. It was 19.3 percent in 1997. There's been a significant improvement in regards to that. Women working full-time in British Columbia went from earning almost 81 percent of men's hourly wages in 1997 to almost 87 percent in 2004. That is, I think, a significant improvement, and I expect that it will continue to improve as the economy continues to improve as well.

Looking at the time and noting the hour, I was going to suggest that the committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 5:34 p.m.

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