



Second Session, 38th Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT OF  
DEBATES OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
(HANSARD)

**Tuesday, May 9, 2006**  
**Afternoon Sitting**  
**Volume 11, Number 4**

THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

ISSN 0709-1281

**PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**  
(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

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

**SECOND SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT**

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
Honourable Bill Barisoff

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Premier and President of the Executive Council .....	Hon. Gordon Campbell
Minister of State for Intergovernmental Relations .....	Hon. John van Dongen
Deputy Premier and Minister of Education and Minister Responsible for Early Learning and Literacy .....	Hon. Shirley Bond
Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation .....	Hon. Tom Christensen
Minister of Advanced Education and Minister Responsible for Research and Technology .....	Hon. Murray Coell
Minister of Agriculture and Lands.....	Hon. Pat Bell
Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Multiculturalism.....	Hon. Wally Oppal, QC
Minister of Children and Family Development.....	Hon. Stan Hagen
Minister of State for Childcare .....	Hon. Linda Reid
Minister of Community Services and Minister Responsible for Seniors' and Women's Issues.....	Hon. Ida Chong
Minister of Economic Development and Minister Responsible for the Asia-Pacific Initiative and the Olympics.....	Hon. Colin Hansen
Minister of Employment and Income Assistance .....	Hon. Claude Richmond
Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources .....	Hon. Richard Neufeld
Minister of State for Mining.....	Hon. Bill Bennett
Minister of Environment and Minister Responsible for Water Stewardship and Sustainable Communities .....	Hon. Barry Penner
Minister of Finance.....	Hon. Carole Taylor
Minister of Forests and Range and Minister Responsible for Housing .....	Hon. Rich Coleman
Minister of Health .....	Hon. George Abbott
Minister of Labour and Citizens' Services .....	Hon. Michael de Jong
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General.....	Hon. John Les
Minister of Small Business and Revenue and Minister Responsible for Regulatory Reform.....	Hon. Rick Thorpe
Minister of Tourism, Sport and the Arts .....	Hon. Olga Illich
Minister of Transportation.....	Hon. Kevin Falcon

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

Leader of the Official Opposition .....	Carole James
Deputy Speaker .....	Sindi Hawkins
Assistant Deputy Speaker .....	Sue Hammell
Deputy Chair, Committee of the Whole.....	Harry Bloy
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly .....	E. George MacMinn, OBC, QC
Clerk Assistant .....	Robert Vaive
Clerk Assistant and Law Clerk .....	Ian D. Izard, QC
Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees .....	Craig H. James
Clerk Assistant and Committee Clerk .....	Kate Ryan-Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms.....	A.A. Humphreys
Director, Hansard Services .....	Jo-Anne Kern
Legislative Librarian .....	Jane Taylor
Legislative Comptroller.....	Dan Arbic

## ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS

Abbott, Hon. George (L)..... Shuswap  
Austin, Robin (NDP)..... Skeena  
Bains, Harry (NDP)..... Surrey-Newton  
Barisoff, Hon. Bill (L)..... Penticton-Okanagan Valley  
Bell, Hon. Pat (L)..... Prince George North  
Bennett, Hon. Bill (L)..... East Kootenay  
Black, Iain (L)..... Port Moody-Westwood  
Bloy, Harry (L)..... Burquitlam  
Bond, Hon. Shirley (L)..... Prince George-Mount Robson  
Brar, Jagrup (NDP)..... Surrey-Panorama Ridge  
Campbell, Hon. Gordon (L)..... Vancouver-Point Grey  
Cantelon, Ron (L)..... Nanaimo-Parksville  
Chong, Hon. Ida (L)..... Oak Bay-Gordon Head  
Chouhan, Raj (NDP)..... Burnaby-Edmonds  
Christensen, Hon. Tom (L)..... Okanagan-Vernon  
Chudnovsky, Dave (NDP)..... Vancouver-Kensington  
Coell, Hon. Murray (L)..... Saanich North and the Islands  
Coleman, Hon. Rich (L)..... Fort Langley-Aldergrove  
Conroy, Katrine (NDP)..... West Kootenay-Boundary  
Coons, Gary (NDP)..... North Coast  
Cubberley, David (NDP)..... Saanich South  
de Jong, Hon. Michael (L)..... Abbotsford-Mount Lehman  
Dix, Adrian (NDP)..... Vancouver-Kingsway  
Evans, Corky (NDP)..... Nelson-Creston  
Falcon, Hon. Kevin (L)..... Surrey-Cloverdale  
Farnworth, Mike (NDP)..... Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain  
Fleming, Rob (NDP)..... Victoria-Hillside  
Fraser, Scott (NDP)..... Alberni-Qualicum  
Gentner, Guy (NDP)..... Delta North  
Hagen, Hon. Stan (L)..... Comox Valley  
Hammell, Sue (NDP)..... Surrey-Green Timbers  
Hansen, Hon. Colin (L)..... Vancouver-Quilchena  
Hawes, Randy (L)..... Maple Ridge-Mission  
Hawkins, Sindi (L)..... Kelowna-Mission  
Hayer, Dave S. (L)..... Surrey-Tynehead  
Hogg, Gordon (L)..... Surrey-White Rock  
Horgan, John (NDP)..... Malahat-Juan de Fuca  
Horning, Al (L)..... Kelowna-Lake Country  
Ilich, Hon. Olga (L)..... Richmond Centre  
James, Carole (NDP)..... Victoria-Beacon Hill  
Jarvis, Daniel (L)..... North Vancouver-Seymour  
Karagianis, Maurine (NDP)..... Esquimalt-Metchosin  
Krog, Leonard (NDP)..... Nanaimo  
Krueger, Kevin (L)..... Kamloops-North Thompson  
Kwan, Jenny Wai Ching (NDP)..... Vancouver-Mount Pleasant  
Lali, Harry (NDP)..... Yale-Lillooet  
Lee, Richard T. (L)..... Burnaby North  
Lekstrom, Blair (L)..... Peace River South  
Les, Hon. John (L)..... Chilliwack-Sumas  
Macdonald, Norm (NDP)..... Columbia River-Revelstoke  
MacKay, Dennis (L)..... Bulkley Valley-Stikine  
Mayencourt, Lorne (L)..... Vancouver-Burrard  
McIntyre, Joan (L)..... West Vancouver-Garibaldi  
Neufeld, Hon. Richard (L)..... Peace River North  
Nuraney, John (L)..... Burnaby-Willingdon  
Oppal, Hon. Wally, QC (L)..... Vancouver-Fraserview  
Penner, Hon. Barry (L)..... Chilliwack-Kent  
Polak, Mary (L)..... Langley  
Puchmayr, Chuck (NDP)..... New Westminster  
Ralston, Bruce (NDP)..... Surrey-Whalley  
Reid, Hon. Linda (L)..... Richmond East  
Richmond, Hon. Claude (L)..... Kamloops  
Robertson, Gregor (NDP)..... Vancouver-Fairview  
Roddick, Valerie (L)..... Delta South  
Routley, Doug (NDP)..... Cowichan-Ladysmith  
Rustad, John (L)..... Prince George-Omineca  
Sather, Michael (NDP)..... Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows  
Simons, Nicholas (NDP)..... Powell River-Sunshine Coast  
Simpson, Bob (NDP)..... Cariboo North  
Simpson, Shane (NDP)..... Vancouver-Hastings  
Sultan, Ralph (L)..... West Vancouver-Capilano  
Taylor, Hon. Carole (L)..... Vancouver-Langara  
Thorne, Diane (NDP)..... Coquitlam-Maillardville  
Thorpe, Hon. Rick (L)..... Okanagan-Westside  
Trevena, Claire (NDP)..... North Island  
van Dongen, Hon. John (L)..... Abbotsford-Clayburn  
Whittred, Katherine (L)..... North Vancouver-Lonsdale  
Wyse, Charlie (NDP)..... Cariboo South  
Yap, John (L)..... Richmond-Steveston

## LIST OF MEMBERS BY RIDING

Abbotsford-Clayburn..... Hon. John van Dongen  
Abbotsford-Mount Lehman..... Hon. Michael de Jong  
Alberni-Qualicum..... Scott Fraser  
Bulkley Valley-Stikine..... Dennis MacKay  
Burnaby North..... Richard T. Lee  
Burnaby-Edmonds..... Raj Chouhan  
Burnaby-Willingdon..... John Nuraney  
Burquitlam..... Harry Bloy  
Cariboo North..... Bob Simpson  
Cariboo South..... Charlie Wyse  
Chilliwack-Kent..... Hon. Barry Penner  
Chilliwack-Sumas..... Hon. John Les  
Columbia River-Revelstoke..... Norm Macdonald  
Comox Valley..... Hon. Stan Hagen  
Coquitlam-Maillardville..... Diane Thorne  
Cowichan-Ladysmith..... Doug Routley  
Delta North..... Guy Gentner  
Delta South..... Valerie Roddick  
East Kootenay..... Hon. Bill Bennett  
Esquimalt-Metchosin..... Maurine Karagianis  
Fort Langley-Aldergrove..... Hon. Rich Coleman  
Kamloops..... Hon. Claude Richmond  
Kamloops-North Thompson..... Kevin Krueger  
Kelowna-Lake Country..... Al Horning  
Kelowna-Mission..... Sindi Hawkins  
Langley..... Mary Polak  
Malahat-Juan de Fuca..... John Horgan  
Maple Ridge-Mission..... Randy Hawes  
Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows..... Michael Sather  
Nanaimo..... Leonard Krog  
Nanaimo-Parksville..... Ron Cantelon  
Nelson-Creston..... Corky Evans  
New Westminster..... Chuck Puchmayr  
North Coast..... Gary Coons  
North Island..... Claire Trevena  
North Vancouver-Lonsdale..... Katherine Whittred  
North Vancouver-Seymour..... Daniel Jarvis  
Oak Bay-Gordon Head..... Hon. Ida Chong  
Okanagan-Vernon..... Hon. Tom Christensen  
Okanagan-Westside..... Hon. Rick Thorpe  
Peace River North..... Hon. Richard Neufeld  
Peace River South..... Blair Lekstrom  
Penticton-Okanagan Valley..... Hon. Bill Barisoff  
Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain..... Mike Farnworth  
Port Moody-Westwood..... Iain Black  
Powell River-Sunshine Coast..... Nicholas Simons  
Prince George North..... Hon. Pat Bell  
Prince George-Mount Robson..... Hon. Shirley Bond  
Prince George-Omineca..... John Rustad  
Richmond Centre..... Hon. Olga Ilich  
Richmond East..... Hon. Linda Reid  
Richmond-Steveston..... John Yap  
Saanich North and the Islands..... Hon. Murray Coell  
Saanich South..... David Cubberley  
Shuswap..... Hon. George Abbott  
Skeena..... Robin Austin  
Surrey-Cloverdale..... Hon. Kevin Falcon  
Surrey-Green Timbers..... Sue Hammell  
Surrey-Newton..... Harry Bains  
Surrey-Panorama Ridge..... Jagrup Brar  
Surrey-Tynehead..... Dave S. Hayer  
Surrey-Whalley..... Bruce Ralston  
Surrey-White Rock..... Gordon Hogg  
Vancouver-Burrard..... Lorne Mayencourt  
Vancouver-Fairview..... Gregor Robertson  
Vancouver-Fraserview..... Hon. Wally Oppal, QC  
Vancouver-Hastings..... Shane Simpson  
Vancouver-Kensington..... David Chudnovsky  
Vancouver-Kingsway..... Adrian Dix  
Vancouver-Langara..... Hon. Carole Taylor  
Vancouver-Mount Pleasant..... Jenny Wai Ching Kwan  
Vancouver-Point Grey..... Hon. Gordon Campbell  
Vancouver-Quilchena..... Hon. Colin Hansen  
Victoria-Beacon Hill..... Carole James  
Victoria-Hillside..... Rob Fleming  
West Kootenay-Boundary..... Katrine Conroy  
West Vancouver-Capilano..... Ralph Sultan  
West Vancouver-Garibaldi..... Joan McIntyre  
Yale-Lillooet..... Harry Lali



## CONTENTS

Tuesday, May 9, 2006  
Afternoon Sitting

### Routine Proceedings

	Page
Introductions by Members .....	4591
Statements (Standing Order 25B) .....	4592
Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation	
J. Kwan	
North Vancouver student leadership council	
K. Whittred	
Jeneece Edroff	
D. Cubberley	
Crossroads Hospice Society	
I. Black	
Saanich multicultural festival	
R. Fleming	
Darfur	
J. Nuraney	
Oral Questions.....	4594
Funding for 2010 Olympic Games	
H. Bains	
Hon. C. Hansen	
Auditor General oversight of Olympic Games costs	
C. James	
Hon. C. Hansen	
Hon. G. Campbell	
M. Farnworth	
J. Kwan	
Management of interface fire risks	
N. Macdonald	
Hon. R. Coleman	
B. Simpson	
Tabling Documents.....	4599
Forest Appeals Commission, annual report	
Petitions.....	4599
C. Puchmayr	
Committee of Supply.....	4599
Estimates: Ministry of Health ( <i>continued</i> )	
K. Conroy	
Hon. G. Abbott	

### Proceedings in the Douglas Fir Room

Committee of Supply.....	4614
Estimates: Ministry of Transportation ( <i>continued</i> )	
D. Chudnovsky	
Hon. K. Falcon	
R. Fleming	



TUESDAY, MAY 9, 2006

The House met at 2:03 p.m.

### Introductions by Members

**C. James:** Joining us in the House today are four guests from the Tzu Chi Foundation Canada. They are Gary Ho, the CEO of the foundation; Eric Hsu, the secretary of the foundation; Mack Miao, the public relations director; and Ken Chang, who is their cameraman.

I could be here all afternoon trying to list all of the things that the foundation is involved in, as they serve the community locally, nationally and internationally. Just a few of their activities include delivering meals at the Salvation Army, distributing food at food banks, visiting seniors homes, providing comfort for the homeless — including building housing, disaster relief and the most recent local fires in Burnaby. This foundation was out there providing direct support. Would the House please help make these people very welcome.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** It's not every day that I get to rise in the House and introduce the heart and soul of the health care system in British Columbia, but I get to do that today. It's a special pleasure to rise in the House and welcome some very special guests who are with us in the gallery. In honour of almost 40,000 nurses in B.C., the nursing directorate of the Ministry of Health invites six nurses, representing each of our six health authorities, to Victoria to celebrate National and International Nursing Week.

[1405]

Representing the Provincial Health Services Authority is Gail Ancill. Gail is a registered psychiatric nurse. She's from New Westminster. She's a nurse educator in neuropsychiatry at Riverview Hospital in Port Coquitlam. From the Vancouver Island Health Authority is Darcy Ross, a registered nurse. She's from Nanaimo. She's the team leader for public health nursing in Nanaimo, Ladysmith and Gabriola.

Representing Vancouver Coastal is Sargent Hayden, who's a registered nurse. He's from Vancouver, and he is the clinical coordinator at a residential care facility and at Insite, the supervised injection site in Vancouver. Representing Fraser Health is Janet Baillies, a registered nurse practitioner of Abbotsford. She's a nurse practitioner with the Clearbrook family practice.

Representing Interior Health is Gayle Filipenko, a licensed practical nurse of Penticton and an LPN at Penticton Regional Hospital. Representing Northern Health is Sarah Hanson, a registered psychiatric nurse. She's a clinical nurse educator at the Prince George eating disorders clinic.

It's remarkable to welcome these remarkable British Columbians to our Legislature. We're enormously proud of the work they do, and we're enormously proud of them. Would the House please make them welcome.

**C. Evans:** Today we have the honour of being visited by a newly married couple from the Sunshine Coast, who I think are very special to us all — wherever we live. Mr. White, in the front row up there — it's his birthday today, and he's 92 — is a third-generation British Columbian who pioneered the introduction of logging trucks on our coast and is a tireless community activist who also has found time in his later years to co-author a prize-winning book on the accounts of early logging.

Mrs. White is a distinguished journalist who has written five fine books under her professional name, Edith Iglauer, including the B.C. coast classic *Fishing with John*. The Whites were just married on February 25. They have been touring Vancouver Island, visiting relatives, and next week they're going to travel to New York to watch Mr. White's grandson graduate from Columbia University. After that, Mrs. White is going to get busy writing her autobiography. I would ask all the House to welcome these wonderful, newly married people.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Joining us in the House today is Jody Lesiuk. Jody is a writer at the public affairs bureau who this Friday will be taking her leave to give birth to her child. I want to say that Jody is one of those exceptional, truly expressive, incredibly creative.... I can't read this, Jody. Sorry.

She is someone who has made an exceptional contribution to us in government at the public affairs bureau. I know all the House will want to assure Jody that she has a safe delivery and an exceptional time as a mother with her new baby.

**D. Cubberley:** It's my pleasure and privilege today to introduce a very special guest with us in the gallery: Jenece Edroff, who's here with her parents Dennis and Angie Edroff. Jenece is a very special person, who recently received an important award — a B.C. Community Achievement Award, which was presented at Government House on April 26 — for her exemplary work in fundraising. I'll have a little bit more to say about that in a few moments.

I do want to say that the Edroffs live in Saanich in the Royal Oak area. They're constituents of mine. Will the House please join me in making them feel very welcome.

**J. Nuraney:** We have in the gallery today Yasmin and Mirza Juma. Yasmin works with the Neil Squire Foundation, an organization that helps people with disabilities in their computer skills and is also very well known for their innovations in that field. Would the House please join me in welcoming Yasmin and Mirza Juma.

[1410]

**C. Trevena:** In the House today are two people without whom I wouldn't be standing here. They're neither of them strangers to the Legislature. On the floor is former North Island MLA for 17 years and former Attorney General, Colin Gabelmann. In the gallery

is former researcher, constituency assistant to Rosemary Brown and Colin's wife, Robin Geary. I have been honoured by the advice, support and commitment they've given me over the last couple of years, and I continue to pick their very astute and very different political brains.

With them are Colin's long-lost sister, Veronica Fisher, and her husband Brian, who are visiting B.C., and Colin and Robin, for the first time. They, too, are in the gallery. I hope the House will make them all very welcome.

**R. Hawes:** In the gallery today is Mr. John Lang, who is the chair of the District of Mission economic development commission and the chair of the Spirit of B.C. committee for Mission. He is here with his wife Karen, who is away right now at meetings with Prospero Credit Union. John is here to watch our proceedings and hopefully learn something that he didn't know before. Welcome, John.

**R. Fleming:** Joining us in the gallery today — next to Mrs. and Mrs. White, in fact — is a parliamentarian visiting us: Ms. Rita Dionne-Marsolais, who is a member of the National Assembly for the constituency of Rosemount. She chairs the standing committee on public administration in that province, and she is an experienced person who is a former government minister of many portfolios. We're very pleased to have her joining us here in the assembly today. She is attending the 2006 summit on performance indicators. Would the House please make Ms. Dionne-Marsolais feel welcome.

**I. Black:** I have two introductions to make today. The first is a fellow parliamentarian. MLA Art Johnston, from the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, is with us. I had the pleasure of having dinner last night with Art and his wife Shirley, who are here for the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation meetings. I would ask that the House make a fellow parliamentarian feel most welcome amongst us.

The second introduction is also a lot of fun for me. I would like to welcome George Gillis, who is a constituent of mine, and his twin daughters, Jennifer and Rachelle, who I had the pleasure of seeing just before we came into the House this afternoon. They're visiting from the great community of Port Moody, and I'd ask you to make them feel welcome as well.

**A. Dix:** Last week I had the opportunity to tell the House about the extraordinary achievements of students at Windermere Community Secondary School. Today I have the honour to welcome teachers and students from Windermere here to Victoria.

**S. Hawkins:** I think there are not too many more people to introduce up in the gallery, but I would like to introduce a dear friend, Mr. Russ Rogers from Victoria, who is visiting the Legislature today to watch question period. I have had the pleasure of getting to know

Russ and his family over the last couple of years as we share a similar journey in our families.

**G. Robertson:** I've got two more. Joining us in the House today is one of my constituents, Geoff Meggs — no stranger to this House and now the executive director of the B.C. Federation of Labour — and also my good friend Mike Magee, who is a superb advocate for aboriginal and environmental issues. May the House please make them both welcome.

**L. Mayencourt:** It's very nice to have both current and former parliamentarians joining us today. Today we have Karn Manhas, who was the MLA for...

Interjections.

[1415]

**L. Mayencourt:** Thank you, sir.  
...Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain.

I think Karn was — is — the youngest person to ever retire from this job. Would the House please make him feel welcome.

We also have a gentleman whose name is Maurizio Bevilacqua. Maurizio is a Member of Parliament for the riding of Vaughan, which is just a little bit north of Toronto. He is running for the Liberal leadership. Would the House please make both of these fine, fine gentlemen feel welcome.

**Hon. R. Thorpe:** It's a great honour for me today to introduce a friend from Toronto visiting British Columbia for the very first time. Would the House please make Carol Wade feel very comfortable.

#### Statements (Standing Order 25b)

#### BUDDHIST COMPASSION RELIEF TZU CHI FOUNDATION

**J. Kwan:** The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year and is marking the event on May 13 with the first-ever Harmony Festival in Stanley Park. The philosophy behind the foundation is centred around the notion that it is with gratitude, respect and honour that you are afforded the opportunity to serve people who face adversities from a variety of circumstances. They seek to change lives, heal humanity and make the entire planet a better place.

Locally their efforts have resulted in donations totalling over \$6 million to organizations in British Columbia such as Vancouver's Children's Hospital, the Red Cross, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Salvation Army and, most recently, the victims of a fire in Burnaby. Worldwide they have provided some \$4 billion to different communities, individuals and families to assist in the challenges that they face.

The foundation enjoys a volunteer force of a million people in 40 locals across the globe. This weekend the



foundation will celebrate having the honour to serve with local events. The Harmony Festival will focus on the themes of harmony of hearts, harmony of communities and harmony of the earth. People are invited to join in the festival by attending the event at Lumbermen's Arch in Stanley Park on Saturday between 1 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. There will be a band, choirs, booths and exhibitions.

The foundation has decided to promote and celebrate harmony with smiles, joy and laughter. The festival will welcome people of all ages from all corners of the world, all religions and all races. In fact, people will also be invited to submit photographs of themselves — smiling. Those will be posted on a wall at the Stanley Park event and also on the foundation's website. The smiling faces of the opposition caucus along with the government caucus will be there as well. I have no doubt there will be others who will be smiling brightly at this event, and I invite everyone to come and join the festival.

#### NORTH VANCOUVER STUDENT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

**K. Whittred:** The North Vancouver student leadership council began as a student-driven initiative two years ago and includes every secondary school in the North Vancouver school district. It provides an opportunity for communications between students in different schools, the opportunity for leadership, and it provides a forum for student voices to be heard not only in North Vancouver but across the province.

The council has met with the superintendent, assistants and trustees of North Van. In April, four representatives from this group had the opportunity to spend a day with the Minister of Education. Just last week the council held an all-day youth conference entitled Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll. The conference idea began when council members asked students what they believed were the worst and best things about their schools. The biggest problem identified by the students was drugs, followed by unsafe sex and automobile safety.

This conference was set up by youth for youth. This unique perspective made the conference effective and successful. Rather than being preached to, subjects were presented in a way that captured the attention of the students. Students were proactive participants helping to resolve the issues. About 1,000 senior students from all North Vancouver schools attended the conference.

[1420]

I applaud the efforts and the leadership that is demonstrated by those one this council and their co-sponsor, teacher John Wilson.

#### JENECE EDROFF

**D. Cubberley:** Today it's my privilege to acknowledge the outstanding achievements of a young constituent of mine, 12-year-old Jenece Edroff. Jenece has the misfortune to suffer from a rare genetic disease called neurofibromatosis.

Diagnosed at age three, at five she underwent surgery to straighten her spine. Her parents were told she would never walk again, but Jenece rebounded within months. It takes an amazing person to face real adversity so young and to remain so positive and engaged with life. Her mom, Angie, says of her: "She was a fighter right from the beginning." Jenece's pluck and a decisive streak led her to push back against the menace of childhood disease.

At seven, grateful for the help she'd received from Variety Club — the children's charity — she launched a penny drive at her school that raised \$164. The next year, with the help of CHEK TV, she raised \$27,000. She went on to raise more than \$300,000 while taking part in other charity projects, including Cops for Cancer, the Easter Seal 24-hour relay and events for the B.C. Neurofibromatosis Foundation. Recently, Jenece received well-deserved recognition for her efforts — a Coast Mental Health Foundation Courage to Come Back award.

Jenece undergoes regular chemotherapy treatments, but she still attends Glanford Middle School in Saanich during the mornings, enjoying the reading and drawing components of the class. While she lives in pain most days, she believes it's really nice to help other kids. "It's not a big deal," Jenece says, with typical modesty, of her work with Variety Club. "They've helped me, so I really like to help them." Jenece's mother said about her that she was put on this earth to teach.

Today it's our privilege and pleasure to recognize you, Jenece, here at the Legislature and to thank you for giving all of us such an inspiring example of courage and leadership.

#### CROSSROADS HOSPICE SOCIETY

**I. Black:** It's a pleasure for me to rise today and speak about a truly exceptional organization in the great riding of Port Moody-Westwood. The Crossroads Hospice Society provides dignified end-of-life care for terminally ill patients and remarkable support for the families. With significant funding from this government, the Crossroads Hospice Society was able to develop a ten-bed facility at Inlet Centre in 2003 in Port Moody.

I have a personal connection to the hospice, because my friend Henry Weizel was a patient. Our dear family friend and B.C. sculptor, Vancouver Island's George Cooper, carved from soapstone the signature dragonfly that greets you when you step off the elevator into the hospice. His late wife and renowned artist, Juan, has many of her paintings hanging on the walls there.

The Crossroads Hospice has attracted over 160 caring volunteers for this ten-bed facility and provides care for up to 175 patients and support for over 3,000 friends and family members every year. The society has also rallied the support of service clubs through the Tri-Cities, including the Kinsmen and Kinette Clubs, who are raising \$50,000 for it. Further, they host one of my favourite events — their annual Treasures of Christmas gala hosted by honorary chairperson Mr. Tony Parsons.

This past weekend I was proud to take part in the society's fourth annual Hike for Hospice, co-hosted by the Rotary Clubs of Port Coquitlam and Port Moody and sponsored by Coast Capital Savings and Phoenix Truck and Crane. I was among hundreds of people who proudly braved the soggy elements and participated in hikes in both Port Moody and Port Coquitlam, raising approximately \$37,000.

It has been said that hospice care is about putting life into days, not days into life. The work of the Crossroads Hospice Society, and indeed hospices throughout B.C., is both critically important and greatly appreciated by our communities. Please join me in saluting them.

#### SAANICH MULTICULTURAL FESTIVAL

**R. Fleming:** I am pleased today to speak about the upcoming Saanich Multicultural Festival, which takes place the last weekend of May. As part of Saanich's centennial celebration, the district of Saanich — in partnership with the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, the Victoria and Vancouver Island Greek Community Society and the Portuguese community — will host the first annual multicultural festival on Friday, May 26 through to Sunday, May 28 at the Saanich Commonwealth pool.

The three-day festival celebrates culture and food, and it will bring together the Chinese, Greek and Portuguese communities to celebrate cultural diversity. Guests will be able to experience the cultures and cuisines of each country by visiting different pavilions. Each pavilion will have foods, music, entertainment and displays of their culture.

[1425]

One gains admission to the three-day festival by purchasing a passport. These are readily available throughout the district of Saanich. Children and teens 18 and under are free.

This weekend of May, Saanich will celebrate 100 years of incorporation and, at the same time, 100 years of contributions that immigrants from around the world have made to the district of Saanich. I want to applaud these organizations for putting this cultural event together, and I encourage all local residents to attend this festival.

#### DARFUR

**J. Nuraney:** The United Nations is calling it the worst humanitarian crisis on the planet. According to recent reports, at least 300,000 people have died in Darfur since the genocide began in February 2003. There are approximately 3.5 million men, women and children in the western Darfur region of Sudan trying to survive the Sudanese government-sponsored campaign of violence and forced starvation. If the situation continues to deteriorate and humanitarian aid support collapses, it is estimated the death rate could rise to as high as 100,000 per month.

While the world argues and hesitates, the systematic genocide and the ethnic cleansing still continue.

The world said "never again" after the Holocaust and the genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda and the eastern European countries. By not taking action, the nations of the world are turning a blind eye to this inhuman plight. We should heed the words of Edmund Burke, the 18th-century Anglo-Irish statesman and philosopher, when he said: "All that is needed for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

I rise today to appeal to the Canadian government to take leadership in halting this most atrocious act and to protect the innocent, who are calling out to the world for help. Let us not simply talk about human rights. Both Canada and the United Nations need to demonstrate a genuine commitment to end this suffering through humanitarian actions.

[Applause.]

#### Oral Questions

##### FUNDING FOR 2010 OLYMPIC GAMES

**H. Bains:** For the last two weeks we've been asking this one simple, straightforward question to the Minister of Economic Development: what is the total cost that B.C. taxpayers are expected to pay towards Olympic-related expenditures?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** I have said several times in this House that the commitment from the province from day one for the staging of the Olympic Games is \$600 million, and no one has asked us to increase that budget beyond that amount.

This is coming from an opposition that really has quite a checkered past when it comes to the support for the Olympic Games. We know there were actually cabinet ministers in that government in the 1990s who were enthusiastic about getting the games to come to British Columbia. But then we see quotes coming from the Leader of the Official Opposition, when she said in August 2003: "I didn't support going for the bid from the beginning." Then she said in January '04: "I didn't support the government trying to gain the Olympics." In March '04 she said: "I wasn't a supporter of going for the Olympic bid."

[1430]

We know that British Columbians in every corner of this province are excited and enthusiastic about the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games. It's time for that opposition to get over their negative, pessimistic, destructive approach to the 2010 Olympic Games and get on board.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members. Members.  
The member has a supplemental.

**H. Bains:** What has made this checkered history is this government's refusal to come out in the open and tell us exactly how much cost taxpayers are expected to

pay. The secrecy and lack of transparency are what is making this a checkered history here.

Yesterday the minister admitted that the cost will be way over \$600 million — way over \$600 million. Again, I ask the minister: if you add them all up...? You had two weeks to do that. You have all the ministers sitting all around you. All you have to do is ask each of those ministers how much money they're committing towards Legacies Now. Add them up and tell the taxpayers exactly how much money it will cost the taxpayers to stage the Olympics. Tell us today: what is the precise figure?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** I have never once said that the cost of staging the Olympic Games is going to exceed \$600 million to the taxpayers of British Columbia, because if I said it, it wouldn't be true. What I said was that we have opportunities because of the fact that we're hosting the Olympic Games, because of the fact that our kids are excited about the fact that British Columbia is going to be in the world spotlight — excited about the fact that we've made commitments to make British Columbia the most physically fit jurisdiction ever to host the Olympic Games.

The taxpayers expect to pay \$600 million towards the staging of the Olympic Games, and that's it. Are there other programs that we can capitalize on as kids get excited about the games and it motivates them to get involved in literacy? Are there other projects in this province that we can accelerate construction on so that we can have it ready for 2010? You're darn right there are, and we're proud of the programs we're putting in place to make sure that British Columbians continue to be excited about 2010.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members. The member for Surrey-Newton has a further supplemental.

**H. Bains:** The minister asked us to do our homework yesterday. If the minister had done his homework, he would have all those numbers today available to the public.

We found out that the Minister of Health admitted here in this House yesterday that there is \$5.4 million that his ministry has set aside towards Legacies Now. That is in addition to the \$41 million that we discovered two weeks ago. That is in addition to the over \$80 million we discovered yesterday.

So, one more time: why the secrecy? Why the secrecy, and why doesn't the minister come clean and tell us what the total bill is?

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Just a reminder, members. Let's listen to the question so we can listen to the answer.

**Hon. C. Hansen:** The fact of the matter is that in terms of the \$600 million that we're spending for the staging of the games, it has been public information for years. It is up on the website, and I invite the member to go and review it.

[1435]

The programs the member talks about are not about staging the Olympic Games. When the member talks about programs funded through the Ministry of Health that he's somehow discovered... Guess what. There was a press release put out. There was an event in Vancouver. It was attended by 200 people, and it was a fabulous program aimed at getting kids physically fit.

We've committed, on behalf of the taxpayers of British Columbia, \$600 million for the staging of the Olympic Games. I have every reason to expect that the games will be delivered without any increased obligation to the taxpayers over and above that \$600 million.

#### AUDITOR GENERAL OVERSIGHT OF OLYMPIC GAMES COSTS

**C. James:** I would like to inform the minister that the members on this side of the House know that the Olympics are going to be successful, because we want to be accountable for taxpayer dollars. That's what's missing from this government. Every time we look at Olympic spending, millions more come spilling out from this government.

Torino — \$6 million. Own the Podium....

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**C. James:** Own the Podium, \$10 million; Olympic secretariat, \$26 million; and Legacies Now, \$80 million.... Mr. Speaker, one big item is missing from that list, and that's public accountability for taxpayer dollars.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**C. James:** Taxpayers took the Premier at his word when he said he wanted open government. My question is to the Premier. If his minister is unable to answer the questions, why doesn't the Premier ask the Auditor General to do it so the public can really get some answers?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** I find this rather surprising that this Leader of the Opposition, after in 2003 and 2004 came out.... The most recent one was at the Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers convention in March 2004, when she said: "I wasn't a supporter of going for the Olympic bid." Now she is trying to sound like she is the biggest fan of the Olympics. It's a little late, I say to the hon. member.

Let's talk about some of the issues that the member has raised. They are not about the staging of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games, but they are about building and promoting British Columbia in a way that will make us all proud and future generations all proud. When the member talks about the \$6 million we spent on B.C.-Canada Place in Torino, do you know what that did? That actually generated \$30.8 million worth of earned media around the world.

When she talks about the Own the Podium program, that's about money that British Columbia put on the table to encourage our elite athletes in Winter Olympics, Summer Olympics, in Torino, in Beijing, in Vancouver, in London....

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, minister.

**Hon. C. Hansen:** That was a program where our Premier was a leader. And guess what. The rest of Canada is excited about that program, the federal government is excited about that program, and more than anything else, our athletes are excited about the program.

[1440]

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members. Members.  
The Leader of the Opposition has a supplemental.

**C. James:** I find it very interesting that if the government is so excited about these, why won't they come clean and tell the taxpayers that they're proud of their Olympic spending? We've seen time and time again that the Premier has failed in his promise for openness, for integrity and for accountability.

Legacies Now? The minister refused to give an answer. The Finance Minister, when we asked — no answers. The Minister Responsible for the Olympics — not a clue about total Olympic spending.

Again, my question is to the Premier. If his government can't get its act together around total Olympics spending.... We know the public wants answers. We know that the Auditor General is ready. The opposition is ready. Why won't the Premier allow the Auditor to come in and give the public the answers they want?

**Hon. G. Campbell:** You know, I think it's pretty sad to hear from the Leader of the Opposition on this. It's pretty sad for someone who was against the Olympics to try and find every way that she can to say: "No, the Olympics are bad."

I hope the Leader of the Opposition is going to the....

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** I hope the Leader of the Opposition is going to the Victoria Independent Film and

Video Festival, who received \$10,500 from Legacies Now to build.... I hope the Leader of the Opposition is going to the First Peoples Cultural Foundation, who received \$9,450 for their first annual indigenous arts festival, because we want them to take advantage of the Spirit of 2010. I hope the Leader of the Opposition is going to the Belfry Theatre Society to say, "Give back the \$10,000 you received from Legacies Now" — because we want them to feel the Spirit of 2010.

Let there be no question. This side of the House is going to provide \$600 million to stage the Olympics. In spite of what every MLA on that side of the House may do, we're going to reach out to every British Columbian and allow them to take full advantage of the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games and the Spirit of 2010, which is alive and well in the province of British Columbia.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**M. Farnworth:** You know, this isn't about boosterism. I'll remind that side of the House that it was this side of the House, when we were over there, who started the Olympic process and who started the journey for the Olympic bid, with which we were successful. Everybody....

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**M. Farnworth:** I know sometimes they hate to hear the truth, but it needs to be said.

Everybody in this House and everybody in this province, regardless of where they stood, wants to see a successful Olympics and wants to see British Columbia portrayed to the world. Part of the B.C. spirit is about accountability and the public in this province holding a government to account. We will ask questions, because at the end of the day the public wants to know how much the games are going to cost — not part of it, but all of the cost.

[1445]

That's why we are asking the Premier once again: why the reluctance to have the Auditor General as the auditor of record of the Olympic Games? At the end of the day, when it comes to addition, we don't want to see B.C. at the bottom of the table.

**Hon. C. Hansen:** I find it reassuring that that member, the Opposition House Leader, has actually managed to convince his own leader to get onside with 95 percent.... We do know how much it costs to stage the Olympic Games to the taxpayers of British Columbia. That's \$600 million.

In terms of accountability, the Auditor General does not have to be asked by any of us to do his work. He has the power to do whatever investigations he sees fit. He can audit, and he is auditing, all of the provin-

cial government expenditures with regard to the staging of the games. He is free to audit any of the other programs that he wishes, which we are putting in place to actually encourage the citizenship and encourage British Columbians to take advantage of the Spirit of 2010.

The reason that the Auditor General is not the auditor of record for VANOC is that he was invited to apply but chose not to.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member has a supplemental.

**M. Farnworth:** VANOC is exempt from FOI. As far as the Auditor General goes, what would really help in his ability to do his job around the Olympics is to have the budget and the funding to do a proper and thorough job.

Interjections.

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

**M. Farnworth:** The Auditor General asked for increased funding, and that side of the House turned them down. So my question is: will the minister ask the Minister of Finance to increase the funding for the budget of the Auditor General so that he can do his job more effectively and ensure that what the House doesn't want, which is that secrecy become an Olympic sport...?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** The bottom line is that we are working towards the best Olympic Games ever hosted anywhere in the world. We have the funds in place to make that happen. But more important is what the legacy is that the 2010 Winter Games will leave in British Columbia.

You know something? It's not just about the gold medals that our athletes are going to win, and it's not just about the bricks and mortar, although there are going to be some fabulous facilities that will be there to service communities well after 2010.

The most important legacy that the 2010 games are going to leave is the pride in our kids. It's the spirit in our communities. It's the excitement in what the future of British Columbia is all about. That is the Spirit of 2010.

**J. Kwan:** You know, 2010 also depends on how the government manages its finances and ensures that there is openness and accountability. What this side of the House is asking for is for this minister to come clean and tell British Columbians how much they would be on the hook.

I don't think it is too much to ask for this government and for this minister to open up the books for all British Columbians to see how much they will actually have to pay towards Olympic-related activities for 2010. Will this minister commit today to actually allow VANOC to be subject to freedom of information, and

will the minister ensure that the Auditor General gets the budget to do the risk audit associated with the Olympics?

[1450]

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Mr. Speaker, I don't know how you say this more clearly so that the members of the opposition understand this. Hosting the Olympic Games is \$600 million. There is a \$600 million budget. The opposition may not have noticed this, but there is a partnership in hosting the Olympic Games. There is \$600 million coming from the federal government. The opposition may not have noticed, but there are opportunities created by the Olympic Games. We intend to take full advantage of all of those opportunities for all the people of British Columbia. I can say that every member of that opposition would come to us, as a government, and say: "My community wants to be part of the Olympic program. How can you include them?"

There is not one IOC member that has come to us and said: "Please make literacy part of the Olympic Games." Not one. There is not one IOC member that has come to us and said: "Please make sure your kids are active in your schools. Try and reduce obesity across British Columbia. Try and make sure that your kids are active and vibrant and excited." Not one IOC member — incredible.

British Columbia is, to use the member's words, on the hook for \$600 million to stage an Olympic Games. But we are excited on this side of the House about what that can do. For example, we are creating, through Legacies Now, their exploration camps. They funded kids, ages five to 12, to attend camps to focus on sports, arts and recreation, and 5,600 kids attended last year — 208 camps in 66 communities. I'll bet there were some members opposite's communities that actually had young kids going and exploring those opportunities for themselves.

There is a snowboarding program for at-risk kids — 150 at-risk kids from Vancouver, from the downtown east side, which this member claims to be concerned about. We gave them an opportunity to learn about snowboarding. Wouldn't it be great to see them on the podium winning a gold medal in 2010?

Just last week the member for Victoria-Hillside bragged about the fact that FIFA is coming to have a world cup — supported by Legacies Now, supported by the Spirit of 2010 — saying: "Let's embrace competition."

The net operating budget for the Auditor General is up 28 percent. The Auditor General can choose to pursue what goals and objectives he chooses to pursue. This Legislature will look for budgets for the Auditor General, as other independent officers, and will provide budgets. British Columbians will have a great Olympic Games in 2010.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member has a supplemental.

**J. Kwan:** Let's be clear. The Auditor General came to the Public Accounts Committee earlier to ask to be the official auditor, and they were turned down. The

Auditor General came to the Finance Committee and asked for his budget to be increased and was turned down by the Minister of Finance and by the Finance Committee.

I would like to ask the Premier these questions. Own the Podium, \$10 million: would that money be spent had there not been the Olympic Games? The Olympic secretariat, \$26 million: is that not money that would not have been spent had the Olympic Games not existed? Legacies Now, \$80 million and counting.

The Premier can justify the spending all he wants, but what we want to know is accountability. How much in total is being spent on Olympic-related spending for the province of British Columbia? Come clean and tell British Columbians now.

**Hon. G. Campbell:** The member opposite has been a member of this Legislature for some time. The Public Accounts are very clear about the commitments of the province. We are very clear about our commitment to hosting the Olympic Games. It's \$600 million. We also care enough about doing this properly to recognize that it is a partnership. VANOC is a partnership between the provincial government, between the Canadian Olympic Committee, between the federal government — trying to do something that's great for Canada.

[1455]

The member opposite is correct. I should say this. She's correct on this. It would be possible to host the Olympics and not try and take advantage of it. I mean, maybe there are some countries or some provinces that would do that. Actually, I would imagine the opposition would do that when they were in government, which is why we fell apart at the seams in British Columbia in the ten years they were in government in the 1990s.

Let me be clear. The \$600 million is a commitment to host, to stage the Olympic Games. This government is going to do what we can to take full advantage of that for economic development, for trade development, for business development, for social development, for literacy development, for recreational development and for sports development, so that every person in British Columbia has a sense that they were part of their Olympics and they celebrate, with this side of the House, the Spirit of 2010.

#### MANAGEMENT OF INTERFACE FIRE RISKS

**N. Macdonald:** On Friday there was an interface fire near Prince George that came within 500 metres of a home. The amount of slash fuel in the area was a contributing factor to the spread of the blaze. Dealing with interface fire risks has been largely downloaded to local government.

To the Minister of Forests and Range: have local governments come to him with problems in preparing for the upcoming fire season?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** In 2003 B.C. saw its worst fire season ever. Subsequent to that we had Mr. Filmon

look at our whole aspect with regard to fire in British Columbia.

We have funded every single thing contained in the Filmon report. We've moved on it incrementally as we've gone through the province. We've worked with local government through UBCM with regard to interface fires. In addition to that, we have actually been the authors of the national wildfire strategy in Canada.

We lead the country with regard to how we deal with fire in British Columbia. We will continue to work with communities to deal with interface fires as we go forward, because it is something that we learned a lot of lessons from in 2003 and that we're going to build on going into 2006.

**B. Simpson:** It's great that we've led the national strategy. It's great that we've done all this planning. But we're being told by fire managers and fire experts that the Rocky Mountain Trench is a tinderbox and that if we have a catastrophic fire season — which they're saying is a great potential this summer — we have the potential to lose communities, homes and potentially lives yet again.

Under this government since Filmon, in that area, the actual work done on the ground in Cranbrook is 43 hectares. In Kimberley it is a whopping three hectares of actual fuel-management work. Filmon said in 2003 that fuel management had to be a priority. He said, "Work with local governments," not: "Download the responsibility to them."

My question is to the Minister of Forests and Range. When will the minister address the concerns raised with him by UBCM on March 31, on this very issue, which are substantive issues that Filmon said should have been addressed in 2003?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** First of all, the member might want to get his facts right and check with the MLA from that area of the province, who tells me we have done a ton of work with regional districts in that area with regard to forest fire strategy.

But let's get something else clear. You did nothing when you were in government with regard to caring about fires in British Columbia.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member, through the Chair, please.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** We learned from 2003. We built a fire strategy for British Columbia. We stepped up to the plate with Filmon. We're working through all the policies with regard to it. We've delivered on the ground. We've added teams. We've added tankers. We've added fire crews. We've added quick-strike teams. We've added all of it to fire protection in British Columbia — way ahead of what you ever thought of doing when you were government.

[1500]

Interjections.

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

[End of question period.]

### Tabling Documents

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Mr. Speaker, I'm excited that I have the honour to present the annual report of the Forest Appeals Commission.

### Petitions

**C. Puchmayr:** I rise to bring a petition to the House. The petition is from registered nurses in British Columbia, and it states: "We, the registered nurses of British Columbia, support the implementation of effective, comprehensive regulations to prevent injuries to workers from sharps" — which are needles, sticks — "and poor practices in the province of British Columbia." These are changes to the Occupational Health and Safety regulations.

### Orders of the Day

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I call estimates, Mr. Speaker — in this chamber the estimates for the Ministry of Health, and in Section A the estimates for the Ministry of Transportation.

[1505]

### Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF HEALTH  
(continued)

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

The committee met at 3:08 p.m.

On Vote 35: ministry operations, \$11,767,963,000  
(continued).

**K. Conroy:** I want to move on to the issues around first-available-bed policy in the province. This is a policy that's caused quite some issues. I'd be remiss not to say that the issues in my constituency were front and centre this year. I would also like to acknowledge the Deputy Minister, Dr. Ballem, for her work that she did in my constituency and for her compassionate manner in which she addressed the situation, which was a very difficult situation. I got feedback from caregivers in the region and family members who were very thankful for Dr. Ballem's approach. I'd like to acknowledge that and thank her for it.

One of the issues that has come up is around the first-available-bed policy. I'm going to be using the report that's become known as the Ballem recommendations, as well as the Interior Health Authority implementation plans, because it's my understanding that the ministry has said the issues that were brought forth in that plan will potentially be utilized across the province.

I want to talk a little bit about what happened there. I think what needs to be addressed is the ministry recommendation to conduct a comprehensive review of the application of the first-available-bed policy. The Interior Health implementation plan was to establish an appeals process. So there was a little bit of a dichotomy there.

[1510]

I'd like to know from the minister what steps the ministry has taken around the first-available-bed policy in relation to what's happened with the issues that have arisen from that report.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** First, I want to thank the member for her question and thank her for her generous comments in relation to Dr. Penny Ballem, my deputy minister. I appreciate that, and I know Dr. Ballem does as well.

The member is correct. We are looking at the application of the first-available-bed policy. Again, to be clear on the point, the first-available-bed policy has, in a formal sense, been around since 1991. I understand, in a less formal sense, it has probably been around since at least the early 1980s and perhaps before that.

The essence of the first-available-bed policy is that when a client or a patient is deemed to be in need of a residential care bed, the first attempt is always to try to place that client or patient in the preferred facility for the client. In those instances where that facility is not available — that is, the preferred facility is not available — the first-available-bed policy suggests that we would try to find the first available bed in the nearest residential care facility appropriate to the client's need. So what the policy is, in essence, is that where compelling patient need exists, it supersedes immediate geographic placement.

Sometimes families have to make difficult decisions with respect to that — whether they want to see that care need supersede geography — and often there are difficult decisions to be made in respect of that. But the other part of the first-available-bed policy that, I think, is also very important is that as soon as a bed becomes open in the preferred facility, then every effort is made by the health authorities to move the patient back to the preferred facility.

**K. Conroy:** I understand that this policy has been around since 1991 and was, in fact, around in the '90s. The fact in the '90s was that there were beds in local facilities where people could be transferred into, so the first available bed wasn't an issue. It didn't become an issue until 2002 with the changes that this government made where it was deemed.... Beds were given by priority and need. What would happen in the past is people's names would go on the list because they knew they were going to need a bed, and they could turn down that bed if, in fact, it came up that they needed it and they weren't quite ready for it. That worked for people.

[1515]

What I understand now is if people turn down a first available bed, they are taken off the list. What is

happening throughout the province, I understand, is that people are taken off the list. If they don't take the first available bed — if it's out of the area where they want to stay, or it's not in the facility they want to go in — they are told they need to go home. Or they're told if they stay in the hospital bed, it will cost them the rate that a hospital person would pay for a bed as opposed to residential care — they'd pay for an acute care bed.

I've talked to people all over the province who have said they cannot afford thousands of dollars a month to stay in an acute care bed. They want to be in their home community. They do not want to be moved hundreds of miles away, away from their friends and over very difficult geographical terrain, which is something I think the minister needs to look at.

I'll ask again: is the ministry looking at re-evaluating how this policy is implemented — such things as people being taken off a list when they can't, for a number of reasons, take the first available bed and not being charged an acute care fee if, in fact, they do need to stay in a hospital?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I apologize to the member. She had asked in her last question about next-steps. Basically, the next-steps around the review of the application of first-available-bed policy involves putting in place, first of all, increased capacity. I am happy to note that 12 additional residential care beds have opened in Castlegar and Trail to address immediate capacity issues. They've also established eight short-stay beds at Columbia View Lodge in Trail for transition, respite and palliative care. So that's useful.

We are working at Interior Health on the redrafting of how that policy will be operationalized. The aim of that is to be very sensitive, as wasn't always the case, particularly in the most unfortunate Fanny Albo situation, where the sensitivities of the family were not respected. So there's plenty of work being done to address that.

In her subsequent question the member raised a few questions about first-available-bed policy and how it would be undertaken. I think the first thing to note is that the system of supportive seniors housing with home care appended, which we talked about this morning, the issue of assisted living, which we talked about this morning, and the issue of residential care — that continuum of care, or campus of care in some cases, where people are assessed by a set of standardized tools so that they are provided with the level of care that is commensurate with their condition.... I hope the member is not arguing with that, and I'm presuming that she is not. That is the way I would think logically these things should be done — to have a careful assessment of need and then attempt to meet that need.

We know that in 2001 the wait time for residential care was about one year across the province. We know today that the wait time is a range between 18 days, most recently in Vancouver Coastal, and as high as 88 days in Interior Health. What we have also in our data, and I guess this also goes to the heart of the member's

question.... Our data shows that in 2001 thousands of patients in residential care were waiting for their preferred facilities. In many cases husbands and wives were in separate facilities. I know we talked about that earlier in this session. The number of husbands and wives who are separated has actually been reduced since 2001, along with a reduction in the wait time since 2001.

[1520]

I think we're actually moving in the right direction, and as we add further to that continuum of care in all of its aspects, whether supported housing or assisted living or residential care, we will see further improvements, particularly in Interior Health in respect of the wait time for these facilities. The frail elderly will be the beneficiaries of that additional investment.

The member also raised the issue of acute care beds and the occupation of acute care beds by individuals who really should be in either assisted living or in residential care. She questioned the issue of fees that are imposed at some point when a patient in an acute care bed refuses to move on to the first available bed in a residential care facility.

Well, what the health authorities do is work with the patient and with their family to try to find alternatives. It may be home care support. It may be alternative facilities, but we do attempt to find an appropriate accommodation for the patient.

Should that fail, and it is part of the first-available-bed policy.... But again, as I noted, I think, in question period one day in recent months, the client rates for long-stay patients awaiting placement was an amendment to the first-available-bed policy on October 1, 1999. So that is something that was added in that era, and it remains in place today.

It remains a part of the way in which we manage the pressures. But obviously, the government in 1999 was not immune from those pressures, because they were the ones that actually put this particular permutation of the policy into place.

**A. Dix:** I ask leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

### Introductions by Members

**A. Dix:** Joining us in the gallery today are teachers and students from Windermere Community Secondary School in my constituency of Vancouver-Kingsway. Windermere is an extraordinary school, and they're extraordinary students. Just to say to the students: they're listening to the debate of the budget of the Ministry of Health with respect to seniors care. I want everyone in the House to wish these students welcome.

### Debate Continued

**K. Conroy:** I just want to clarify a few things for public record. There were 12 beds added in Castlegar. Those were privately funded beds. They didn't bring



new beds into the community, but what they did do is they gave the opportunity for people to actually live in publicly funded beds.

There was one bed added to Trail, and that was also a privately paid bed, and that family was able to now access a publicly funded bed. There are no new beds, technically, in that region. In fact, there is a shortage of beds, because the Columbia View Lodge took permanent residential care beds and converted them to transitional, short-stay palliative care beds. So it took beds out of the total number of beds in that region.

I just want to make it clear to the minister that those were good things. We were able to ensure that seniors came home from far away and back to places like Castlegar or closer to Trail and Castlegar. That's a good thing. Families were no longer paying exorbitant rates for private care, but it wasn't new beds per se. I just want to clarify that.

It's my understanding that in 1999, when a senior was moved out of a... When they had to go from acute care to residential care and they chose not to take the first available bed, they were charged the fee that they would pay in a residential care facility, not the fee that they would pay in an acute care facility. Today seniors are paying acute care fees in beds that are in acute care hospitals, and I'm talking to families who can ill afford it. There is no option for them. They have to take the first available bed, often far away from their families, which is an issue.

I want to know if the minister actually knows how many seniors in the province right now are paying for acute care beds or are in an alternative level of care in the hospital.

[1525]

**Hon. G. Abbott:** The policy that the member has just outlined, which is of apparent concern to her, would be, should she find it objectionable, a reversal of the policy that was put in place by the NDP government in 1999. If the member finds that policy addition of October 1, 1999, objectionable, I certainly would appreciate her advising me of that, and I'll take note of that, but I'm not sure if that's what the member is attempting to say or not. I welcome her further advice.

While I'm welcoming her further advice, I would like her advice with respect to whether she sees beds or units which are privately owned but publicly funded as inherently inferior to publicly owned and publicly funded beds, or whether non-profits and the operation of publicly funded beds under non-profit societies are somehow inferior.

I'm troubled that she finds Interior Health's response of accessing an additional 12 beds for those who need it in Castlegar and Trail somehow flawed or inferior to the actual construction by the government of such beds. If she does, she's going to have a big problem with the direction that we're going, which is to provide the best value to the taxpayer, whether it's a non-profit supplier, a public supplier or a private supplier. That's important.

In terms of the review of the application of the first-bed policy, I think there are some points that I want to make very clear, and these are Interior Health actions:

(1) Developed clear guidelines to ensure IH's intent to maintain and respect the needs of couples in our care. Again, I think we've made some good progress on the issue of couples being separated in facilities, to the extent we can, where their respective medical conditions would permit it. We do want to see even fewer couples separated.

(2) Established an expedited appeals process for families and residents that allows both the families and our staff to slow the process down and consider extenuating circumstances if needed. Policy augments existing appeal process and will be referenced in information package for patients and family.

(3) Identified second-look process on moving a client to a first-available bed out of their home community. Any such decision now requires the consultation and approval of the home and community care director and the chief operating officer.

(4) Reviewed and revised our hardship support policy that provides a means of support to families having to travel outside their immediate community for residential care.

(5) Finally, developing an information package for patients and families outlining options, process and policies, which will be given to all seniors who may be in need of home support and residential care services. That will be available in August 2006.

I think all of those things are important in terms of assisting patients and families at what is often the most difficult time in our lives. Many of us are of an age where our parents are into the end-of-life experience. There are often difficult decisions to be made around that end-of-life experience, and I believe — and powerfully believe — the work that's being undertaken in Interior Health, which I think will help to inform policies elsewhere in the province, is a very constructive step towards assisting families and patients with those often very difficult end-of-life issues.

**K. Conroy:** I'd love to give the minister advice. I would defer to the deputy minister, as she has far more experience and education than I have, so we'll continue to work together.

[1530]

I'm glad you brought up the issue around the appeal process and the IHA. There are some concerns about what has been put into place. Because both the ministry and the Interior Health Authority have said that these are policies that could be implemented across the province, there are some concerns.

One of them is the whole issue of when someone is going to be moved and the family is not comfortable with that and wants to put in an appeal process. What has been implemented by the IHA is a review process. It's a review process by the head, like you've said, of community care and the COO of the whole district. That's a very, very busy position.

People have expressed concern that that person would be the one who would be doing a review process. It's not an appeal, as we understand. Also, in a public meeting the person for our region did state that she felt that even though a review process was in place, there probably would be very few changes made, because she would be working with her staff. It left a real concern for people that....

Is this a true appeals process? The answer to many people was that they thought not, that it is inappropriate for the COO to be undertaking this, and that you do need somebody independent who is not so involved in what happens in that hospital.

Is the ministry looking at another way of undertaking an appeals process? Is this something that is going to be implemented across the province? These situations come up. We know that it doesn't just happen in West Kootenay-Boundary. It's happened in other parts of the province, in other health authorities. It is a policy that is very important to people — to seniors and their families.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I thank the member for her question. I think it would be fair to say that in terms of how the first-available-bed reviews will be conducted, we are still looking at how that process should be structured and what players should most appropriately be involved in it — that sort of thing.

I think we are always receptive, as reasonable people, to reasonable suggestions about how these things might be done better. The member will recall that much of this work was initiated as a consequence of the sad and unfortunate case of Fanny Albo, where some unfortunate decisions were made, some mistakes were made, and some errors of judgment were made.

What we are trying to do is to put in place an opportunity for a second look, for reconsideration where families raise issues, and there are lots of different ways that we could do that. There are lots of different ways that we could structure a review or appeal process. We have a suggested model, and we will be watching with interest to see whether that suggested model is one that takes root, or perhaps it may be improved in some ways. We'll look to find what works well, and when we have a clear understanding that something's working well, then we might consider trying to see it put in place across the province. But we want to do some additional work around that.

The other point, I guess, around this is that notwithstanding the opportunity to request a review or to request an appeal, there are still difficult decisions that have to be made by the health authorities.

[1535]

They still have to try to ensure that acute care beds are being appropriately.... They still have to try to find the best alternatives for patients. They still have to try to meet the wishes of the patients and their families.

One shouldn't conclude that because there are relatively few reversals after reviews, the process is wrong. Sometimes people believe the processes are correct only when the processes produce the decisions that meet their interests. So it can be challenging.

There are a number of criteria that come into play in terms of the review of what's appropriate and what's not appropriate in the application of the first-available-bed policy. For example, among the criteria are: urgency, facility location, client's diagnosis and condition, facility suitability, family supports, client preference, impact on client's health or psychosocial well-being and financial or physical impact on client's designated support person. All of these are issues that can and should be considered by the authorities making a difficult review or appeal decision. The attempt here is to be thoughtful, to match up, as best we can, the client's care needs with the available resources that can be brought to bear in the particular case.

**K. Conroy:** As we found out, this wasn't.... When everything happened with the Albo family, we found out very quickly that this wasn't an isolated incident. This, in fact, was happening with a number of other families. Names have been brought forward, and more and more people.... We're not going to do that today, but we know that this is not just an isolated incident and that this is happening in other parts of the province, in other parts of the IHA, because we have documentation of that.

We also know that one thing that was not on the minister's list when they were reviewing was the need for the bed. In a number of situations, we have been told by health care professionals, by families, that the reason seniors were moved was because they needed the bed. That's the reality. So that's one thing that is not on that list and needs to be looked at.

We need a far-reaching review on this issue. My question to the minister is: is there a time frame, and who would be consulted with to deal with these issues?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** Just to give the member a sense of the challenge we have here, about 35,000 clients a year are making use of residential care facilities, and we have about 7,000 new admissions per year. Again, the wait times for appropriate placement, either in residential care or assisted living, have been dramatically reduced since 2001. As we see the number of assisted-living and residential care beds come on stream between now and the end of 2006, those numbers will, I believe, continue to improve.

As I noted, I think, in discussion earlier in these estimates, we're currently in a position of about 1,500 net new beds. We will be up to about 2,500 to 2,700 by the end of 2006. That will be remarkably useful in terms of moving forward.

[1540]

We are seeing a 4.7-percent increase overall in all categories of beds — about 1,910 additional beds, based on the year 2005-2006 over 2001-2002 — so we actually have seen an increase. Palliative care beds, for example, increased by 67 percent; residential care, assisted-living and supportive housing beds were up by 5.4 percent; mental health and addiction beds were up 28 percent. That has been very useful.

Also, and I think this is very important, the number of alternate-level-of-care patients — that is, folks who

really should be in either residential care or assisted living but are in acute care beds for a time awaiting residential care placement — has gone down. The percentage of ALC, alternate-level-of-care patients, in acute care beds has gone down by some 27 percent in 2004-2005 over 2001-2002.

**K. Conroy:** We're going to need to exchange research because my information shows me that the alternate level of the care in this province in the north and the interior has actually gone up. You're correct in the Fraser Valley and in Vancouver. Those numbers have gone down, but it's my understanding that the numbers have gone up, and in the north, since 2001. So that's a rising figure. It is a concern for families.

I don't think anyone would disagree with the challenge the ministry faces with the situation with placing seniors. I think what I've heard is that the issue for seniors' and caregivers' families in the province is the fact that we've moved too quickly in this province. There is this need for assisted-living beds, and at the same time, there hasn't been the attention paid to the residential care, or to that interim level of care where you're not quite ready for residential care and you can't be in an assisted-living facility and get the required supports you need. There needs to be an adjustment around how the beds are looked at and how they're named. I know in our region they call it the name game on beds.

We could probably spend the whole afternoon talking about beds, but I have a lot of other things I want to cover, and I only get today, so we're going to move on a bit. One of the issues that I also talked to people about is the issue around licensing regulations and the quality of care. The assisted-living registrar: what kinds of resources are appointed to this office?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** We believe that we can get the answer to the member's question here shortly, but rather than wait a couple of extra minutes, if she has an additional question, we can move on to that, and I'll provide her with that information as it becomes available.

**K. Conroy:** With the office of the assisted-living registrar, is the number of complaints that come into that office documented? If so, how many have been received since it was created?

[1545]

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I'll just provide this information. I think it goes to the heart of what the member was asking. As of January 2006, 98 assisted-living residences have been registered or approved for registration. The registrar has received 35 complaints about health and safety in assisted-living residences since January 1, 2005. The registrar's office was able to assist with the resolution of all the health and safety complaints except for three, and those three remain in progress.

Four of the 35 health and safety complaints were referred by the registrar to ALCE — we have to go to

the acronym department to get that one, and we will — for resolution when the operator needed support or guidance to comply with health and safety standards. Those complaints related to tenancy concerns were referred to the residential tenancy office for assistance, all of which have been resolved.

**K. Conroy:** When there are outstanding issues, are they corrected? Will you continue to work on them so they are corrected, or do they ever become an issue that can't be resolved?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** We're getting some additional information for the member here, but I will give her this piece, and then we'll come back to some of this. The ALCE, for those who have been sitting on pins and needles awaiting what that is, is the Assisted Living Centre of Excellence.

Relatively few of those go on to the ALCE. Most of these 35 complaints have been resolved informally at the registrar level. There are no fines, but the potential of losing registration, which obviously is a far more compelling penalty even than a fine, remains a possibility and remains a very live concern for a facility that would be subject to a complaint.

**K. Conroy:** Is there somewhere where families can go? Is this public information where they can go and punch in a facility on some website and they can tell if there have been any complaints registered against them? Is there some avenue for that?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** The registrar of assisted living is developing a website that will have information with respect to those registered assisted-living premises. Right now that doesn't exist. I guess the best thing would be to call the registrar, and the registrar can provide information as appropriate to the caller.

[1550]

**K. Conroy:** For licensed community care facilities, what we've understood is that the health authorities can send in persons to go and make unannounced visits to check the licensing issues with those kinds of facilities. What I'm wondering is if the ministry has information on those kinds of inspections and how they're carried out.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** The member may wish to explore this more, but my understanding of how this works is that should the registrar, for example, receive a complaint, the registrar has the authority to invite whatever officials she feels appropriate to go in and review the situation. She might involve, for example, a nurse. She might involve licensing officers. She might involve other health professionals that she deems appropriate, based on the case at hand.

That is my understanding of how the process works. I'm not sure I have addressed the member's point. I'll invite her to throw in a supplementary here, if I've missed it.

**K. Conroy:** Are the inspections only complaint-based, or are they done on a routine basis?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** The role of the registrar is a complaints-driven role. However, the Assisted Living Centre of Excellence, which I noted earlier, is an industry self-regulating model that will be building best practices, which will be attempting to ensure that all of its members achieve the standards that are set out by the Assisted Living Centre of Excellence. So there are drives for quality at two levels, both from the industry association and the Assisted Living Centre of Excellence and from the registrar on a complaints-driven basis.

As of May 14, 2004, the assisted-living registrar has authority to receive and investigate complaints about assisted-living residences, including the power to enter and inspect a residence where there is a concern about the health or safety of a resident. In addition, health and safety standards for assisted living are now in place to ensure that the health and safety of assisted-living residents is not jeopardized.

**K. Conroy:** For the facilities that are not under the assisted-living registrar but are, in fact, under community care licensing, they would be governed, monitored and inspected by community care licensing — under that act, I'm assuming.

[1555]

I'll ask the same questions: are inspections in that sector complaint-based, or are they routine?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** Residential care facilities are licensed either under the Community Care and Assisted Living Act or under the Hospital Act. I understand that for those that have been licensed under the Hospital Act, there is a transition of those facilities into what's termed section 12 of the Community Care and Assisted Living Act. That's one level of the licensing under residential care.

Assisted living is a registration under the Community Care and Assisted Living Act, and it flows, as we have been discussing, around the registrar and how the office of the registrar works.

**K. Conroy:** The inspections that are done on those sites: would they also be available somewhere, in some way that the public could access them?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** There is a different process around residential care and assisted living in terms of how due process is undertaken around inspections. In residential care — because, as the member knows, of the level of acuity or need by those patients — they're typically there because they require 24-7 support within their facilities. For those residential care facilities, they are subject to unannounced inspections by the licensing officers as well as, obviously, enforcement on a complaints basis where that occurs. The licensing reports, which I think the member was also asking about, are typically available from the health authorities and maybe on line as well.

A final point I should note is that British Columbia is the first province in Canada to regulate assisted-living residences. We have been viewing it for some time as a gap in terms of the regulatory framework, and I think it is going to be a very useful addition to the way in which these issues are managed. Should a person have a concern about a person in care in a licensed community care facility, they should contact the community care facilities licensing program in their health authority.

[1600]

**K. Conroy:** The minister brought up issues around section 12 of Bill 73 and some of the issues that are arising from that. I want to talk about some of them, but I would also first like to ask the ministry: when is this process going to be completed — the issues around section 12 — and when will that be presented?

[J. Yap in the chair.]

**Hon. W. Oppal:** I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

#### Introductions by Members

**Hon. W. Oppal:** In the House this afternoon is a class of grade 11 students from my riding, David Thompson high school. With them is their teacher, Mr. Vellescig. I had the privilege of meeting them outside in the foyer. I would ask that they feel welcome.

#### Debate Continued

**Hon. G. Abbott:** In answer to the member's question, and I'll just try to be sure that we're answering the right question. I think the member's question is around the transition of, particularly, denominational private hospitals from the existing regulatory framework to section 12 of the Community Care and Assisted Living Act. That's my understanding. If her question is broader than that, I'm glad to add some further information for her consideration.

Our understanding is that in terms of the transition of those denominational private hospitals, there are some complex issues involved. There's an extensive consultation process underway with them. There are issues around management structures, around taxation and so on. These discussions for the private denominational hospitals involve 23 facilities and, at the most recent count, 2,353 residents or beds in those facilities.

We haven't put a fixed time line around the transition of those facilities to section 12 of the Community Care and Assisted Living Act. We aim to do it efficiently and effectively, but there are some complex issues which we have committed to working through with the denominational providers.

**K. Conroy:** That will suffice. The minister has wrapped up a number of issues into one, so that answer does suffice.

One of the things with the community care facilities licensing and the adult care regulations that I've been looking at.... I did bring this up in estimates last fall. My background is early childhood education, so I'm pretty familiar with how the community care facilities and their regulations work.

[1605]

I still have concern around the lack of staffing regulations that are in the regulations. The licensee has to ensure that a person is of good character, that they have the personality, ability and temperament necessary.... That's to manage a facility. There are no regulations for either managing the facility or for working in the facility that are specific to the training required.

A number of facilities have expressed concern around the lack of RNs in their facilities. There was some real concern about the cost-effectiveness of this, in that RNs are able to determine some issues that are coming up that a long-term care aide might not be able to determine, and residents end up in acute care facilities requiring further support and acute care services.

It is a concern. Is the ministry looking at any way of ensuring that facilities do have the proper training? I don't think it's enough that a person is a person of good character, although that's a very good skill to have. I think that we need to ensure that there are skills like specific long-term care aides, LPNs, and those are specific credentials that need to be recognized in these facilities.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** For those who are watching the proceedings today who've been waiting for this number, I'm glad to advise that the budget for the assisted-living registrar is \$420,000 per year.

In terms of the member's, I think, very good question about how we can ensure that we have quality of care in those institutions, whether they're assisted living or residential care, we basically have two ways in which those care packages are provided to the folks in assisted living or residential care. They are typically provided either through the health authorities, where quality improvement programs are in place and the health authorities are looking at ways to continuously improve the quality in those facilities....

The second way in which care is delivered is through what's known as the affiliate sector. The affiliate sector might, for example, include groups like the Salvation Army that provide care facilities on a contract basis for us. More and more, those contract provisions that we have with the affiliate sector are also aimed at establishing benchmarks for quality and driving continuous quality improvement in the facilities.

We also work with groups like Ed Helfrich and the B.C. Pricare Association that is representative of those in the private care sector. The aim is to ensure that across the board we have the best possible quality in the facilities that are licensed or registered to operate in this province.

[1610]

Final point. Both the nurses' bargaining agreement and the facilities bargaining agreement, as the member

knows, were recently concluded. Those provide policies and support for training and the building of further best practices and better management in the area of quality as well.

**K. Conroy:** I think this is a good time.... The minister had asked previously about my concerns around private versus non-profit facilities. I think that what's at issue for me and for many members and people that I talk to is the fact that at the end of the day a private owner-operator needs to put money in their bank account, which is business, which is fine. But in the non-profit facilities, the facilities run by the health authorities, the money goes back into the facilities.

I've seen some fabulous facilities. I think a sterling example is Mount St. Mary, right across the street here, non-profit residential care run by a non-denominational organization — amazing facilities. The building was newly constructed. Construction started in the late '90s — just well done. They have excellent quality of care. They have staffing levels that are commendable — RNs, LPNs, long-term care aides. It's an example of what people can do when all the funds are put back into the facility.

There is a real concern around staffing levels. I think of Polson Extended Care Facility in Vernon. The staff there express their concern around the shortage of staff for proper patient care.

When I toured around the province visiting facilities.... I'm the first to say that it doesn't matter how fancy the facility is or if it's brand-new. What people tell me about is the quality of care and how they love their caregivers. In some of the facilities I was in the people weren't too happy with their caregivers. Those were facilities where the staffing ratio.... There was a large number of residents to caregivers. There were few, if any, RNs on. It's a real concern — the quality of care around staffing issues — across the province.

There doesn't seem to be any continuity or any regulations that all facilities have to abide by. That's a concern that's been expressed by facility operators, by families, by residents who live in the facilities, as well as the people who work in the facilities. Is there anything that the ministry is going to do to alleviate that issue?

[1615]

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I thank the member for her question.

An enormous amount of work has been done by the staff at the Ministry of Health in respect of the important issues that the member raises around driving quality across the board, whether the facilities are privately owned but under contract with the health authority, whether they're not-for-profit societies that, again, are working under contract with the health authority or whether they are facilities that are owned by the health authority itself or existing public facilities.

In all of those cases, the aim of the work we are doing is to drive improved quality. There's a ton of work that's been done there. The member mentioned Vernon, and we know that there is a Vernon advocacy group that's been concerned about staffing levels at

Interior Health residential care facilities. It's not clear to me whether that is a broad-based concern — you know, whether it's owned by public or not-for-profit.

Also, so we're clear: the private, for-profit ownership of residential care beds remained constant at about 24 percent between 2002 and September 2005, which is the most recent date we have information on. So there hasn't been a big change in terms of the percentage — in fact, there's been no change in the percentage — of private, for-profit ownership in the residential care sector. It's remained about the same.

There is work being done around ensuring that LPNs and care aides and so on are able to work to full scope of practice. There is a forum undertaken in the nurses' bargaining agreement, which I referenced. So we are working on a range of issues in that joint policy committee, and I should mention those to the member. Policy discussions among the Ministry of Health; the six health authorities; HEABC, the Health Employers Association of B.C.; and the Facilities Bargaining Association will continue through the establishment of a joint policy committee.

The ministry has committed an initial \$100,000 for the work of the FBA-joint policy committee. Projects to be undertaken by the committee include complex care policy discussions, competencies and training standards for care aides, a report on LPN and care aide best practices and effective utilization. Work will be done on responsive shift scheduling.

As the member knows, this is a very big issue for nurses — how we can better manage the area of shift schedules. As well, we will be looking at practice dialogues and professional practice councils to increase knowledge and understanding of practice areas and skills which LPNs and care aides can bring to health care.

A final point around education. During the bargaining process the ministry agreed to transfer \$5 million to the facilities bargaining agreement for administration of a program of educational supports for members on terms outlined in the agreement.

**K. Conroy:** I thank the minister for the response. I still think it's an issue that continues to come up. I think last fall in Williams Lake, when the COSCO group did their study with Charmaine Spencer, a lot of the issues around their concerns for the housing up in Williams Lake for seniors were around minimum staff levels — that they weren't appropriate.

[1620]

I think the Pederson report that the IHA did afterwards reiterated that. I can tell you that there were some issues in the Nelson constituency. The member for Nelson-Creston and I toured a facility, and there were concerns expressed about a new facility, Mountain Lakes, around staffing levels. We will continue to monitor those staffing levels and make sure that they are not only adequate but are appropriate for the seniors.

Not so much in the residential care, but we notice when talking to facilities in the newer assisted-living facilities, some of which did have residential care associated with them.... With the new facilities that took

over buildings, when they were built, staff were let go. When they were hired back, they were hired back to an existing union. I'm just curious if that's a policy the ministry supports — that these new facilities have the right to tell the staff that in order to work, the union is existing in new facilities.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** The ministry doesn't give direction or make decisions in respect of those issues. The affiliate sector and other sectors are guided by the terms and conditions that are laid down in the Labour Code and to the extent that they apply in collective agreements themselves.

The member is correct, though, to identify the need for nurses as one of the biggest challenges we have across the province. I don't want to appear to harp on this, but in the Vancouver Health Authority today we have 772 nurse vacancies. That, to me, is an astonishing figure — 772 vacancies.

They are actively recruiting from graduating nursing classes in the province. They're recruiting nationally and internationally for nurses who can help fill those 772 vacancies, because whether it's an emergency room, critical care, acute care or residential care, there is a huge need for nurses. We need to find ways to meet that gap because the biggest challenge we have in delivering quality care across the board is ensuring that we have a sufficient number of nurses.

Similarly, in the Fraser Health Authority: 321 nurse vacancies at the present day. So just those two of five regional health authorities have 1,100 vacancies. Those are two of the largest health authorities in the province, but there are three others that are substantial as well, and it goes to the magnitude of the problem that we have in respect of nursing resources.

The health authorities and, I think, Health Match B.C. and others have been recruiting aggressively. We've brought many nurses in through the provincial nominee program. Most importantly, perhaps, we have expanded the number of nursing spaces since 2001 by 62 percent, or 2,511 spaces. That is a very critical part of meeting the health human resource needs we have in the area of nursing.

All of those initiatives are helpful, but there is more work to be done. I am very proud that when we came in, in 2001, after seeing this area of health human resource policy not receiving the resources it should in the previous ten years — there had not been any expansion of the nursing seats in the 1990s — we did make a huge investment in that area. I believe we're beginning to see the benefits of that investment in health human resources.

[1625]

**K. Conroy:** Along that line, one of the biggest issues, when I talk to nurses and people that are working in the health care sector, especially with what's happened lately in the Interior Health Authority, is the fact that nurses are also leaving the field and leaving the region because of lack of support in the facilities they're working in — lack of morale, issues that are very diffi-

cult for nurses to face. We've had nurses in our area who have retired early, who have taken stress leaves because of the workload.

I'm hoping that the new nurses coming on stream will alleviate that. I'm also hoping that some of the work done in the review that's been undertaken in the Kootenay-Boundary area will alleviate some of that too.

Along that line, I just want to bring up an issue with the Interior Health Authority that has come up quite a bit as of late: the fact that there is this inquiry happening. Or a review is happening. While that review is happening just in the West Kootenay-Boundary region, there are issues throughout the entire region, including issues of staffing and nurses. Nurses have been speaking out. I know, Mr. Minister, that you will agree that there isn't a gag order, but many of the people that are working in the region don't agree with you.

Now we know that there are a number of municipalities, regional districts that have joined in the request, along with thousands of people who have signed petitions in the region asking for a full, independent inquiry into what's happening in the Interior Health Authority. It's not just about long-term care beds, it's not just about the cuts to acute care beds, and it's not just about the nurses and the mental health issues. There are many, many issues that need to be looked at globally in that health authority region.

People are requesting that some type of inquiry be held. People want to ensure that this is done in an independent process, and I ask the minister: is this going to happen?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** The member raises a number of issues. Let's start with the nurses. Clearly, the last thing that anyone wants in this province is for us to lose additional nursing resources. When we see any reduction in the number of nurses, it obviously puts a strain on the remaining body of nurses, and that makes it even more difficult for them. So we do very much want to avoid any kind of cyclical process that saw a reduction in the number of nurses that were able to practise in this province.

I'm confident, in fact, that what we are seeing — not just in Interior Health but across the province — is a shifting culture where the contribution of nurses is ever more appreciated, and the importance of their role is ever more appreciated.

We know we have a challenge in respect of the demographics in the nursing population, just as we do in the general population. The majority of nurses in the province are my age — in their early 50s — and contemplating retirement within, possibly, the next five years. We do need to be educating a younger cohort of nurses, and we're doing that with a 62-percent expansion in the number of nursing seats in this province.

We've come a long way, and we're starting to see, as those expanded nursing graduating classes come on stream, the opportunities for health authorities to literally hire the entire classes. Vancouver Island Health Authority, for example, has indicated that it's looking

to see the hiring of pretty much every graduate out of the nursing schools this year.

[1630]

That's the pressure the system is under. That's the pressure that is generated by insufficient training and education dollars being devoted to this important area in the 1990s. Again, if the member is concerned about the workload of nurses and the pressure that nurses are under, why was it that we did not see that investment in additional spaces in the 1990s? Because we didn't. If the member thinks I'm wrong, then she should tell me that I'm wrong and explain to me why I'm wrong, because we know our facts are right here.

Rather than sort of be histrionic about this, though, I think what we have attempted to do with nurses across the province over the past couple of years is to start to build processes where the ministry, the nursing profession, the health authorities, HEABC are all engaged around the issues that can help ensure the health, safety, well-being, job satisfaction, etc., of the nursing profession, because we know the quickest route to burnout is unsatisfactory working conditions.

Through the processes that led up to the recent 97.1 percent ratification vote by the nurses.... That wasn't something that happened in the week before ratification. That was a process that goes back many months and involved prolonged and protracted efforts by all of the parties at the table to identify those things and areas where we can work to make the satisfaction level among nurses higher than it currently is.

We know there are lots of factors in respect of that. We know this is a work-in-progress. We know there's an opportunity for continuous improvement. I salute the nursing profession and their leadership that have, I think, come to the table with the disposition to work, to sit down with the government and the health authorities and work through these issues and actually find agreements and accommodation that will make sense on the ground and deliver better health care.

The nursing bargaining agreement makes plenty of opportunities for us to continue to work in that area. We don't see those discussions ending with the ratification of the nurses agreement. In fact, they're an opportunity for us to redouble our efforts and work through those issues that will strengthen the nursing profession in this province even more and, as a consequence, strengthen patient care in this province even more.

The member referred to "a gag order" which supposedly exists in the Interior Health Authority. I had the opportunity at a recent meeting with Interior Health to talk about that. There is no gag order in respect of nurses or any other profession in Interior Health.

In fact, much to their credit, and I hope the member will acknowledge this, Interior Health and their board have recently enacted a whistle-blower policy, which actually encourages nurses and anyone else who works within the Interior Health Authority to actually bring forward their issues where they see the potential for patient care being compromised. It actually invites them, encourages those nurses or other health profes-

sionals or front-line health care workers to come forward with those concerns. Well, it's just the reverse of a gag order. In fact, it's a policy that puts a policy backdrop to the encouragement of people working together.

The object of all this is to improve the culture of care that exists in Interior Health and other locations in the province. The whistle-blower policy of Interior Health is obviously intended for Interior Health, although I think other health authorities have, at least in some cases, comparable policies. But the aim of this is to improve the culture of care; to improve the relationships that exist between administration and nurses, between administration and front-line health care workers, home care aides and so on; to improve the culture between doctors and nurses and home care aides.

[1635]

I think we can see great improvement in all of these things. I do look forward to that. Again, I think responsible, appropriate steps are being taken by Interior Health and other health authorities to achieve that objective.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

Finally, the member says: "Well, have a public inquiry looking at all aspects of Interior Health." Well, I don't think that's justified. In fact, Interior Health do a very, very good job of delivering health care and health care services in a geographic region that is very, very challenging to deliver health care in.

Interior Health is not a large metropolitan region. Interior Health is an expansive geographical region with probably a dozen or more large cities and many, many more, dozens more smaller communities which have their expectations for health care as well. So I actually think there is no justification for undertaking anything termed an inquiry.

Further, I believe that such an inquiry is not a recipe for action. It is, in fact, a recipe for inaction. I don't plan to stand by, as Health Minister in this province, and await the outcome of somebody else to tell us how to do these things. I think, in fact, we are on the right road under the leadership of the ministry and the health authorities. We are on the road to improving health care in hundreds of ways, every day, across Interior Health and across this province.

I'm not going to stand back and say that an inquiry can add value. I don't believe it will. We are working each and every day with the health authorities and the 120,000 people who provide health care across the province. We're identifying, each and every day, new ways to bring about continuous improvement for the residents of this province.

**K. Conroy:** There are many, many people in the Interior Health Authority region that would disagree with the minister — nurses, doctors, advocates, patients, many people in the Kelowna hospital dealing with code purples, many people in Kamloops dealing with code purples, people in Williams Lake dealing

with long-term care issues, and people throughout our region. It goes on and on and on.

I'm not going to take up all my estimates time arguing with you the benefits of an internal inquiry, but I do believe that some form of inquiry that's external, that's transparent, that could show some accountability issues, that could bring things to the fore would give staff and people that work in that region the sense of security that they can speak out. As of last week I talked to people who still do not feel they have the sense of security to actually speak out against the issues that are very, very troubling to them in the health authority.

On that note I'm going to move on. One of the issues that has come up is around the RFP process for residential care facilities in the province. Most recently, there was an RFP process in the Vancouver Island Health Authority that led to some questions from various people across the region about how those RFPs are processed. So a question to the minister: what is the normal length of time that persons have to reply to RFPs of a significant nature, such as residential construction?

[1640]

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I want to comment on the general and then move to the more specific, because the member did reference the Vancouver Island Health Authority and some concerns which she said had been expressed around their RFP processes.

Request for proposals is typically the last stage in identifying what will be a successful project. It might be a housing project. It might be a health facility project. Generally, the time line that is contained in the request for proposal will vary with the size and complexity of the project. Often, we see a typical RFP period being around three months, but there will be variation on that depending on the size and complexity of the project.

There are procurement guidelines on the government website to guide one in respect of procurement. The pros in this area tend to be Partnerships B.C. and B.C. Housing. They do a lot of these RFPs. In every case, what they do during the RFP process is assess the proposal against what it is they seek to achieve.

I've got here a two-month deadline for a request-for-proposal process. Two months is typical of time frames provided for this process and consistent with time frames used for residential care RFPs: for Interior Health Authority, ten weeks including two over the Christmas period; and Fraser Health Authority, six weeks. Additionally, VIHA provided six weeks of advance notice that an RFP was being released. The advance notice identified the approximate number and type of beds and spaces required by the community.

To date, only three requests have been made seeking an extension to the RFP closing date. VIHA had over 100 people attend a bidders' meeting, so the anticipated response rate is high. The process needs to be kept on a tight schedule to ensure that the complex



care and assisted-living spaces are built and in service in as timely a manner as possible.

I think that's probably what the member was referencing around the complex care and assisted-living RFP process with the Vancouver Island Health Authority. I presume she had heard some concern that the time frame was too tight in respect of the VIHA process. I think what I've just noted are the reasons why the time frame was appropriate and, further, a lot of evidence that, in fact, most of the interested parties found the time lines appropriate, because there has been very good uptake on interest in proceeding with some of these projects.

**K. Conroy:** When you're looking at the RFPs that are awarded, does the ministry or Partnerships B.C. take into consideration the past practices of people who they're awarding the RFPs to — if they've had other facilities around the province?

[1645]

**Hon. G. Abbott:** Yes, the quality of care that has been provided historically by the provider would come into play.

**K. Conroy:** Then I just want to put on the record that the community of Nelson was quite concerned about the direct granting of an RFP to a manager who had had his facility close down due to a number of concerns. During the RFP process, even though he didn't have the highest bid, he was awarded the RFP to build this facility. It's caused incredible concern in the community. I just want to put that on record. I think that, in this instance, the past practices of this manager were not taken into consideration.

It would seem that this isn't the practice that is utilized across the province and that it might be health authority specific?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** We are not intimately familiar with the case that the member raises. Given that I don't know all of the details around that particular case, it would probably be unfair and inappropriate for me to make comment in what is obviously a public setting here in the Legislature. The member may wish to provide me with more information on this case in this setting, or she may wish to advance the information to me in a private communication. I'm glad to receive that information in either case.

What I can say in a general way is that quality of care and history of quality of care is an important element when we are looking at a partnership with a care provider for the future in any corner of this province. We often will work, particularly on the larger projects, with Partnerships B.C., who bring a professional approach to the issues of tendering and so on.

As well, I know from experience in Salmon Arm that often we will put in place what are termed "third-party fairness auditors." Where concerns are raised by one or other of the competitors in a process about how the process was structured or managed, we can also

engage a third-party auditor to look at the process and advise us whether the processes, in any sense, may have been skewed or unfair or should be reconsidered. Those are all possibilities.

[1650]

Again, I won't try to be definitive about the application of those issues to the case the member raises in Nelson, because we don't know enough about it. The member may do as I suggested at the outset — raise more points here or advance more information to us. We'd be fine to look at it.

**K. Conroy:** I'll take the opportunity to discuss it with the minister out of the chamber.

I want to talk a bit about home support. The minister brings up the issue around continuum of care, campus of care and the need for home support for seniors. It is an issue, when I talk to seniors in this province, that there isn't enough home support for them. We know that home support is cost-effective, that seniors can stay in their homes longer, in supported housing facilities longer, if they have that home support that can keep them in those facilities.

In the minister's service plan, there's a strategy to increase the range of supportive living environments and community care options across the spectrum from home care to residential care facilities, and I'm wondering how much of this funding is dedicated to the home care aspect of that.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** We're still doing some math in respect of breaking out the home care component of the budget from the residential care portion of the budget, and we'll have that shortly.

I do want to note, however — and this is, I think, an important point — that the average number of hours that a home care client receives per year has increased overall from 212 hours per client in 2001-2002 to 244 hours per client in 2004-2005. That is an important statistic.

I think I should also note that the first ministers' agreement around the ten-year action plan on health was able to provide additional funding to the five regional health authorities in the '05-06 budget allocation to support short-term, acute care, home care and end-of-life services. So there has been some enhancement of services in that area.

In '05-06, the budget that we approved last fall, government allocated an additional \$150 million over two years to strengthen and modernize the full range of services for seniors and to ensure that seniors age in place where appropriate. That included just over \$1 million of this amount being spent on increasing home care services.

[1655]

There's lots of work being done by the health authorities and others around comprehensive home care planning, development of assessment tools and so on. So there is some excellent work being done there — not to say there aren't challenges in that area, because there are. We are always working to try to build our health human resources in that area. Again, I do hope that the

recent contract agreement will be supportive of that aim.

**K. Conroy:** I'm assuming those are provincial numbers, because actually in the greater Trail area, to be specific.... I'm focusing a bit on that because, just to give some background, it seemed like a lot of issues had happened with seniors who had been moved out of the area and were separated — in fact, we know it was an issue with the Albos. It was a lack of home support services that put them back in the acute care system. That is quite common. I hear that a lot from seniors.

In our local area — the Kootenay Lake, Nelson, Castlegar, Trail area — there's actually been a 42-percent cut in the number of home support services. It's interesting because the population has increased, which is the statistic that the minister uses of 75,000 seniors over the age of 75. In fact, that's a concern in our region. People aren't accessing the required home support services. For the most part, as I've talked to people, it's not so much an issue about services, resources and staffing as it is the number of staff hired to do the work. They're available.

I know that in the other parts of the Interior Health Authority, there was actually what was referred to as a "code purple" in the home support just after Christmas, where they were not taking on any more home support clients. Even if you were in the system, ended up in the hospital and were sent back home, you were put at the bottom of the list and weren't able to access the home support system. That was quite a concern in the Kelowna area as well as in the Okanagan area.

Statistically, those numbers might be working, but the reality is that the seniors aren't accessing the home support as they should be. Again to the minister: what kind of programs or support will the ministry be putting in place to ensure that what is happening, especially in the Interior Health Authority, isn't going to continue to happen across the province?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** The issue the member raises, about the number of home care and home support workers that we have in the system, is an important one. It is one that is of great concern to me. It is an issue which we recognize needs attention, and I'm working with my colleague the Minister of Advanced Education, working with my colleague the Minister of Education, working with government to try to ensure that we are putting in place all of the opportunities for training and education that will build the numbers of home care workers available to us.

One part of that is ensuring that we have a contract in place that supports those objectives, which I believe we do. I think it will be supportive of that. Second, ensure that we have tuitions to those programs that are affordable and are supported — so that tuition doesn't become a barrier to folks entering the home care aide programs and so on that are offered at community colleges and university colleges in the province. That's very important.

[1700]

I think, third, that we need to begin, if we're not already doing it, to think about home care aides as being positions where people can grow, where they can continue to access training opportunities, where they can continue to grow into other positions and areas of caregiving within the health authorities. It should be an opportunity for a lifelong career in the health authorities when one enters that area.

The member referenced cuts, which is always a fascinating thing to hear in a ministry that has gone from \$8.3 billion in 2001 to \$12 billion in the current year budget, plus capital. In fact, when we are talking about home care, including home support specifically, we see a \$107 million lift across the province for that budget item. That's very, very important. So there is a major lift in that area. In fact, it is a \$108 million lift that has occurred over those five fiscal years.

The member can say "cuts" — and I know that is part of the mantra of the opposition to reference cuts — but there has been anything but a cut in the allocation of resources to this very important area of health care. There has been a huge lift of \$108 million to the area. Does that mean it's perfect? Heck, no. It's far from it. We've got lots of work to do, but just as we have seen great progress in the area of reuniting seniors over time....

Just for the record, we know that in August of 2001 there were 615 married residential clients in different facilities from their spouses. In November 2005 that number had been reduced to 73. So home care is a part of the work we need to do to ensure that to the extent we can — because, again, medical conditions can separate couples — we need to put those supports in place that allow people in their latter years to enjoy the quality of life which they should expect from a society as rich and prosperous as the one we're in.

**K. Conroy:** Can the minister explain...? Is there not some type of policy that goes across authorities so that the ministry is assured, when they give their money to the authorities to implement home support programs, that it's actually implemented? The reality in Trail is that the home support hours were reduced by 64 percent. A cut's a cut's a cut.

I think there needs to be some policy that the ministry has to ensure that every health authority puts those dollars into home support. Is there such a policy to ensure that happens?

[1705]

**Hon. G. Abbott:** This is what we know. In every case in every health authority — IHA or any other — there are standardized assessment tools in place that, as we talked about earlier, provide a comprehensive assessment of patient needs. We will know, through those standardized assessment tools, whether home care is appropriate in this case, whether the patient might require a level of assistance — for example, assisted living — or, where the care needs are more compelling and comprehensive, perhaps the need for residential care.

We do have those standardized assessments. Based on that assessment, there is a distribution of resources across the health authorities by the health authorities in the most appropriate and efficacious way that they can. We do know that the IHA has about \$20 million more expended in the area of home care, including home support, than they did back in '01-02. So the budget line has increased by some \$20 million. Again, I'm not sure on what basis the member is making her accusation.

**K. Conroy:** They weren't accusations; they were facts. I will ensure that the minister has a copy of the study that's been done.

At the risk of getting a lecture about the '90s, I'm going to ask the minister: is the ministry going to consider reinstating personal care like the IC-1 home support? I hear about that a lot, and I'll remind the minister I wasn't here in the '90s. What I do hear is the comment from the senior who said that she gets a bath once a week, but it's in a tub that's not very clean because she can't clean it and the home support person is not allowed to clean it. The seniors who have fallen because they've tripped over rugs or....

Just the whole issue around the hygienic issues that keep people healthy. I'm hoping that the minister can rise above it and talk about the positive benefits of personal care and potentially reinstate them, because seniors do need them.

[1710]

**Hon. G. Abbott:** To the member's question, I want to first of all make it clear that I would never want to deliver a lecture in respect of the 1990s. I read a very thoughtful column recently by Les Leyne, which suggested my occasional references to the 1990s were really getting kind of worn. So I had a brief discussion with Les about that point and acknowledged the force of the arguments he advanced in his column. I said it was only the fact that the current member shared the same name as the government in the '90s, that they shared a number of the same members as in the 1990s, that they shared a number of the same political aides who are now re-ignited as MLAs.... It was only the fact of the same essential party and the same direction that occasionally I'd call attention to the record of the 1990s.

I know the member wasn't here in the 1990s. I do know, though, the former member for the constituency that she is now proud to represent today. He was an excellent fellow, and I understand that she may have some personal knowledge of that former member. He was an excellent member and a delightful friend to all of us in the Legislature.

However, turning to the important, serious side of this discussion.... The issue of home support or personal care for the frail elderly is a very important one, where I do think that we can do some innovative thinking. The issue that has been around — and it's been around for a while — is whether the housekeeping component should be a part of the personal care in home support.

Freestanding housekeeping, as the member will know, was something that in a formal sense was eliminated in 1996. There was a policy decision made by the former government — and I hope it's fair for me to point that out — in 1996. The on-the-ground application of that policy, because there were 52 health authorities at that time.... The on-the-ground application of that shift came, in some cases, a year or two or more later, but the general policy direction was shifted in 1996.

I think that decision was made with the aim of getting the best possible and useful allocation of the resources available to government and to health authorities to achieve the purposes that we wish to achieve. I think the shift that was made in 1996 was consistent with trying to achieve that. That having been said, I think there will be cases, and they may be exceptional cases, where the application, judiciously, of housekeeping resources where it is pivotal to a frail elderly person remaining in their home.... There might be some judicious application of a more flexible policy in respect of that.

That's not to say the shift that was made in '96 and that continues today was the wrong one. I think it was the correct one, but I think there can be exceptional circumstances. This is a matter of taking the policy and applying it in a commonsense way to the specific circumstances that might face a frail elderly individual. I think we do need, on occasion, to look at that and look at a more flexible application of that particular policy.

**K. Conroy:** I'm happy to hear that. I'm sure numerous groups around the province, who are also asking for this, will be happy to hear it. I know the B.C. Health Coalition has done a home support campaign that they've been lobbying for, as have other seniors groups that are very concerned about this. It is an issue.

[1715]

One of the other concerns that has been expressed to me is that some of the assisted-living facilities that aren't adequately staffed are utilizing home support services, and seniors justifiably should access those services. There are facilities that are utilizing them more than other facilities, and it's usually dependent on staffing levels.

Back to staffing levels in assisted-living facilities. I know we talked a little bit about it earlier, but just to clarify. The minister talked about the actual qualifications and issues around that but didn't talk about numbers. Is there going to be any movement towards actual ratios of residents to caregivers in facilities?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I thank the member for her question. Assisted living by definition is a housing arrangement that consists of three elements: a private housing unit with a lockable door, hospitality services and personal care services. We know that in some cases the assisted-living operators will contract with the health authorities to provide the third — the personal care services — and that's possible.

A second point: do we plan to put in place fixed ratios with respect to residents to caregivers? No, we

drive outcomes through the standards that are set out through contract. We also drive quality through evaluation criteria when we are considering undertaking a contract with the proponents.

[1720]

For example, when we're looking at the evaluation criteria for an EOI or RFP submission, we would look at demonstrated understanding in the delivery of hospitality and personal care services. We would be looking at a staffing plan that demonstrates an understanding of the services required, demonstrated ability to meet required number of units, demonstrated ability to meet required time line and demonstrated ability to meet expected funding range, a location appropriate for assisted living, and building meets mandatory design and construction standards for assisted living. Those are the kinds of things that we would look at.

Then in terms of the contract that is developed, that contract will contain a number of quality indicators, which will be incumbent upon the operator or the contractor to meet, were he or she to meet the terms of the contract provisions.

**K. Conroy:** So would it specifically be laid out in the contract? You're not saying the numbers would actually be put into the contract. You're just saying that the outcomes are placed in the contract, and the management is expected to come up with the right number of staff to ensure that those outcomes are carried out?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** To the member's question: the quality indicators would be embedded in the contract. It would look at hours of care and all of the quality issues around what would be provided to the patient or the resident within the facility.

We would not be prescriptive in the contract about the ratio, for example, between LPNs and RNs. That would not be something that would be addressed. Rather, we would look to the outcomes and the quality indicators that would guide us in that contract.

**K. Conroy:** Are contracts available to the public to peruse? Or are they FOI-able? Are they in any way available?

**Hon. G. Abbott:** The best and, I guess, the only answer I can give in a generalized way to the member's question around the availability of contracts for her perusal or the perusal of any other interested party in the province would be that access would be consistent to that provided within the bounds of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. There is a range of rules and requirements and obligations around the FOIPPA act. So it would be difficult, and probably impossible and inappropriate, for me to guess which portions of those thousands and thousands of contracts might be available for public perusal.

One would have to explore the bounds of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act around that point to have a comprehensive understanding in each and every case of what would be available.

However, I want to note, as well, that much work has been undertaken and continues between the ministry and the six health authorities to move to a standardized template contract that will be used across the health authorities. We're not there yet. There is a lot of work being done on this, but we are moving towards that.

[1725]

To the extent that we can achieve that in the future — of having a standardized, kind of boilerplate contract model — that would probably provide for more consistent public availability of the contracts. That's speculative, because that process has not yet been completed.

**K. Conroy:** I understand, for the minister's information, that the non-denominational society has some excellent contracts, and continues to have, that were originally developed in the mid-90s.

I'm just going to move on to palliative care. This is an issue where I tour around and talk to people about what kinds of palliative care are available for people in the province. I know that after Dr. Ballem's report in our region, we really did need to look at a more robust palliative care program — quoting the report — and that they actually did some enhancement of palliative care services.

Palliative care is such an important part of end-of-life caring, and just making sure it is done in an appropriate and responsive manner.... I'm wondering what the actual funding is that the ministry has in place for palliative care.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I thank the member for her questions. Her comments are entirely on the mark in respect of the importance of palliative care resources in this province. I think it is an area where good work has been done, and we're seeing the results of that, but more needs to be done as well.

I'll begin by noting that in fact, the number of palliative care beds has been dramatically increased in the province.

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

It has increased from, I think, 57 to 145 — in fact, that's the correct number — between 2001 and today — so 57 hospice beds now to 145. And 27 of those beds are in VIHA, 44 in Vancouver Coastal, 46 in Fraser, six in Northern and 22 in Interior Health, for a total of 145. That is definitely a major expansion in the palliative area, and I know a number of communities are working to expand that number even further. That is constructive and appropriate and much, much welcomed for them to do that.

Since 2001 the number of clients using the palliative care program has been steadily increasing as well. Now over 21,000 clients have enrolled in the program since its introduction in February of 2001, so that is encouraging.

The member will also know that there is currently before the Legislature, under a statute that was advanced by the Attorney General, a provision for the

introduction of advance care directives for the possible use of those who are palliative or are soon to be palliative, so that is an area of activity currently.

[1730]

There is lots of work being done in conjunction with the Canadian strategy on palliative and end-of-life care with Health Canada and with other organizations to really build our understanding of palliative care issues and to ensure that we appropriately resource facilities that deal with the frail elderly — typically, but not always, during their end-of-life experience.

In terms of the palliative drug program, we have also seen a very substantial increase in that area, from \$4 million in fiscal '01-02 to \$14 million for fiscal '06-07. That's a \$10 million increase in the palliative drug program — again, an important part, along with the care facilities, in ensuring that those at end of life can enjoy the dignity and respect which they certainly deserve and should expect.

**K. Conroy:** One of the experiences I had when I was touring around was to visit the hospice society's home in Prince George. It's just a fabulous home. If you ever have an opportunity, Mr. Minister, it's well worth a visit. The care they provide is exemplary. I talked to some of the people in the facility. The families are thrilled with the type of care. They have a doctor that visits regularly and RNs working in the facility. It's a home-like atmosphere. Grandchildren, children come to visit and play, and they're part of the process.

The most difficult thing for an organization like this is the lack of funding. They're a non-profit society. They struggle to make ends meet. They've had some wonderful support from the community to purchase another facility right next door to them. But sustaining funding is an ongoing issue for hospice societies like this around the province.

Is there anywhere in the budget where there's going to be recognition for organizations like the hospice society to ensure they have sustained funding? They are providing a valuable resource to communities across the province.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** The issue of hospice and palliative care is an important one in every jurisdiction. I know because the three MLAs from Prince George have spoken to me about hospice and palliative care, about the importance of it to Prince George. I do appreciate that it is an issue for Prince George and for the north.

[1735]

Part of the challenge is that in recent years we have seen unprecedented growth in terms of the hospice movement and the interest of communities in providing better and stronger palliative care for those going through the end-of-life experience. That is a salutary growth of interest in that area, but again, it is challenging for the health authorities and the ministry to keep up with that quite unprecedented interest in the expansion of palliative programs and resources.

It is worth noting — and we haven't spoken a lot about the Northern Health Authority to date in our

discussions in these estimates — the excellent work that Northern Health Authority is doing in respect of palliative care issues. Among those initiatives underway in the Northern Health Authority is a comprehensive Northern Health-wide 24-7 palliative care program based on the services of a palliative care consultative team of support for palliative care patients and their families and for care providers across all health sectors. This includes GP physician leaders with specialized palliative care knowledge — I think that's a great step ahead; palliative care nurse consultants; pharmacists with specialized training and experience in palliative care; a Northern Health and hospice volunteer nurse liaison role, working to support and enhance the role of hospice volunteers in all Northern Health sites.

They are working on palliative care-specific drug kits for the management of pain and symptoms — available in patients' homes and/or in Northern Health facilities in all communities. There is a formal partnership between Northern Health and B.C. NurseLine, completing the availability of 24-7 support for Northern Health patients and their families.

Northern Health has quality palliative care, including development of palliative care-specific clinical practice guidelines for bereavement planning and support. Just as importantly, they undertake case management for patients and families, with regularly occurring palliative care team consultation.

In a whole range of areas, including the e-health area, Northern Health have been, I think, salutary leaders in respect of palliative care. I'm pleased that they have been working in partnership with Prince George Rotary Hospice House and are supporting the expansion of the five-bed Prince George Rotary Hospice House to ten beds.

**K. Conroy:** I do want to acknowledge, again, the great work that they do up there. I was very impressed with it and wish that we had facilities like that throughout the province — which unfortunately we don't, but it would be great if we did.

One of the other issues that came up with some facilities that genuinely practice palliative care right in their residential care facilities, where they chose to palliate residents in their homes.... One of the issues that was raised with a number of them is that the funding levels were being cut so that.... The one that struck me was where the manager of the facility said: "We're not going to cut our staffing levels because these people require the palliative care nursing levels that palliative patients require." But at the same time, the health authority was cutting back the level of funding that was going to support that palliative care.

Is there any formula the ministry has that can go across authorities to ensure that facilities that are respecting the needs of residents, so they can actually die in their own homes and not in an acute care facility, can have the ability to do that and have that continuum of care — the full campus of care? What I'm hearing from managers is that there needs to be some kind of

formula so that facilities that do implement this type of passionate care for residents can carry it out.

[1740]

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I will strive, as I always do in my answers, to try to be fair both to the question posed by the member and to the efforts that are, I think, being extended on a pretty much constant basis by the health authorities to improve health care delivery in all areas, including palliative care. I think it is important to note, and I don't say this in any kind of partisan or confrontational way, that what we are seeing over the past decade is a gradual but pronounced shift in the way that caregivers and the health care system look at end-of-life issues.

I think as a society we have had some difficulty in coming to grips with the end-of-life experience. In many ways the course of care often tended to be an attempt to kind of avoid or not honestly face up to those end-of-life issues. The palliative care movement, the hospice movement have taken us a long ways towards better understanding end-of-life issues.

It is interesting, for example, that it is only today that we have before the Legislature advanced care directives for the first time in this province. There has never been an attempt to put those in place. I think that is one of the indicators around a change, a shift in how we are viewing some of those end-of-life issues that confront the health care system on a daily basis, because, of course, there is always going to be some portion of the clients that we have who are palliative.

Again, in my personal experience, my father was in a residential care facility for the last year and a half of his life. There was a pneumonia that went through that facility and affected several of the patients in the residential care facility. Near the end of his life he contracted pneumonia, and the family had to make some difficult decisions about whether we should be, you know, trying different strategies in terms of trying to deal with that pneumonia. It comes down to all of the issues around do not resuscitate, and so on — all of those issues.

So I think the shift we are seeing is an acknowledgement around.... You know, there are some strategies which we need to put in place which address the needs of different people and different end-of-life experiences. The advanced care directives will give an opportunity for people to make a choice about the end-of-life decisions they want to be a part of.

In terms of the cuts, I don't know where the phrase "cuts" comes from in this context. We have greatly expanded the number of facilities. We've greatly expanded the number of funded beds. We've greatly expanded the end-of-life drug program. So I think it is unfair, both to the ministry and to the health authorities, to say that there have been cuts. It's just not consistent with what is going on.

[1745]

I think we could say this as well, though: there is not acknowledged expertise across the board of care-

givers within residential care facilities. That's why, for example, I think the work that's being done by Northern Health on liaison expertise is very important in terms of ensuring that within residential care facilities in Northern Health there's a clear understanding of the kinds of supports that are available for palliative care patients within the context of residential care, rather than them having to be moved elsewhere — or support within the home for palliative care, as opposed to having to go on to acute care or other facilities.

There's much work being done in this area. Every day we are building the body of best practices around management of palliative care issues. We've come a long way, I think, as a society and as a health care system, in understanding and managing palliative issues.

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

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 5:46 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker 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. G. Abbott moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

**Mr. Speaker:** This House stands adjourned until two o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

The House adjourned at 5:48 p.m.

---

## PROCEEDINGS IN THE DOUGLAS FIR ROOM

### Committee of Supply

#### ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION (continued)

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

The committee met at 3:09 p.m.

On Vote 41: ministry operations, \$839,458,000 (continued).

**D. Chudnovsky:** Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon to you and to the minister and his staff.

[1510]

Let me just start with a little logistical business. What we propose to do is to begin with some additional questions on TransLink, as I indicated yesterday. Then I'll be moving to B.C. Rail for a little bit; after that the Gateway project and some questions on Sea to Sky. All of that shouldn't take more than ten minutes or so. Then later on in the afternoon a colleague will be coming in to ask some questions about B.C. Transit in the capital region — okay?

Let me begin with this, if I might. Could the minister help us understand how much funding has been provided to TransLink by the provincial government since 2001?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** We don't have the figures going back to 2001. I will try and pull out the figures for the most recent year, for the benefit of the member. I just ask his patience for a moment.

[1515]

Just before I answer that question, I want to let the member know.... I should say to the member that yesterday, when the member listed the things they were planning on canvassing, he didn't mention B.C. Rail, so we actually sent the person home. I don't believe we would be able to get them back in time, so maybe what I could do is that if there are questions there, we'll take the questions on notice and get written answers back to the member. I apologize for that in advance.

Last year they received \$270 million in fuel tax revenue. That's the 12 cents of fuel tax that we transferred to TransLink for the express purpose of providing funding for them, to fund their organization. They also received about \$65 million as a provincial contribution towards the Canada line and \$2 million as an initial contribution towards initial work being done on the Evergreen line.

It's possible, member, that there may be smaller amounts somewhere that I just haven't got at my fingertips. Those, generally, are the big-ticket ones.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Of the project funding, the minister has indicated three allocations of resources to TransLink, one of which is a reaction to increased fuel costs. Of the project funding — the Canada line money and the Evergreen line money — when were those allocations made? That is to say, when were the commitments made? Are they post-2001 or pre-2001 commitments?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** The commitment for the Canada line would have been post-2001. The commitment for the Evergreen line was actually a commitment that.... We maintained a commitment that was previously made by that member's party while in government. It had made a commitment towards the Evergreen line of \$170 million post-2010. We agreed to that commitment.

We said that we would honour that commitment, and we have, the only difference being that we did advance \$2 million for planning work from that \$170 million commitment post-2010. So there's \$168 million

of commitment remaining post-2010. We advanced \$2 million to allow planning work to get started on that line.

[1520]

**D. Chudnovsky:** Thanks to the minister for that.

There is \$65 million in the post-2001 commitment that flowed from provincial government to TransLink.

I know he says he doesn't have the previous years numbers, but it may be that he can do what I'm about to ask him, and if he can, we'd appreciate that. Can the minister outline and itemize for us any other post-2001 commitments of funding from the provincial government to TransLink which have been paid from the 2001 change of administration to the present? We've got \$65 million from last year for the Canada line. I'm looking for any other commitments of dollars from the provincial government or allocations of dollars from the provincial government which were post-2001 commitments.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** For the '04-05 fiscals — as the member would find, obviously, in public accounts — we also flowed \$54 million towards the Canada line. Off the top of our heads, to the best of our recollection, there are no post-2001 additional commitments above and beyond, of course, the 12-cents-a-litre fuel tax which they use to collect revenues. That has gone up. I forget the quantum, but it has gone up since 2001.

**The Chair:** Member. Also, all the questions go through the Chair, please.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Absolutely.

Could the minister confirm, then, that what we're talking about in terms of provincial commitments to TransLink in the period 2001 to 2006 is, give or take, \$120 million? That's my quick, rough estimate for project funding. It's \$120 million. Is that correct?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Yeah, the member's math is correct. But it's not commitments; these are dollars that have flowed — \$119 million and, of course, the \$2 million toward the Evergreen line for planning.

**D. Chudnovsky:** How much money is committed next year to come from the provincial government to TransLink?

[1525]

**Hon. K. Falcon:** It's \$17.2 million.

**D. Chudnovsky:** If I could ask two questions at once, I think they're pretty straightforward. The first one is: what's that money for? And the second one is: is it money that was committed pre-2001 or post-2001?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** That is a milestone payment, part of our capital contribution towards the Canada line. Of course, that is part of the post-2001 commitment as part of the Canada line project.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Are there any guidelines attached to that \$17.2 million? That is to say, is there an expectation that it be spent on infrastructure or maintenance or planning? Or is it just an amount of money that is forwarded to TransLink, which is then used in whatever way they want for that project?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** We have certain milestone criteria before payments get made. There has to be certain construction and engineering work that must be completed before the dollars flow.

**D. Chudnovsky:** I think what I understand him to be saying is: should those requirements be met, that \$17.2 million will go. Am I understanding correctly? If I am, what are those requirements in this case?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** There are six specific criteria for the milestone. Do you want me to read them into the record?

**D. Chudnovsky:** That would be great.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** The North Island bridge — all piles for piers N1 to S1 installed. The second is elevated guideway. Construction of the precasting plants is substantially complete and first unit cast. The next is cut-and-cover tunnels. Excavation for the cut-and-cover tunnels at the south end of Cambie Street commenced.

The next one is board tunnels. Construction of the TBM entry pit is substantially complete. The next one is stations. Design of the 49th Avenue station is complete. The last one is property acquisition, acquisition of the key properties. Then in brackets it says, "or rights over or in respect of the property sufficient for the project" — or having in place agreements of purchase and sale in respect of the properties listed in schedule C attached to this milestone memorandum. As part of the agreement, five out of those six milestone agreements — they can pick any five of the six — have to be in place.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Just to the side for a second. Perhaps the minister can help me. My memory was just jogged by my question and your answer. We talked yesterday about the performance criteria for the \$150 million. Did we get an answer to that question?

[1530]

We did. Great. Thank you. Five out of six of these criteria must be met for the full \$17.2 million to be forwarded, or is there a setup for a ratio of the money to be brought forward or allocated if some of them are met? How does that work?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** There's no mechanism for establishing ratios. They have to meet five of the six, and if they meet it, they get paid. Otherwise, they don't get paid.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Just a couple questions about the Evergreen line. There's some question as to the schedule on the Evergreen line because of funding. What is

the expectation of the minister with respect to additional funding from the province for the Evergreen line and the timetable for that?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** The member knows that that, too, is a TransLink project. We've always been very clear about the fact that we would honour the previous government's commitment, though it was not our own, of \$170 million contributed towards the Evergreen line post-2010, and there's no expectation on my part that there will be additional dollars forthcoming.

**D. Chudnovsky:** So the expectation is that that funding will be post-2010. Does the minister or the ministry have any information to share with us with respect to the schedule of completion of the Evergreen line, both in and of itself and, secondly, as a result of the timing of the payments from the province?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** I don't have any information. There again, it's not my project, so I'm not aware of what schedule TransLink is operating on or how quickly or slowly or otherwise that they are going to be proceeding with that particular project.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Just a couple of questions about the general relationship between TransLink and the provincial government. The minister has been quoted on numerous occasions using interesting and colourful language in his description of the TransLink governance process — words like "circus atmosphere" and "a whole bunch of silliness." The minister will recognize those; he's never shied away from them.

I'm wondering whether the minister could comment on the impact of that kind of language on the ongoing relationship between the provincial government and TransLink, which is the body that sets and implements transportation policy for the largest community in the province.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Well, the member knows that I'm well known for my candour and that I speak my mind, and I say things as I generally see them. But the member should also know that my comments are modest compared to the e-mails and letters that I receive from members of the public, who, I can assure you, are much more vociferous in their descriptions of TransLink than the Minister of Transportation is.

I will also say this. Many of my comments have echoed the comments of members of the TransLink board themselves. Former members like Doug McCallum and Larry Campbell were scathing in their description of how broken the governance system was and how dysfunctional the board was, so this is hardly just the Minister of Transportation forming an opinion on TransLink. This is the Minister of Transportation in a chorus of voices — those currently sitting on the TransLink board or have sat on the TransLink board historically and, of course, members of the public, who perhaps are the loudest voices of all in making it known to me through an avalanche of e-mails and let-



ters and phone calls and stopping me in the street to tell me just how dissatisfied they are with the current structure.

Now, I respect that when the Minister of Transportation points out the fact... I was very careful to point this out. I think there are sometimes individuals on the board that are disruptive, through ideological reasons or what have you. I hear members of the board tell me that if it weren't for but a couple of individuals who are constantly a problem, perhaps things could operate a lot more smoothly. I don't know. That's just what I hear from board members.

[1535]

I can tell you that from that my point of view, I've always been careful to say that I think there are many members of the board who do an exceptional job, among them the Chair, Malcolm Brodie. I think there are some very good members there that try hard to work with a very difficult system. But at the end of the day, I think we have a governance structure that is destined to fail. It's destined to fail by the very way it's been structured, by the rotation of members every year, by the fact that there's nobody that serves on it long enough to develop a skill set to oversee what is, after all, a budget that has tripled in the last decade — almost a \$900 million operating budget and a multi-billion-dollar capital budget.

What I'm hearing loud and clear from members of the public is that they want a change. My response to that, in part, was ensuring that we have a governance review which could make some recommendations that, hopefully, will be thoughtful and will be able to help address the concerns that the public has.

**D. Chudnovsky:** The minister has used the word "dysfunctional" on a number of occasions in his descriptions of the TransLink board. I wonder if he could share with us what his measures of dysfunctionality are. If, indeed, the board is operating in a dysfunctional way, there must be ways for us to identify that dysfunctionality. I wonder if the minister could share with us his view of what those specific dysfunctional things are.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** I will be happy to do that. I'm not sure if this member talks to constituents in his riding or not, but maybe he's just one of these rare people that never hears a disheartening word about TransLink. I don't know that. You'll have to inform me if that's the case, member, because you would certainly be unique in the universe if you're not hearing the same thing that I'm hearing in, as I say, avalanches of letters, e-mails, phone calls, visits, stopping me in the street, etc.

However, perhaps the best way to answer the member's question as to what I consider dysfunction is to quote directly from people that the member opposite is familiar with. Let me start with — how about former Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell. In the *Vancouver Sun* on June 22, 2004, the headline was "Mayors Want 'Unworkable' TransLink Scrapped," and the comment from Larry Campbell was: "The mayors of the two

largest cities in the lower mainland say the collapse of the RAV project shows TransLink is not working properly and should be replaced with something that does."

Here's another one. On March 9, 2006, in the *Vancouver Sun* — and this is one of my biggest fans — Derek Corrigan was quoted as saying: "Corrigan said he has no confidence in the panel. He said he's always regarded TransLink as a way for the former NDP government to offload some of its responsibilities on the region." An interesting comment from an ally of the member opposite.

Let's see. Yeah, here's another one. An editorial from the *Vancouver Sun* on June 23, 2004. The headline title is: "TransLink is Broken; It's Up to Victoria to Fix It." That's the headline.

TransLink has come to represent political gridlock in the lower mainland rather than a transit system that moves fluidly. Instead of blindly heading down this road, it's time to admit that TransLink itself is broken, that it is incapable of doing the job it was created to do.

On Monday Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell and Surrey Mayor Doug McCallum faced up to this reality. What we need is a structure that can override the inherent conflict that has paralyzed the current board which is comprised of local mayors and councillors and yet must act in the interest of the entire region.

[1540]

I think those quotes to the member opposite are a very good summation. Rather than just have the Minister of Transportation give his opinion of why I think TransLink is dysfunctional and doesn't inspire confidence in the public — which it doesn't — what I've done by quoting from an ally of the member opposite and the former mayor of Vancouver, who is hardly an ally of this government, and the editorial in the *Vancouver Sun* is really establish perfectly why a review is in order.

**D. Chudnovsky:** First, let's deal with the question of speaking to people in the constituency. I won't go through it chapter and verse, but I will assure the minister that this MLA is in constant touch with the people in his community. It's a pleasure and a privilege to be in constant touch with the people in the community of Vancouver-Kensington, which has been my home for 30 years and is, as we all know, the finest of the 79 constituencies.

On the issue of the laying out of the dysfunctionality, it seems to me that what the minister has said to us — in the case of the concerns of former mayors Campbell and McCallum and the editorial from the *Sun*, which spoke to the very same issue, so we're really talking about the same thing — is the legitimate opinion of former mayors Campbell and McCallum that what they wanted in terms of the RAV line took a long time to get. Some people disagreed with them.

That, it seems to me, is in fact what the minister is saying about that. With respect to the comments made by a current mayor, what Mayor Corrigan seems to be saying — as I read and understand his comments and have had discussions with him — is that the structure of TransLink governance should be at least as accountable or more accountable to locally elected decision-

makers than it is now. I don't yet hear from the minister — and perhaps it's a question of my ears, but maybe it's a question of his list — dysfunctionality. What I hear is disagreement.

At the time of the decision made on the RAV, there was certainly controversy. Some people saw it one way; other people saw it other ways. There was a debate. It took a little while for that debate to be resolved. Some people liked the decision; some people didn't like the decision. From my point of view, for what it's worth, that's not dysfunctionality. It's a debate. Debate is sometimes tedious, and democracy sometimes takes a while, but in the end, a decision was made. Again I would, just for the record, want to ask the...

I would give another example. There's the example of the parking stall tax, which I've heard about from a few of my constituents — some of them who don't like it. This is the parking stall tax that was implemented as a result of legislation which the minister brought forward to allow for that implementation. There are certainly lots and lots and lots of folks who don't like that, but that's not dysfunction, from my point of view, at least. That's a debate, a discussion, some disagreement. People don't like the decision that was made.

I want to press the minister, if I may, Chairperson, to give us some more examples of dysfunctionality, if in fact there is dysfunctionality there.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** I think the member needs to get it off his chest. I think the member needs to stand up and say: "We support TransLink board the way it is." Just say it; you'll feel better — through the Chair. He will feel better if he comes out and says: "We like TransLink the way it is." Forget the fact that virtually nobody in the lower mainland will agree with that characterization, but I think it will help him feel better if he comes out and says that.

The member talks about the parking stall tax and tries to imply that this was a tax brought in by the provincial government. Oh, how wrong that member is. If the member did his homework, he would know that the bill that the member's party drafted, the GVTA legislation in 1998.... In their wisdom, they decided it would be a good idea to allow TransLink to have the option to do things like collect a parking stall tax.

What a brilliant idea that was. And guess what? They've decided they would like a parking stall tax. They came to the provincial government and said: "We've now gone forward with our consultation, and we are going to start collecting a parking stall tax."

[1545]

We took a look at the 1998 legislation — that member's party was in power at the time and drafted the legislation — and realized that the way the legislation was drafted, it would allow that parking stall tax to apply to residential streets, to churches, to hospitals, schools — you name it. It was wide open.

It also had no appeal mechanism. It had absolutely no cap that would put any discipline in place in terms of their ability to hold down the amount of increase they could put into place. And it had no sunset clause.

I spoke to the chair at the time. I respect they've got the right to bring it in, but they should know what our position is on the parking stall tax. We disagree with it, but I'm not going to interfere with their right to make decisions. They have that right. They went through the consultation period.

I have to remind the members of the small business community of this, too, because there are lots of people who think I should step in and fix a problem that's not of my creation. I won't be doing that, because ultimately — and I'm sure this member will agree with me at least on this point — they will be responsible and held accountable for the decisions they make.

They did go out and do their proper consultation, and they brought forward to us the ask for us to allow some changes that would let them collect that parking stall tax in an efficient and effective manner. What we did through our discussions with them was say: "We will do that, but we're going to bring in changes through Bill 9 that will protect the taxpayer."

Quite frankly, that's what the cap on the rate was all about. That's what the sunset clause was all about, and that's what the restrictions on where it will apply were all about — so that we didn't run into a situation where residential street parking or hospitals or schools or what have you were going to be captured by the parking stall tax.

This member may know that when we introduced that legislation.... I'm on the record. Read *Hansard*, and you'll find out what the Minister of Transportation thought about the parking stall tax. He was not pleased at all to be bringing in the legislative changes that would allow them to collect it, albeit with the protections that we built in.

You'll recall that many members on the government side stood up and very vociferously attacked TransLink for even bringing forward a parking stall tax. Through very thoughtful arguments they disagreed with the premise, but I did honour the commitment of their independence and their ability to make decisions and have to live with them. They've done that, to their credit, and that's the discussion I've had many times with the chair of TransLink and many of their members.

The member opposite is, you know, really asking me: what is dysfunctional about TransLink? Well, I can tell the member, as I've tried to do, tried to illustrate not just through reading quotes of former politicians. I actually thought the *Vancouver Sun* said it very well, and I agree wholeheartedly with their one sentence that says that what we need is a structure that can override the inherent conflict that has paralyzed the current board, which is comprised of local mayors and councillors yet must try and act in the interest of the entire region.

There is an inherent conflict, because what you get is politicians who are appointed to the GVRD, and from the GVRD, based on weighted averages, you know, get appointed to the TransLink board. They revolve every year. Not surprisingly, they tend.... Not all of them — some of them tend to think in a very paro-

chial kind of local backyard politics fashion. That may be useful within their own constituency, with their own municipality, but it is not useful for the benefit of regional decision-making.

That is what I hear most often from the public, combined with the fact that the public doesn't have the confidence that the governance structure is protecting their taxpayer investment. That is something that is troubling to me as the Minister of Transportation, because I do want the public to have confidence that the substantial amount of dollars that are going into major capital programs and into the operating budget of TransLink are dollars that the public can feel confident are being looked after and well maintained.

That's one of the reasons why the member knows well that we insisted — we were very insistent — that while we were prepared to make a substantial commitment to the Canada line, the \$435 million capped commitment from the province, we wanted to ensure that a structure was in place, a private-public partnership, that would protect the investment we're making on behalf of British Columbia taxpayers and, frankly, protect all the taxpayer dollars going into that project, which were very extensive, by ensuring that a structure was in place that had sufficient risk transfer, sufficient disciplines built in through performance payments, milestone payments, etc. I think we've achieved that.

[1550]

**D. Chudnovsky:** The minister began his response to my question, of course, by asking a question. I'll remind him, as I've done many times in the past, that we are eager and at a moment's notice would take his place on the other side and be quite willing to answer his questions. But you know what? We get to ask the questions, and he's got to answer them. Sometimes that's difficult, and sometimes that makes government uncomfortable. As I have said to the minister on many occasions, at the drop of a hat we'll be willing to switch positions, and we'll answer the questions.

With respect to the question of an approach to TransLink governance, it seems to me that it's always a good idea to have a discussion about governance, and this one may be useful. We would hope, arising from the minister's comments yesterday that when we have a look at changing the governance structure of the institution that makes policy for transportation and implements policy for transportation in the lower mainland, that we wouldn't have a handpicked group of three reporting directly to the minister — who told us yesterday, very clearly and reiterated, in fact, that this was not a public process at all. It was a question of getting advice for the minister.

In a discussion of the governance of such an important body, we would expect that would be a wide-ranging, comprehensive and public process. We would expect that a minister.... Certainly, we would be hoping that the minister would say from the beginning that the goal of such a review would be to increase accountability and democratic decision-making as opposed to reducing accountability and democratic decision-

making. I think that kind of discussion could lead to all kinds of improvements to any governance structure.

Now I wanted to move very briefly.... The minister, and I understand why.... He's right; I didn't mention the issue of B.C. Rail yesterday, so I understand very well that a person who might otherwise have been here is not here. That's certainly okay with me, and I'm sorry that we didn't mention that yesterday.

Perhaps the minister and his staff will be able to grapple with this one or not. There was an announcement a couple of months ago by B.C. Rail that they were reversing a position that they had held previously that the spur line to Roberts Bank.... There was an expectation that that spur line would be sold. Then there were police, and there were investigations and allegations and people arrested, and all kinds of stuff happened. The process that would have led to the privatization of the spur line was halted. We understood it was postponed, and then the announcement came a couple of months ago that in fact B.C. Rail had chosen not to go ahead with the privatization of the spur line. The question is why?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** The member is largely correct, actually, in his recollections. I believe it was last March that I cancelled the port subdivision sale. No, that was March 2004, actually. I believe it was in March 2004 — and I could be off by a few weeks there — that I made the decision to cancel that.

The member is correct. It was on the basis of a suggestion by the RCMP that there was an investigation ongoing that may involve aspects of the port subdivision tendering process, and that was sufficient for me to move quickly to cancel the process that was underway. Then what happened last March was — and I can answer this question; I'm pleased to be able to do this for the member opposite, actually, because I don't need a staff person here to assist me in this... The member may recall that we came forward with the B.C. port strategy.

[1555]

One of the things that we've really started to recognize and want to take a leadership role in is the fact that British Columbia is on the cusp of some pretty tremendous opportunity right now, with the global realignment that's taking place, the rise of China, and to a lesser extent India, as the manufacturing powerhouses of the world. That is going to have incredible ramifications to North America, particularly the flow of container traffic into our ports, but we are not the only port of entry possible.

We are the closest port of entry to Asia, and that in itself affords us this tremendous geographic advantage that nobody else has, that we have. Last March the Premier announced that we would be moving forward with the B.C. port strategy. Part of that port strategy is to look at our ports system as a system, to make sure that we're thinking about the port of Prince Rupert, where we're investing over \$100 million with partners, to think about the Vancouver port, the Deltaport, the Surrey-Fraser port, the nine deepwater ports that we

have in the province, and ensure all our policy decisions that we're making are coordinated in such a way as to ensure that we're capitalizing on the opportunities that the growth in the Asia-Pacific and the global re-alignment are affording British Columbia.

As a result of that process that was underway, I made a decision to cancel moving forward with anything to do with the port subdivision line. I made that decision because I wanted to make sure that we fleshed out the port strategy and that I did not do anything that could later on be inconsistent with some of the objectives we may be trying to achieve as part of the B.C. port strategy.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Could the minister tell us what the value of that spur line was at the time that the decision was made to privatize it, and what the value of the spur line is now?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** I guess we'll never really know, because we didn't actually go through the process of determining and getting to the stage where we received bids, etc. At least in my own head, I haven't got any figures that jump into my mind at all. I'm sure we did evaluation, but to be candid with the member, I can't recall. That's going back a couple of years now, so I just don't even recall what it was. It certainly was in the tens of millions, as I recall, but I probably shouldn't be quoted on that because I don't recall off the top of my head.

The critical thing to know is the way the port sub-line works is that all three railways have access to the port sub-line. Essentially, it operates on a toll basis where they make payments towards the cost of operating and upkeeping the line. If there are any improvements made to the line, those go back to the three railway companies, and they pay a share towards whatever those costs are.

**D. Chudnovsky:** The minister would agree with me, would he not, that the value of the asset has appreciated substantially since the time that it was considered for privatization and the decision was made not to go ahead with it? Certainly that's the clear implication in the announcement that was made by B.C. Rail about the decision not to go ahead.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** In terms of trying to establish whether value has gone up or not, I have no idea. I have no idea because it's the rail business — right? I mean, this isn't like real estate condo developments, so it's very difficult to determine what the value may be two years later, three years later, five or ten years later.

[1600]

I'm not enough of an expert in the rail business to know what a 20-kilometre or 30-kilometre line is worth. I forget the distance of the spur line now.

I will say this. The strategic value, which is not necessarily its monetary value, has gone up, in my view, in the sense that as part of the B.C. port strategy and as part of what we're trying to do with the Asia-Pacific....

We think there may be a strategic value there that we want to ensure is part of the discussion on the B.C. port strategy.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Thanks to the minister for that answer.

The notion that the strategic value of the spur line has appreciated in the intervening years is, I think, a reasonable one. I also believe that it's a reasonable assumption that the monetary value of the spur line would have increased in the intervening years as well.

I appreciate that the staff who might be able to answer that question in a very concrete way aren't here. So I'd ask the minister if we could have that information: an estimate of the value of the line, beyond the strategic value — but the strategic value will have an impact, certainly, on the monetary value of the spur line — at the time that it was to have been disposed of, as compared to what it was at the time that the decision was made not to do that. I think that's an important question, and we would ask for that information from the minister and the ministry.

I would ask this question: what about the strategic value of the former B.C. Rail and the monetary value of the former B.C. Rail at the time of the privatization and now?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** In this case the member and I are probably going to have a very strong philosophical disagreement, because one of the things that the member knows well is that the operating performance of B.C. Rail under government ownership was disastrous. It was disastrous for more than a decade — as I recall, a billion and a half dollars written off, a total underinvestment in capital assets, for the very same reasons, ironically enough....

The member wasn't here this morning, but I was having debates over the Ferry Corp. The words that come out of the Auditor General's report and the other two reports — the Fred Wright and the Hugh Gordon — all have the same theme, which is that whenever you have a government trying to run a commercial operation, it is never served well because you have government with competing demands and interests. Just as a quick example off the top of my head, health care will always win out over buying new railcars.

One of the things that we wanted to do was make sure that communities and shippers that were not being particularly well-served by B.C. Rail could get the kind of investment in the railway and the rail line that they deserved. As you'll recall, part of the commitments made by CN was to acquire 600 new railcars; they have acquired well over 1,500 new railcars since then. They've made tens of millions of dollars of new investment in the line — dollars that, frankly, government wouldn't have had available, nor would government have been likely to invest.

I know that what the member opposite will likely stand up and say is: "Oh, but minister, remember how profitable it was in the last couple of years." I always find that particularly interesting, because through

every step that the board we put in place — the independent board with clear direction, as we always do with all our boards to make it financially sustainable.... Through every step of the way all we heard was criticisms and yelps and squeals from the members of the opposition. When we shut down the passenger rail service, for example, which was losing over \$10 million a year — nothing but howls of outrage from members of the opposition.

When hundreds and hundreds of staff members unfortunately had to be let go to try and get the staffing component of B.C. Rail down to a point that was more aligned with the rest of the railway industry, we heard nothing but howls of outrage from the members of the opposition. That's understandable. They philosophically disagree with running things on an efficient basis, and I can understand that.

[1605]

At the end of the day, here's the real problem with B.C. Rail. It was a short-line railway competing with majors that have rail lines across North America and an ability to spread their costs across the rail network right across North America.

Ultimately, what we have today now is massive new investment in the line, massive new investment in cars and massive new investment right across the railway. I think that strategically for British Columbia, that is a very positive thing.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Certainly, there are philosophical disagreements between us. We've had an opportunity and will, I hope, continue to have an opportunity in this forum and others to explore those philosophical disagreements. But I wasn't asking a philosophical question.

The question I asked was a very concrete and data-driven question. The question was: what was the value of the railway when it was sold, and what is the value of the railway now? It's a very concrete, hardheaded kind of question, and I'm asking the minister if he would be able to provide the answer to that question for us.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** No, I wouldn't. I wouldn't be able to provide that answer because, as the member knows, the lease arrangement that we entered into with CN, the long-term leases.... The taxpayers, I might add, received over \$1 billion — a substantial, substantial amount of money — which, as the member knows, the business journals praised as a pretty exceptional price.

The member asks what it is worth today. Well it's probably impossible to say due to the fact that it is now integrated as part of CN's North America-wide railway system.

CN has also made substantial, tens of millions of dollars worth, investment into the railway network in track upgrades. As the member knows, even in the tracks going to the Port of Prince Rupert, CN is making substantial upgrades, not only to the tracks, but the tunnels are all being improved and widened. It's extraordinarily expensive. The height increase to allow double-stacking in anticipation of tremendous new

growth in the new Port of Prince Rupert is as a result of the B.C. Rail-CN partnership, I might add. It wouldn't have happened without the CN-B.C. Rail investment partnership.

In fact, CN is one of the major investors in the Port of Prince Rupert to the tune of somewhere well north of \$17 million. Coupled with the provincial and federal government investments and Maher Terminals' investments, we're talking well over \$100 million directly as a result of that investment.

It's very difficult, if not impossible, to make that determination. Maybe a rail analyst could try and back out the investments that have been made — the capital investments, all the improvements to tracks, to tunnels, to adding cars — and try and make some kind of a rough estimate. I think that would be unlikely, and it's certainly well beyond my ability.

**D. Chudnovsky:** The minister has previously stated a few minutes ago that it's his judgment that the value of the spur line has appreciated. He indicated that its strategic value, it seems to me, is a philosophical concept, and we agreed that we'll debate philosophy at other times. The fact is that strategic value certainly impacts on the monetary value, and I think that we understand. As we heard the minister, it appears he resists saying that there is an increase in the monetary value of the spur line. But that certainly was the very clear implication of the announcement of B.C. Rail when they chose not to go ahead with the privatization.

I think it's equally true that the value of the asset that used to belong to the people of British Columbia, the former B.C. Rail, certainly would be strategically enhanced over the last few years and, as well, monetarily enhanced. But the minister says that he's not able to make that calculation, and I understand that.

We'll move on to the Gateway for a little bit.

[1610]

The minister is once again cheering me, which is gratifying — confusing at times, but nonetheless gratifying. There was an element of cheerleading going on in question period today, and I guess he got in the mood.

The discussion we had about the Gateway project earlier in the fall was instructive to a point. But there were elements of that discussion which couldn't take place because, the minister indicated to us, there were a number of studies that needed to be finished or started. Those were the studies that were originally promised for last summer. Then they were promised for the fall of 2005, and then in estimates in the fall of 2005 the minister said: "Absolutely we will have them before the end of the year." Then there was talk of having those studies early in the year, and now we're in May.

I wonder whether the minister could give us an update on the studies that he asserted, and has asserted since last summer, were the ones that were going to justify and answer the questions that people in the community have about the Gateway project.

[J. Nuraney in the chair.]

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Well, I'm not sure exactly what the member was talking about with all these. He made it sound like all these promises were made and not kept, and that's just completely false. So I'm not too sure what that was all about.

I mean, we only released a project definition report at the end of January of this year — January 31. If the member goes onto the website, the member will find dozens of reports and companion documents that go into the hundreds and hundreds of pages — all available for the public — on the Gateway program.

The companion documents.... I'll just list a few of them for the member. I don't know what the member's research staff does, to be candid with you, but apparently they don't go on the Internet.

[1615]

*The cycling plan overview; the Highway 1 Corridor Overview of Future Transit Needs; lane allocation technical report; Transportation and Land Use Linkages; Road Pricing Review; Greater Vancouver Trip Diary Survey 2004; Gateway Program: Preliminary Economic Costs and Benefits.* Three different tolling reports: *Analysis of Tolling Options; Traffic and Revenue Forecasts; Test Results and Revenue Pricing Regimes.*

Other reports include the Gateway program focus groups September 2004; *Transportation as an Economic Growth Engine: Challenges Opportunities and Policy Suggestions; Opening the Arteries of Growth*, and on and on it goes. I'd be here reading all day, but I think my point is well made.

Now, the member has said: "Aha, but there are some I don't see." This is the common theme I've heard the member go around. I hear him on the radio. I hear him talking to people. "Yeah, they've got lots of reports, but there are really critical ones that aren't there," and "They're hiding things." You see, that's always the underlying theme: the government is hiding stuff to try to deprive the member's opposition of the fuel they need to hold us to account.

Again, I'm sorry to disappoint. For example, the member says: "There's no environmental assessment work." Well, actually, that's wrong again. The environmental assessment summary and the PDR report demonstrate that the initial work that was done shows there will be an overall improvement in the environmental outcomes. Well, that's great news — an improvement.

I would have hoped the member would have stood up and said: "I am thrilled that there's going to be improvement in air quality. I'm thrilled that there are going to be environmental outcomes that improve as a result of the Gateway program." But no, that's not what they said. They said: "Where are they hiding the reports?"

As I have said before and I'll say again, the environmental assessment work is undergoing a peer review. It's undergoing a peer review, and that peer review includes representatives from the GVRD, the GVTA, Health Canada and others that look at that environmental assessment work, provide the peer review. Then, like every other major project we're involved with in the province, when we apply, when we enter

into the environmental assessment process, those studies are made public, just like every other project, and it will be the same with this one.

I anticipate that that will likely happen sometime this summer. That is my hope. I won't, for the sake of the member's psychosis or upset.... I don't want you to get upset, member, but if it's not exactly in July or August, I don't want you running around saying: "Oh, my goodness, another broken promise." My expectation is that it will be in the summer, but we don't totally control the process for when we enter into the environmental assessment process.

The member knows that since the project definition report, additional reports have been added as they've become available. Sometimes it takes time, because many of them are very weighty reports that have to be converted into a format that's available to be read on the Internet. *Analysis of Tolling Options* is one that comes to mind. The traffic studies report was posted. The economic costs and benefits of Gateway — I believe that was posted, certainly post-the PDR report released on January 31. The test results from the various tolling options — another one that was posted on the website.

There is more information that has been made publicly available about this program than I.... I can't think of another program where there's been so much information. The reason why I will continue to make sure everything is released and everything is public is because I know that there is broad-based, strong public support for this program.

I know that the member opposite talks about how when they get on this side, they'll be able to take positions. I will say to the member opposite that if you wish to get to this side, you will have to take positions. You will have to stand up and be counted. You will have to speak to the 82 percent of lower mainland residents that rank transportation congestion as the number-one concern they have. In poll after poll after poll, the message is the same. "We want a government that'll deal with this problem. We don't want government to process it. We don't want government to talk about it. We don't want government to debate about it."

That's what the member opposite is good at. That's what the member opposite's party is good at. "Let's just keep discussing, debating, arguing and bickering and do everything but actually make decisions and get on with it." You know, there are pieces of the Gateway program, like the South Fraser perimeter road, that have been talked about for 25 years.

[1620]

Member, I know this drives you crazy when I give these kinds of speeches, but your government, when you were in government, were on the record....

**The Chair:** Minister, through the Chair.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Through the Chair to the member opposite. That member's government repeatedly made promises that they would twin the Port Mann Bridge in the 1990s, that they would build the new Pitt River

Bridge in the 1990s. They would go ahead with the South Fraser perimeter road in the 1990s, and they never did.

What distinguishes that member's party in government and our members' party in government? There's a big distinction. We do exactly what we say we're going to do. I get that there will never be unanimity around the decisions we make, but I can tell you that everywhere I travel in the lower mainland — and I speak to people all over the place — the one consistent theme I always hear is: "Minister, we're behind you. Get on with it; get it built. Don't listen to the critics."

Now, I will differ somewhat in that I always listen to the critics. I listen to what they have to say, and I will continue to do so. But I tell you this: I will not be paralyzed by the critics, and I will not stand frozen by the critics. I will always pay attention to what the critics have to say, because I think it's important that we incorporate those comments and suggestions into what we do.

There are two things I would always ask of the critics. The first is to actually read the information that is on the website and freely available to all, because I find the questions they keep raising are all answered, and it's all publicly available. The second thing I would ask is this: provide us with your options, provide us with your alternative. As Premier Bennett said so eloquently in a speech he gave within the last ten days, talking about the critics that were around in Expo, talking about the critics that opposed the SkyTrain — actually, many of them, of course, members of the opposition party — talking about the critics that are always there that never offer alternatives....

Well, we are going to demand that they offer alternatives. They'd better be realistic alternatives, they'd better be well thought-out alternatives, and they'd better be alternatives that have the kind of science and the kind of technical background and the kind of backup we've got in our studies.

That is why I am so pleased to make sure that everything gets publicly released on this program, because everything points to the fact that this is a project that makes economic sense, social sense, environmental sense, and it makes sense for British Columbia, which is going to be a major gateway for the Asia-Pacific into North America.

**D. Chudnovsky:** First of all, I'm quite prepared to have the minister make comments about my mental health, but I would ask that the minister, especially given the discussion that we had yesterday in this room, to please withdraw insulting comments about our research staff. He may like or not like me. He may like or not like what we have to say. Our researchers are magnificent, they work very hard, they do the work they have to do, and I would ask the minister to withdraw his comment about them.

**The Chair:** In view of the parliamentary requirement of language and tradition, would the minister please do that?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** I would happily to do that. I am sure his research staff do the best job they can. I would just encourage them to utilize the website, which is publicly available and has lots of information on it.

**The Chair:** Minister, you have to specifically withdraw the term "psychosis."

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Oh, I'm sorry. Oh, you're referring to the term "psychosis?"

**A Voice:** No.

**D. Chudnovsky:** I once misspoke in the House. I apologized. It wasn't unconditional. The Chair reminded me of that. I made it unconditional.

I think it's only fair that the minister, without embellishment, apologize for what he said. I think he wants to. I understand that he's an honourable person. I think his apology should come without instructions to our staff. We provide the instructions to our staff.

**The Chair:** Minister?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** I have absolutely no hesitation. If I've offended the member or their staff, I unequivocally would withdraw that.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Thank you very much. When will the minister release the noise impact assessment and mitigation report written by BKL Consultants Ltd?

[1625]

**Hon. K. Falcon:** The noise mitigation will be released as part of the environmental assessment package that will be released once we enter into the environmental assessment process and peer reviews are completed. That will be released — as I say, our hope is — in the summer.

**D. Chudnovsky:** When will the minister release the fuel cost-savings report written by Delcan?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** That is a report that is going to be released as the other ones are, as we're getting those reports converted to a form available for the Web. That report will be released in the coming weeks.

**D. Chudnovsky:** I'd like to refer to the *Hansard* from the discussion we had in the fall regarding the Gateway and read to the minister a question that I asked and an answer that he gave. To provide the context, this was in the context of a discussion not unlike the one we're having now, in which I was asking the minister about a number of studies that he had referred to that were going to answer questions that people in the community legitimately have about the proposed Gateway project.

I was asking the minister for the level of specificity and sophistication of those studies, and I said to him: "Minister, could you give us a sense of the depth and

sophistication of the study?" This was one about traffic congestion and the alternatives, the government's potential for making decisions to go ahead with one section of the program and not others and what would be the impact on traffic congestion.

I said: "Could you give us a sense of the depth and sophistication of the study? For instance, would one be able to look at the studies and say: 'Here's our best guess as to traffic volume and congestion if we use HOV lanes, if there are no tolls on the twinned Port Mann but there are tolls on the Golden Ears, and the south perimeter road isn't finished until 2011?'" I gave examples of the kinds of sophistication. "Are they at that level of sophistication — the studies?" The answer from the minister was: "Yes." My question is: where are those studies?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Again, for the member, it is on the website, under the analysis of tolling options. There are four scenarios presented. One is with no Gateway program; in other words, you do the absolute minimum — no tolls. That's scenario 21. Scenario 17: Gateway program with no tolls. Scenario 15: A \$2.50 point toll. Section 16 is the dollar-point toll and a ten-cent distance-based toll. The member will find all of those scenarios that are projected out to 2011, 2021 and 2031 also on the website.

**D. Chudnovsky:** We have looked at that report in some detail and analyzed it, studied it. I've even talked about it in some of the media work that I've done that the minister earlier said he listened to. I'm glad for that answer, except that it doesn't answer the question that was asked.

The question that was asked in the fall, and the question that I'm asking now, is whether the.... The question asked in the fall was whether we could disaggregate, from the proposed project and the proposed options, pieces of the proposed project — that is, HOV lanes; tolling, no tolling; Golden Ears, no Golden Ears; Port Mann twinning, no Port Mann twinning; widening of the highway, no widening of the highway; south perimeter road, no south perimeter road. That was clearly the question that was asked, and clearly, there isn't an answer to that question that I can see yet.

[1630]

I'd like to move back to the *Hansard* report from the fall talking about these studies that we have been speaking about over the last little while. I asked the minister, "Am I correct that both of those things will come before the end of the year?" — this, we'll recall, was in the fall of 2005 — and: "Will we see all the studies that have been undertaken by the ministry?"

The answer from the minister was, "Yes. What I said was that the project definition report, which encompasses all of those studies" — including the environmental review, and the many studies which are part of the environmental review.... This was the minister saying: "Yes. What I said was that the project definition report, which encompasses all of those studies we

talked about the other day...." — including the one I just referred to, and the environmental report. "The answer is yes, we will share all that information."

Then the minister went on to say: "I think it's important that all that information be out there, because it informs the public discussion. We will share that, not only with the opposition but with the members of the public."

My question is this: Given that fundamental elements, parts of the studies to which the minister was referring, have not yet been made public, and won't be made public until the summer, how is it that we can be confident about the so-called consultation process that has been going on? How is it that we can look at the public consultation process — about which we have many criticisms, but it's what the government purports to be a consultation process — and how can that be a legitimate consultation process if fundamental studies about the environment, for instance, which were promised for last year, won't be made public until after the consultation process?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Well, you know, Chair, here the member goes again. You heard the word: "so-called" public consultation. What a slap in the face for the over 3,000 people that came out to your so-called consultation. I hope the member will withdraw that, because I actually think that is a disservice to the fact. Not only did we have over 3,000 people attend these so-called community consultations, there have been over 100 meetings with local government, over 60 meetings with the GVRD, 60 small-group meetings representing 600 people and stakeholders — and the member wants to call that a so-called...?

You know, this is exactly the kind of negativism and pessimism that is just so rife in the member's party. It is incredible to me that they can just search and search to find anything that is remotely negative, and disparage the fact that over 3,000 lower mainland residents were interested enough to take time out of their own schedules to spend an evening thoughtfully listening, looking and asking questions.

I can tell you I'm just offended that the member refers to it as that, because I can tell you that our staff have worked extraordinarily hard on those consultations, and the public have been engaged. They have asked extremely thoughtful questions. They have participated and contributed in a manner which I think is exceptional, and I take very strong umbrage with the member's characterization of a so-called consultation.

Let me just go right to the member's point. Apparently it's a so-called consultation because the environmental assessment reports weren't available, or because every single report with all its laborious detail wasn't available. Well, you know, member.... Give the member's head a shake.

[1635]

What is the reality that takes place in public consultations? There's a project definition report which summarizes the vast detail that is found in hundreds of pages of documents that underlie the project definition



report — including, I might add, as I pointed out to the member, the various environmental assessments summary in the PDR that says there will be an improvement in air quality.

If the member is suggesting that a lie has taken place, then I suggest that the member ought to say that on the record. If the member doesn't believe what was summarized in the project definition report, stand up and say it on the record.

I rather doubt the member will say that. The member will just go through his typical approach of trying to disparage the fact that several thousand British Columbians took the time to come out and involve themselves in a community consultation. He'll try and pretend that it's somehow not an appropriate consultation or that it's a so-called consultation, because this member disagrees with the project. This member and the opposition members don't support the Pacific gateway. They don't support the Gateway transportation program, but they haven't got the nerve to stand up and say it on the record.

You know, member, you'll feel a lot better if you just come out and say that. I've said it here before, and I'll say it again: the reason why they won't say it is because they can't say it. They can't say it because they know there's widespread support. They know that members in their own caucus support it, that even the members from Surrey support it, so they can't say it. That must be torturous. I get that it must be difficult.

They can't say it, because they haven't got the jam to go on the record and say: "We oppose the Gateway project. We don't want you spending \$3 billion to improve the transportation network. We don't want to make sure that we capitalize on British Columbia's unique opportunity to be Canada's gateway to North America for the Asia-Pacific." They find other ways of, you know, suggesting that the public consultation is a fraud, that it's a so-called consultation. Well, as I say to the member, that does a tremendous disservice.

You know, member, all those reports are being made publicly available as soon as we can make them publicly available. As I've said to the member, the environmental assessment reports are being peer-reviewed as we speak and will all be made publicly available the moment we enter into the environmental assessment process, just like it is on every other major project we do as government. No different.

Apparently, that's not satisfactory for this member and the opposition. That's unfortunate, but it's no surprise to this Minister of Transportation, because that's always what the position of the opposition is: negative, destructive, pessimistic. Nothing has changed.

**D. Chudnovsky:** The notion that I'm negative and pessimistic will tickle my family, friends and acquaintances. It's, as usual from the minister, entertaining.

How much money is committed to the Gateway program for this year from the provincial government?

[1640]

**Hon. K. Falcon:** I apologize for the delay, but I wanted to get the member all the numbers to, perhaps,

even save time on the questioning. Most of these come from page 28 of the budget, the '06-07 to '08-09 budget. What the member will see there is that in the '05-06 fiscal, last fiscal, there's \$50 million towards the Gateway program. For the current year we're in, '06-07, there's \$93 million; for '07-08, \$71 million; and for '08-09, \$155 million.

From '06 to '09, in other words, there's \$319 million of investment. I would just point out that in '04-05 there was about \$50 million.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Is there additional funding from the federal government for the project during that period?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Those numbers don't include any federal contribution at all, but over that same period of time we anticipate that we will recover about \$35 million from the feds, representing their contributions towards the Pitt River Bridge, which is the component on the North Fraser perimeter road.

Interjection.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Yeah, over that period. Which would be roughly.... I'm using approximate numbers, but it's close enough for the member's purposes.

I apologize, but my staff member was also advising me that during that same period we anticipate recovering an additional \$50 million as contributions towards the South Fraser perimeter road, which is the southern portion of the Gateway program.

Interjection.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** That's right.

**D. Chudnovsky:** As I understand the figures that the minister has provided us, it's give or take \$400 million to '09, between the contributions of the provincial government and the contributions of the federal government. That's something in the order of 11 percent, 12 percent of the cost of the proposed Gateway project that will be allocated during the life of this government. Is that the case?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Of course, don't forget the \$100 million from the two previous years that predate the three years we talked about, so you have to include that. As the member knows, the Gateway program is a program that will be staged in different phases, so different parts of it will start at different times. The Pitt River Bridge, of course, is going to be first out of the gate in terms of moving forward under construction, starting late this fall.

[1645]

The second part of it that you'll see move forward very quickly is the South Fraser perimeter road. Already there's substantial public consultation that's taken place on the South Fraser perimeter road portion. Then, of course, the centerpiece is the twinning of the

bridge and the widening of Highway 1 and the interchanges.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Thanks to the minister for that correction. I stand corrected.

With the additional \$100 million — I think my math is approximately correct — about 14 percent of the projected \$3½ billion cost of the Gateway will be allocated during the period of this government. I think it's worthwhile saying — and the minister and I have had some interactions on this question as well — that that \$3 billion is an estimate. There are those who, like the *Vancouver Sun* and Mr. Hochstein — no friends of mine, either one of them — indicate that their expectation is that the costs of the Gateway will be substantially higher than that. Given even the \$3 billion amount that the minister has estimated, it's a very small portion, I think we'd all agree, of the Gateway project that will be allocated during this period.

How much money is committed to funding for the South Fraser perimeter road in this year's budget?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Just before I give the member that figure, I do have to correct the record, because the member has gone around repeatedly quoting Mr. Hochstein and has incorrectly taken the comments of Mr. Hochstein that referred to....

I'm going to give a lesson. I see the member there is looking on with interest — another member. I'm happy to provide a lesson for the member. I know he has no business background to speak of, so this will be helpful in terms of his understanding of the construction industry.

Mr. Hochstein represents the independent contractors and business agents. They are from the construction industry, and the construction industry has seen significant cost escalation.

I would remind the member that there is a pretty substantial difference between the construction sector and the roadbuilding sector. There have been increases and cost increases on the roadbuilding side but nowhere near the quantum or the magnitude that we see in the construction sector. I would caution the member that when he runs around talking about Mr. Hochstein and comments Mr. Hochstein made that were directly related — nothing to do with roadbuilding or bridgebuilding but having to do, actually, with the construction sector.... I would encourage the member not to confuse that with a whole different industry sector, which is what the member has done.

The other thing I would say to the member. Again, the member runs around.... I've heard the member talk about \$3½ billion, \$4 billion with absolutely no basis in fact. He can't point to one simple thing — except, apparently, Mr. Hochstein's comments, which were, of course, referring to a whole different industry sector — to justify his suggestion that the budget amounts that we put in place were somehow insufficient. I find that interesting too.

What the member maybe should know, which might be helpful to the member, is that the area in the roadbuilding sector in which you see the greatest cost

escalation is the structural side. That means bridges, because that's where most of the concrete and steel gets utilized.

The member may know that we are fortunate in this sense, because it just so happens that TransLink is planning an \$800 million Golden Ears Bridge. As a result, we're able to lift the very latest numbers out of.... In this inflationary environment, with all the steel costs that have gone up, we're able to take those numbers from a project that hasn't even started construction yet. But we've got the absolute latest and greatest numbers.

That is also the area of greatest risk. The member, I'm sure, knows.... Maybe he doesn't know, but I will explain to the member that on the roadbuilding side, there's much less appreciation than we see on the structural side.

What did we do? We've got the latest numbers, based on a project that hasn't even started construction but is based on all the latest bids that have just come in. We've utilized those kinds of numbers on this project, and we've built in a contingency on each portion of the Gateway program. The North Fraser perimeter road portion has a contingency built in. The twinning of the Port Mann Bridge and the improvements to Highway 1 have contingencies built in. The South Fraser perimeter road has contingencies built in. On top of all of those project contingencies, there is an extraordinary contingency of \$300 million for the program as a whole.

[1650]

That, in my view, is the kind of thoughtful, careful, well-researched costing that you would do on a project like this. I am keenly aware — and I've said it before; I've said it to this member — the member opposite represents a government that wrote the book on megaprojects gone wild. It could be a movie, in fact. Anyway, I digress.

The important point is that there was a lot of thought and a lot of carefulness that went into the budget, and I am very confident about the numbers that we put forward on the Gateway program. I'd be happy to debate that with the member at length anytime and anywhere.

With respect to the specific question the member has for the South Fraser perimeter road: for this year alone, \$38 million.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Has Treasury Board approved construction funding for the project?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** For the member's benefit, we have approvals for expenditures to the South Fraser perimeter road, which is primarily property acquisition and engineering costs. We don't yet have approval for construction. We won't have that approval in place until such time as we enter into the decision to move forward with construction.

Just one other thing for the record. The member might know that in the *Vancouver Sun* article on January 31, 2006, a quote from Mr. Hochstein — who this member has taken great liberty to quote with his comments that have to do with the construction sector and the building of homes and offices and industrial.... His comment is: "The Gateway project is required because

we need it for our own provincial productivity. Government officials have to be very careful how they budget for that project and make sure they include for that kind of construction inflation that is likely to continue until 2010."

**D. Chudnovsky:** I'm not sure that they shouldn't have delivered that quote to this side of the room, but fine. That's good.

I wonder if I could ask the patience of the minister and his staff and move to a discussion of Eagleridge Bluffs for a little bit and then come back to Gateway, if that's okay.

[1655]

I wonder if the minister could tell us what the budget is for expropriation costs on the part of the project that's the Eagleridge Bluffs.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** The land acquisition budget for that portion is \$22 million.

**D. Chudnovsky:** I understand that there's litigation pending on the issue of expropriation. Could the minister let us know what that litigation is and how much money those who have gone to the courts are seeking?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** If the member is referring to litigation pending with respect to the land acquisition, I'm not aware of any litigation pending. The member is coming late to the party on this discussion, though, and perhaps it might be helpful for the member if I give him a little bit of background before he gets too far out with very limited knowledge on this issue. I think I can probably save the member some time and provide a little bit of an education on this particular subject.

The member should know that there have actually been four independent appraisals on the valuation of that land and that property. The member should know that one of those appraisals was conducted jointly as part of my agreement I had with West Vancouver council, who shared the same sentiment as the member opposite — that somehow the province was moving forward in a manner that was undervaluing that land.

We had an agreement with West Vancouver to jointly select an appraiser, jointly agree on the terms of reference that would follow up on the two prior appraisals we had done to that point, and we did that. The appraiser came back and confirmed the earlier two appraisals that were also independently undertaken. The member should just be aware of that. That was the third appraisal, and subsequently, there's been a fourth independent appraisal. I say that to help the member, because he probably was not aware of the history of this project. I hope that will be helpful for the member.

**D. Chudnovsky:** I wonder if we can look at the issue of the options — what have come to be called the options — in terms of that element of the project. As I understand it, there was an investigation of a number of options. I wonder if the minister could outline for us

what those options were and who the investigators were and what it was that they concluded.

[1700]

**Hon. K. Falcon:** I'm going to engage in a discussion that's going to have to take some time, because I know the member is new to this file. It's complex. If the member is arguing he's very familiar with it, I'm happy to sit down and allow the member to share his knowledge.

Interjection.

**The Chair:** Through the Chair, please.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Through the Chair.

The reason I say that, member, is because this started out with 32 different options. The way the public process works is you consult with the community and eventually — and I'm going to try and simplify it, because we'll be here all day; I know the member doesn't want to spend all day, so the member will forgive me if I try and move quickly to get to where I know the member wants to go — you get down to, essentially, four options.

What happened was that when I was first visited by the former mayor of West Vancouver, who came to see me indicating that their preference was for the tunnel option.... There was a two-lane tunnel option as one of the options that went forward. There was a four-lane divided overland route, and there were two other routes. The one you will often hear about is the idea of adding a third lane to the existing corridor.

[A. Horning in the chair.]

Now, what is important for the member to know about this whole discussion is this. All of those options went through the community public consultation process. For example, the adding of the third lane — it's an option that the coalition for Eagleridge Bluffs say we should do; it's simple, and why on earth wouldn't this government consider it? — is exactly the opposite of what they allege. It is not simple; in fact, technically, from an engineering point of view, it's extraordinarily complex.

In fact, it's so complex that because you've got the steep cliffs there, what we did on the test section, which the member will be aware of down the road, is that we were able to build support platforms that allowed us to do the work while allowing traffic to continue by there. Because of the huge depth of the cliffs there, we cannot deal with that in the same way as we did on the test section.

That was the first major problem, and you certainly couldn't deal with it without doing significant blasting and shutting down of the highway, which would block traffic, potentially, for weeks at a time, something that the communities made very clear to us would be totally unacceptable. If there's one thing we heard crystal-clear from the communities up and down that corridor, it's that they wanted this work to be done with minimum inconvenience.

The final thing was that it didn't meet our safety objectives. As the member knows, that is the most dangerous section of the Sea to Sky, and simply adding a third lane would mean no possibility of a median barrier, which means we would still be facing the challenges of fatalities and crashes and an unacceptable safety risk. We're not going to do that on a corridor which already sees 300 accidents a year, horrific fatalities and is one of the most dangerous sections of highways in the province. So that was rejected. I might add, member, for your final benefit, that the community of West Vancouver also did not support that option.

Then it very quickly came down to the two options that the community was interested in looking at. The one was the two-lane undivided tunnel option, and the other was a four-lane divided overland route. The majority of the public that took the time to actually come out to the public open houses and the community meetings and fill out the feedback forms — surprise — supported the overland route.

Then West Vancouver said: "Well, we want a four-lane tunnel." Now, a four-lane tunnel was never one of the options, but they decided they wanted a four-lane tunnel. I sat down in a meeting with the West Vancouver mayor and council, and I was very clear with them. I said to them: "A four-lane tunnel was never one of the options, but if you want a four-lane tunnel, you are the wealthiest district in the country, and if you're prepared to put up the money for the difference, you get a four-lane tunnel. But otherwise, let's not have this discussion about options that never existed." I can tell you that I've never heard politicians respond more quickly and with more certainty to the fact that that was not an option that they were prepared to look at.

We now had, with my agreement with West Vancouver council, the option to move forward on the two-lane tunnel and the four-lane divided overland route, and the agreement we had was that we would gather information that was independently gathered and share that information with West Vancouver and with us, so that at the same time we received the information we would share it.

That included an additional appraisal to follow up on the two independent appraisals that had been done on the land. That meant the safety information associated with both options, etc. We did that.

One of the things that I warned the council about in that meeting — because I've been through this many times before in many different communities across the province — is that facts are very stubborn things, and sometimes we don't like the facts that come forward. But I assured them that as Minister of Transportation I would be making my decision based on the facts. It wasn't going to be based on what I wished the facts would be; I was going to be basing it on what the actual facts were. And they agreed with that. In fact, they left that meeting very happy over the fact that we had an agreement.

[1705]

The agreement was that I would take both options through the environmental assessment process so that

we didn't close the door on either the tunnel option or the four-lane divided overland route option. We would gather that information and share it with them, and then I would make a decision within the framework of costs. Clearly, cost is an option we can't ignore.

Environmental sustainability — that was clearly important. Public safety — that was the most important issue. I made that very clear to them, and they agreed. The final was the capacity to handle future traffic.

As that information came in, here's what it said. On the public safety portion, the independent experts, some of the best in the world, suggested in their traffic modelling that there would be two and a half times the rate of fatalities on the tunnel option. That's a real problem. As the Minister of Transportation, to spend \$40 million more for an option that could potentially kill two and a half times more people is not an option I'm excited about.

In terms of the environmental, we took both options through. Both options had significant environmental impact. You shouldn't kid yourself in pretending that the tunnel option does not have impact. It has significant environmental impact. It could potentially, for example, drain the watershed. That's a pretty significant impact. It also had impact on habitat. It had impact on Nelson Creek, which is a fish-bearing stream with six different species of fish. There was environmental impact. There was environmental impact in the overland route too, and I'll go into that in more detail in a moment.

The cost. Well, we know that the tunnel option was \$40 million more for the two-lane tunnel. There was never a four-lane tunnel option. We know that option is well north of \$200 million, but the two-lane tunnel option was \$40 million more. We received the third independent appraisal, which confirmed the first two independent appraisals, and shared that with them.

Finally, on the capacity to handle future traffic growth, what we found is that the four-lane divided overland route would handle traffic volume growth for the next 50 years, as opposed to 25 years for the two-lane tunnel option.

Within that framework, I made the decision to go forward with the four-lane divided overland route. That was the right decision then, and it's the right decision today. I get that there's a small neighbourhood group.... That's exactly what it is. It's a small neighbourhood group of individuals — with extraordinary resources, I grant you that — who disagree with the decision.

I understand that. I get that not every neighbour is going to be thrilled with it going on their back yard, but I will point this out to the member, to make sure that the member understands this. West Vancouver took the province and the federal government to court, and they challenged us on the environmental assessment work, alleging that the work was insufficient. They made a bunch of allegations in their report. They lost in spectacular fashion. In fact, they have to repay the legal fees to the province and the federal government.

They have had every opportunity to express their opposition — this small neighbourhood group — to this project. They fought an election over it. The leader of this group, Dennis Perry, is the deputy leader of the Green Party. This was the only issue he ran on. This was his issue: "I want a tunnel, and I think it's important that we have a tunnel in my neighbourhood." That was his only issue. He lost 2 to 1, including the polls of Horseshoe Bay and Eagleridge, which I find interesting — the vast majority of the polls.

Apparently, an election wasn't enough of an issue for the citizens of West Vancouver to decide that they wanted to side with them over that issue. A failed lawsuit wasn't enough, and now, as the member knows, the contractor is in court exercising its right to carry forward a contract. They were contracted by the government to undertake some work, and the small neighbourhood group led by Mr. Perry continues to issue lawsuits, etc. They've got every right to do that. Those will be heard by a judge, and I will make no comments on the pending legal situation, obviously.

That's the history of that. I hope that was helpful to the member.

**D. Chudnovsky:** The minister, in the course of his answer, referred to the environmental concerns with the four-lane overland route and said that he would come back and explain that to us. He didn't do that, so I wonder if we could ask him to go back and do that.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** I touched on it in a tangential way, and I apologize. I touched on it on the basis of the lawsuit that was issued and fought over the whole premise of whether the appropriate environmental assessment work had been undertaken on the option that was the selected option by the Ministry of Transportation.

[1710]

The other thing I will say is that the member, I'm sure, would want to be aware of the fact that the group, the coalition for Eagleridge Bluffs, makes a number of allegations that are patently false and have been advised in writing repeatedly — and by me over the radio and every other form of media that I have available — that they are, in fact, false and misleading and that they ought not to repeat them. But they continue to do so. One of them that they continually say is that this highway is blasting right through the Larsen Creek wetland. Well, that's not the case. It is just simply not the case. It actually bypasses it.

The other thing they will tell you is that the red-legged frog is in jeopardy here. Actually, they're wrong there again. They're wrong in two ways. First of all, we're not even sure the red-legged frog exists there. No one has ever actually seen one. But in the event that there's a possibility, even a risk, that the red-legged frog may exist in that area, we designed and built culverts underneath the highway to ensure that the frogs can hop uninterrupted through their normal habitat corridors.

I will say this to the member — and a final point on the environmental side: I am extraordinarily proud of

the record of the ministry when it comes to the environmental outcomes. We have a record that I will put up to any other government anywhere in terms of the environmental work that we do to minimize impact. But let's be clear. Let's not kid ourselves. Anytime you build anything, there is going to be an environmental impact.

I dare say this: West Vancouver, which in their own official community plans is calling for over 1,000 luxury homes and a golf course and a school in the same area, in the exact same area....

The member is nodding his head no. Are you suggesting, member, that you disagree with that characterization?

**A. Dix:** I'm just listening.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Oh, okay. It's just a twitch. That's understandable.

The member should be aware that the official community plan is calling for a thousand homes. I will say this. I believe that West Vancouver — and I know West Vancouver — does everything it can to minimize the environmental impact when it builds its housing. I know they do that, just as the Ministry of Transportation undertakes every effort possible to minimize the environmental impact of its projects.

This member, I am sure, wants to ensure that they are informed by the real facts in this case as we have this discussion. I know the member opposite is a very thoughtful individual. I appreciate the member allowing me the time to go through this, because it's been a lengthy, two-year process, as the member no doubt knows, and it is obviously a very complex one. But I do want to reinforce to the member opposite that the housing developments have an impact too, and the member knows that well.

I know that West Vancouver does its best to minimize those impacts, just as we do in the Ministry of Transportation on our roads, but I also know that the tunnel option had a significant environmental impact too. We never closed any of those doors on those two options until such time as all of the information that we agreed to share with West Vancouver came forward conclusively, decisively, and pointed me in one direction. That was direction for the decision we made.

I have not seen a scintilla of evidence since making that decision from any of these individuals that have been continually protesting as part of their neighbourhood group for two years that has changed my mind in terms of the decision made two years ago.

I will say this as a final point. I grew up probably five minutes from this area. I know this area better than many of the people that are standing out there professing their great love of this particular area.

I spent three hours with the member for West Vancouver-Capilano, representatives of the council and representatives of the coalition for Eagleridge Bluffs — Bruce McArthur was one of them; I remember that very clearly — walking the entire site. As the member for West Vancouver-Capilano will recall, I

had the expert from West Vancouver council — who is an arborist, Steve Jenkins — on one side making their concerns known to me, and I also had independent experts that were retained by the ministry to provide me the other side.

I listened to both of them, and when we stopped at each section, I would listen to what the arborist from West Vancouver said and the concerns that he registered. I would listen to the experts that were retained by the ministry and what they had to say.

I was able to factor in both sides of the argument, and I stand here today and say to the member for Vancouver-Kensington that it was the right decision. I'm proud of that decision. I will not be changing that decision.

**D. Chudnovsky:** Thanks to the minister for that answer. Unfortunately, it wasn't an answer to the question that I asked.

[1715]

The question I asked was: what are the environmental problems that will be caused by the four-lane overland route? Earlier in the questioning and the answering, the minister indicated what the environmental problems might be were they to use the tunnel route, and he elucidated on them and described them in some detail. Good for him, and thank you very much for that.

What we want to know is: what are the environmental downsides of the four-lane overland route?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** The member actually changed the question a little bit, so I appreciate the opportunity to answer that question now.

I think the thing that the member will find most significant is that the environmental assessment office, and this was reinforced in the judgment of the Federal Court... They both stated that there was no significant environmental impact to the four-lane divided overland route option that was selected by the Ministry of Transportation. The environmental assessment office went on to point out that both the tunnel and the overland route have similar impacts on habitat of concern. That's something that the member might be interested in.

There was some impact on dry arbutus, and you'll hear the members of the coalition for Eagleridge Bluffs point that out. That's true. There is some impact on dry arbutus. It is not a protected habitat. I think it's worth pointing out. But nevertheless, there is some impact. We are compensating for that impact as part of our commitments under the environmental assessment certification.

The final thing I will say to the member is that all of this is available on the environmental assessment office website. There are thousands of pages that form part of this, and I can tell you that it is — again, I'm proud of this fact — some of the most thorough environmental investigation and process that we have undertaken as part of the ultimate decision we made.

As I say, both options had an environmental impact, and the decision we made on the quantum of the

four factors — safety, environmental impact, cost and the ability to handle future traffic growth — all pointed in the direction of the decision that was made.

**D. Chudnovsky:** I have one more question in this area for now, and then we're going to hand it over to the member for Victoria-Hillside and come back to some stuff tomorrow.

[1720]

My question is.... I'm wondering if the minister can lay out for us three cost projections on three alternatives. I know that the minister started with four and then went to two, but I want to ask him if he could please lay out for us the cost projections on three of the alternatives. One is the one that's been chosen, the overland four-lane route. The second is the tunnel route, and the third is the additional....

I want to make clear that I heard loudly and clearly what he said about the additional-lane proposal, but I'd like him, if he would, to please lay out the cost projections on that as well — so, those three. Then, once that question's been answered, we'll move to the member for Victoria-Hillside.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** The three cost projections the member is looking for are.... The four-lane divided overland route is \$130 million for that section. The two-lane tunnel option was \$170 million.

There are those that call for where a third lane would be added to the existing corridor. So that the member knows, a third lane couldn't be designed to meet Canadian design standards. It is so curved on that section, as the member knows, that you couldn't come close to meeting the standards. You would need four lanes in order to meet the highway safety capacity requirements for the least safe and highest-volume section of highway anywhere on that Sea to Sky corridor.

[1725]

The amount of blasting and rock removal that would be necessary to get you to four lanes, which is the only safe standard for the most dangerous and least safe area of that highway, would be so extraordinarily high that that option was rejected. It was rejected early on for very good reasons and at a high level. Well, we didn't even take it to detailed costing because of how expensive it would be, but at a high level, it would certainly be the most expensive of the options that are available.

**R. Fleming:** I wanted to ask the minister a few questions about the Victoria regional transit system. Maybe some staff members will just take a minute to assist the minister.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** I first want to take a moment to introduce staff. Today I'm joined by senior vice-president Steve New, senior vice-president Ron Drolet and our chief financial officer at B.C. Transit, Tony Sharp.

**R. Fleming:** I wanted to ask a few questions, beginning, I think, with the summary financial outlook in the

B.C. Transit service plan, page 11. I just want to look at some of the figures around revenue. Based on the actuals from last year, \$46 million in terms of contributions from the province is scheduled to flatline for the next three years. I wonder if the minister can confirm that the new baseline amount that is projected for '06-07 and is not scheduled to change right through to the '08-09 fiscal year is indeed a confirmed funding freeze from his ministry.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** Those are the amounts shown in the service plan. The member knows well that historically we've seen additional operating grants provided to B.C. Transit from the province. In '06-07, for example, you'll see the first instalment of \$1 million towards fuel and other cost increases that have been facing B.C. Transit. Since '02-03 the member knows that there's been an additional \$4.5 million in additional operating grants provided to B.C. Transit. That represents just over a 10-percent increase in the operating grants for that period of time.

[1730]

**R. Fleming:** Let me just follow up on that, then. The revenue sources that are projected over the next fiscal years — the contributions from the province increase.... In the next three years they don't increase at all, but let's go back to the actuals from '04-05. They increase by \$2.5 million.

At the local level, local taxes from property and gas will increase from \$30 million to \$41.48 million, an increase of \$11 million, and from passenger fares, an increase of \$5 million. So \$16 million of new funding by the end of this service plan will come from local sources and passengers and only \$2.5 million from the province. I guess my question for the minister is: does he think this is in keeping with the historic funding formula that B.C. Transit has used for several decades?

**Hon. K. Falcon:** What I would point out to the member is that in every year right up to '05-06 the province has provided additional operating grants to reach the historic levels that they have been. You know, the other thing I would point out to the member is that one of the things I'm quite proud of is that with all the change that we went through as the government from 2001, the one thing we never did is that we did not cut anything from the B.C. Transit budget. That was one budget we made sure that we did not impact by some of the changes that had to take place to get the economy of British Columbia back into line. We had to make some difficult choices. One of the areas that we avoided putting some of those difficult choices onto was B.C. Transit.

I recognize there are always those that want and would like government to spend more, and I am totally sympathetic to the argument, but one of the things I think we have an obligation to do for taxpayers is to ensure that we are doing everything we can. I think B.C. Transit staff have done an exceptional job, but we want to make sure we're doing everything we can to

provide the best possible solution at the most cost-effective price. That's why we are doing the governance review of B.C. Transit, to ensure that we can come forward with recommendations or changes, if there are to be any, that might achieve exactly that.

**R. Fleming:** I know the minister does appreciate government spending. The Gateway program and the Canada line are indeed substantive investments. My concern here with B.C. Transit is that it is the Crown corporation that serves the capital region and 50 other smaller communities across B.C.

I'm concerned that during the past five years, when funding has increased very modestly but during a period when costs of service delivery have risen even more dramatically, the result in the capital region has been a declining amount of service hours, fewer buses on the road and declining service levels. That is something that I hear from mayors, whether they're in Kamloops, Victoria or right across the province, in communities that are serviced by B.C. Transit.

I guess the minister's solution to date has been to introduce something called flex funding. I have some questions about that, because to me it sounds like a very magnanimous term for allowing local government to pick up more of the costs themselves while the province declines on the same request of them. So the question is for the minister. There are apparently 21 communities out of the 50 B.C. Transit serves that are taking up the flex-funding arrangement. I'm just wondering if the minister could detail which communities are doing that — if any of those local communities are doing that — in terms of increasing their local gas taxes.

[1735]

**Hon. K. Falcon:** The member is correct in his description of the flex-funding arrangement. It allows communities that have services that they feel are important and that they would like to add to their network.... They have the option. We're not going to stop them from being able to add those services at their cost. They have every ability to do that. They also have the ability, through private sector partners, health regions and schools, to receive contributions for the delivery of services, too, as a way of helping to fund that.

In terms of the communities that have stepped up, there have been many. Each of them are required to pass a resolution of council asking the Ministry of Transportation for the ability to move forward with the addition of services that they wish to provide at their cost. There have been at least a dozen, all of which require orders-in-council by the provincial government. So it's all in the public record. If the member wishes, I'm happy to read out the list. I know the member might be time-sensitive, so I won't do that unless he asks.

**R. Fleming:** Thank you for being time-sensitive.

I think I'll just maybe ask the minister for a list of that and have it outside of this meeting. The minister has just said that flex funding is all about the province

basically saying: "We're not going to stop you if you want to raise your own local revenues and avoid cuts and maybe add to your service network."

I wonder, then, if he could just tell me.... In terms of the Victoria Regional Transit Commission, they've done an extensive amount of planning there. They've gotten tremendous regional buy-in to increase the service, and their plan actually calls for a very ambitious 35-percent increase in service. Mind you, much of that is to get them back to where they were in 2001, but some of it is to respond to new development and new service demand which, ironically, grows as gas prices increase.

We now have a problem that many jurisdictions would be envious of, which is that the transit demand is drastically increasing. I wonder if the minister could tell me, in light of the Victoria Regional Transit Commission's request for flex funding, if you will, of a one-cent-per-litre gas tax increase — which I understand the minister asked that the commission go and get the approval of the business community, which they did — why that has been turned down and what that means for the plan to increase service by 35 percent?

**The Chair:** Minister. Noting the time.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** I appreciate that, Chair.

First of all, I think that the member opposite is aware of the fact that the easiest thing for any level of government to do, and the first reaction, is always to go right to the taxpayer for more dollars. I can tell you that this is somebody that resists that easy temptation, whether it's TransLink, Victoria regional commission or any other group that wants to immediately go and assess additional costs on the taxpayer to fund whatever it is that they are looking for. Yes, they will get a vigorous analysis from this Minister of Transportation to be sure.

[1740]

I take it by the member's comments.... The member is on the record as supporting the imposition of an additional one-cent tax on the population in Victoria. I'll state that for the record so that I know where the member stands, because I think it's important to ensure we know where each of us stand on an important issue like this. That has been referred to Finance anyhow, because that's obviously a decision that would be made by the Minister of Finance.

As the member knows, I'm certainly not going to make a recommendation that that come forward prior to having the review completed, which may, for example, suggest that there are savings on the cost side so that we could spare taxpayers an additional cost — by finding better ways to deliver the service, for example. Maybe there are more cost-effective ways of delivering the service. I certainly am not going to lunge forward and grab onto new revenue opportunities without examining all of the expenditure side of things to ensure that there aren't savings that could be utilized there that perhaps were missing.

The other point I would make is that the member's characterization about the business community being

unanimously in support of the one-cent-per-litre tax would not be the correct characterization, based on the letters and the information I received. I would call it, at best, some qualified — some very qualified is perhaps even a better description — support for increasing the fuel tax. It certainly was not the unanimity that the member seemed to suggest it was.

That's not to say that ultimately, maybe, that will end up being the right thing to do. It could very well be, but certainly, that is something that the Minister of Finance would have to carefully review. It's something that I think should take place only when we've completed a governance review, which will help guide us, going forward, to ensure that we're delivering the service in the best way that we possibly can.

**R. Fleming:** Yes, I know that the minister and his government resisted mightily when the province raised gas taxes for every British Columbian by 3½ cents per litre in 2002. I note that over the last three, possibly four, years the minister has also resisted mightily when he's allowed gas tax increases by TransLink on three separate occasions.

For three years this request has been made by the Victoria Regional Transit Commission. It's been turned down every time. The correspondence I have shows that the minister has asked the commission to do various things, such as go out and survey the business community. Every time they do that and report on the findings and submit their service plan for a service increase, they get turned down. There's a double standard here, apparently.

I note that under the flex-funding arrangement, you could hardly call that a mighty resistance on the minister and the government's part to increasing property taxes, because that's where they go. All they need is a resolution of council, and the minister allows it. A tax is a tax, I suppose, as well, and we know that property taxes have gone up quite significantly in many communities in order to address the funding situation from the province over public transit.

I want to ask a quick question about new fleet. I understand that B.C. Transit has sold some assets recently — this may include land — and that there is some money that was raised from that. I'm wondering if the minister can confirm that that money will be invested in new fleet vehicles for the various areas that transit serves across the province and if he can assure me that Treasury Board isn't intending to claw that money back.

**Hon. K. Falcon:** The only comment I'll make about that is that it's under consideration. I won't say any more.

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

Motion approved.

**The Chair:** The committee stands adjourned.

The committee rose at 5:44 p.m.



## HANSARD SERVICES

Director  
Jo-Anne Kern

Acting Production Manager  
Robert Sutherland

Editorial Supervisors  
Janet Brazier, Christine Ewart

Senior Editor — Galleys  
Heather Bright

Technical Operations Officers  
Pamela Holmes, Emily Jacques

Research  
Mike Beninger, Dan Kerr, Sarah Wiebe

Editors  
Shannon Ash, Laurel Bernard, Andrew Costa,  
Heather Gleboff, Margaret Gracie, Jane Grainger, Iris Gray,  
Linda Guy, Bill Hrick, Paula Lee, Elizabeth Levinson,  
Cristy McLennan, Marg MacQuarrie, Constance Maskery,  
Jill Milkert, Lind Miller, Lou Mitchell, Karol Morris,  
Melissa Nelson, Dorothy Pearson, Erik Pedersen, Janet Pink,  
Melanie Platz, Robin Rohrmoser, Camilla Turner,  
Heather Warren, Arlene Wells, Tara Wells

Published by British Columbia Hansard Services, and printed under the authority of the Speaker by the Queen's Printer, Victoria. Rates: single issue, \$2.85; per calendar year, mailed daily, \$298. GST extra. Agent: Crown Publications Inc., 521 Fort St., Victoria, B.C. V8W 1E7. Telephone: (250) 386-4636. Fax: 386-0221.

**[www.leg.bc.ca](http://www.leg.bc.ca)**

Hansard Services publishes transcripts both in print and on the Internet.  
Chamber debates are broadcast on television and webcast on the Internet.  
Question Period podcasts are available on the Internet.