



Second Session, 38th Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT OF
DEBATES OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 21, 2006
Afternoon Sitting
Volume 6, Number 8

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 Deregulation	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	Anthony Dambrauskas
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.....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, February 21, 2006
Afternoon Sitting

Routine Proceedings

	Page
Statements (Standing Order 25B)	2383
Heart and Stroke Awareness Month	
D. Cubberley	
Guide-Scout Week	
H. Bloy	
B.C. Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals	
D. Routley	
Contributions of Langley citizens	
M. Polak	
Junior Achievement	
J. Horgan	
Climb for Community Living at Mount Kilimanjaro	
I. Black	
Oral Questions.....	2385
Federal funding for child care	
D. Thorne	
Hon. G. Campbell	
Funding for hydrometric water monitoring services	
S. Simpson	
Hon. B. Penner	
Compliance of Copeman clinic with federal and provincial legislation	
D. Cubberley	
Hon. G. Abbott	
Closing of Moberly Manor in Revelstoke	
N. Macdonald	
Hon. G. Abbott	
Closing of residential care beds at Queen's Park Care Centre in New Westminster	
C. Puchmayr	
Hon. G. Abbott	
Seclusion room washrooms in mental health facilities	
C. Wyse	
Hon. G. Abbott	
Availability of health care services in rural and northern B.C.	
G. Coons	
Hon. G. Abbott	
Petitions.....	2389
N. Simons	
Budget Debate	2390
Hon. C. Taylor	
J. Kwan	
Introduction and First Reading of Bills.....	2395
Budget Measures Implementation Act, 2006 (Bill 2)	
Public Agency Accommodation Act (Bill 3)	
Agriculture and Lands Statutes Amendment Act, 2006 (Bill 4)	
Hon. C. Taylor	
Tabling Documents.....	2396
<i>Budget and Fiscal Plan</i>	
Government's service plans and strategic plan, 2006-2007, 2008-2009	
Hon. C. Taylor	

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2006

The House met at 2:04 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. members, noting how many people are here in the precinct today, I think I'll just welcome everybody on behalf of all the members.

**Statements
(Standing Order 25B)**

HEART AND STROKE AWARENESS MONTH

D. Cubberley: February is Heart and Stroke Awareness Month, and across B.C. advocates of heart health are bringing the issue to public attention. The unfortunate event that yesterday befell our colleague, the member from Vancouver-Capilano, reminds us in a very personal way just how important this is. Our thoughts are with him, and we all wish him a full and speedy recovery.

[1405]

Cardiovascular disease is a scourge — the leading cause of death in Canada. Much of it is caused by life-style choices: a diet too rich, a life too sedentary, too much stress. Therefore, it lies within our power to control. Remedy, though simple to state, is more difficult to implement, especially in busy lives.

Simply put, we need to be more physically active. Finding time for 30 to 60 minutes a day of moderate exercise three to five times a week improves cardio-respiratory fitness and inoculates us against disease. This challenge applies especially to my generation, the baby-boomers, slipping rapidly into the quicksand of physical inactivity and obesity at rates that belie their savvy, self-centred reputation. Deep down we all know it can happen to us, so what are we waiting for?

Here at the Legislature, all this month, there's a blood pressure screening and cholesterol testing clinic on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 to 11:30 in room 145.

If you already know where you're at, the more important step is the one that spurs us to action. It can be as easy as taking a brisk walk on a regular basis. We may have to rejig our lifestyles, but with resolve we can put heart health within easy reach.

Let's make Heart Month a time to renew our commitment to heart health and redouble our efforts to lead a healthier lifestyle and so lead British Columbians by our example.

GUIDE-SCOUT WEEK

H. Bloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to wear my scout uniform into the House. This week marks Scout-Guide Week in British Columbia. Tens of thousands of boys and girls and youth and up to 24,000 adult volunteers are involved in both scouting and guiding in Canada, building on the generations whose lives have been formed by the values of leadership, honour and teamwork.

Scout-Guide Week coincides with February 22, marking the birthday of both Lord and Lady Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of scouting and guiding. In scouting circles the day of their birth is called Thinking Day and is used to celebrate international friendship. Activities are planned across British Columbia, including camps, mall displays, special banquets, parades, as well as recognition events.

Founded in 1907, scouting grew from its birthplace in England to today, and over 28 million members in 216 countries and territories continue this proud tradition. Last year Scouts Canada raised over \$30,000 to help those humanitarian relief efforts in South Asia. Also, they commemorated the 2005 Year of the Veteran by handing out 150,000 crests to veterans to honour their sacrifice for Canada.

I ask all my colleagues here today to join me in congratulating Scouts Canada and Girl Guides of Canada for all their success and contributions to the province and in wishing them all the best in Scout-Guide Week.

**B.C. SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION
OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

D. Routley: I rise today to remind the House of the services of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in British Columbia. The SPCA performs many great community services on our behalf. Those include public education. They liaise with schools. They attempt to bring our public up to speed on the issues that affect our pets and our animals — domestic and otherwise. They engage in the spay-and-neuter program that protects our communities from having stray animals wandering. They also carry out the investigations of animal cruelty and apprehension work in B.C. Unfortunately, B.C. boasts one of the highest rates of animal cruelty charges in the country, so this is indeed a community service to all of us.

Pets are very important to people. In fact, women who are fleeing abusive relationships, by a rate of 17 percent, list their pets as one of the concerns that keep them in the house long past a time when they should probably leave. It's a very widespread benefit that we receive from this organization, but unfortunately, it's an unpaid benefit.

In Alberta the SPCA receives public funding. In fact, the Calgary SPCA receives more public funding than the entire BCSPCA organization. As a result, donated dollars going from neighbours to help support these programs are being diverted to pay for these community services that benefit us all.

[1410]

I think we should all make a commitment to the fine people, volunteers and employees, of the SPCA who do a wonderful job protecting the animals of B.C. and enhancing the life of British Columbians.

**CONTRIBUTIONS OF
LANGLEY CITIZENS**

M. Polak: We are at the beginning of a new legislative session, we are at the beginning of a new season,

and we are at the beginning of a new year. New beginnings cause us to reflect on the year that has passed. In Langley we are remembering the contributions of three outstanding community leaders.

In 2005 Langley city Mayor Marlene Grinnell retired from political life. Marlene began her civic career in Langley as a school trustee. She went on to become one of Langley city's longest-serving mayors and was the first woman to hold that post.

Cliff MacDonald, Langley's RCMP superintendent, also retired in 2005. Cliff served as a member of the force for 39 years. Cliff spent 13 of those years in Langley, serving both the township and the city.

As 2006 dawned, Langley lost one of its most dominant personalities with the passing of George Preston. George was the owner extraordinaire of Preston Chevrolet Cadillac in Langley. He was also a former mayor, charitable businessman and, as one local newspaper put it: "holder of as many honours as his community has been able to bestow upon him." Whether it was business, sports, the arts or public service organizations, almost everyone in Langley was touched by George's generous spirit.

All three of these individuals have left an enduring mark on Langley. They have inspired the generation to follow. As the torch passes to new leaders and community activists, I know that this House joins me in wishing a joyful retirement to Marlene Grinnell and Cliff MacDonald, along with strength and comfort for the family and friends of George Preston.

JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT

J. Horgan: I want to take this opportunity to speak to this House and those watching at home and our guests today about an organization that has been working in this province for the past 50 years to help foster business and community leadership skills in British Columbia. Junior Achievement provides a valuable service to our young people, opening their eyes to practical economics, business practices and community involvement. Junior Achievement has been providing a successful bridge between the business sector and the education sector since 1955.

Business education programs in the K-to-12 system are positively enhanced by Junior Achievement programs and by the volunteers. By learning directly from business leaders in our community, students form positive relationships and develop an understanding of what makes our economy go. Junior Achievement is one of the many positive community-based programs that help our students and young people develop leadership skills and understanding of business, economics and the role of entrepreneurship in our community.

I had the pleasure of participating in a JA weekend conference at the University of Victoria last summer, and I was struck by the energetic participation of young people. I know the member for Okanagan-Westside will be delighted that those on this side of the House are as eager to support and value entrepreneur-

ship as he is. I know that he will be pleased to learn that the participants in my session valued social, cultural and artistic developments as much as business and economics. It is this balance of social, cultural and economic that we are all seeking in our community.

I'm pleased to support the positive contribution that Junior Achievement makes, has made and will continue to make in the future. By inspiring young people to realize their potential, Junior Achievement plays a valuable role in our community. I ask all members to join me in saluting the staff and volunteers that make this program possible.

CLIMB FOR COMMUNITY LIVING AT MOUNT KILIMANJARO

I. Black: On February 7, 43 British Columbians set out from Vancouver International Airport in an attempt to climb Tanzania's most famous Mount Kilimanjaro. While the summit has been conquered before, including by our own Premier, what makes this expedition unique and inspirational is the fact that 16 of these climbers live with a developmental disability.

[1415]

Called the Climb for Community Living, it is organized by the B.C. Association for Community Living, and it is designed to raise awareness of the challenges facing those living with a developmental disability. Their objective was to declare from the highest mountain in Africa their organizational goal: to build communities where everyone belongs. In addition, each climber set out a goal to raise \$1 per foot that they climbed, representing \$19,341 and the very elevation of Kilimanjaro's summit. That's almost six kilometres. I don't walk that far — never mind try to climb it.

Two Coquitlam developmentally disabled residents, Ron Berg and Eric Andersen, are among the group of 43 who set off for Africa. Meeting these men, their families, their climbing-support persons and their supporters and sponsors was an inspiring and moving experience. I was delighted to attend their send-off dinner and to leave them with provincial pins and the greetings of our province and Premier.

I'm thrilled to advise that on Sunday, after spending the night near the crest, where they slept contending with oxygen levels that are half of what is found here at sea level, they scaled Stella Point, the very summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, almost six kilometres above the African plains — and soaring well above their limitations.

Please join me in congratulating Ron, Eric and all the other climbers — and the B.C. Association for Community Living and its many volunteers and sponsors — for this amazing achievement and for raising funds and awareness for this most worthy cause. This accomplishment proves that hard work and determination can overcome any obstacle and should serve as an inspiration for all British Columbians, including every one of us in this very House.

Oral Questions

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR CHILD CARE

D. Thorne: Following the federal election the Premier outlined four critical areas where he stated that his government wanted to move forward with the new federal Conservative government. The Premier stated that these four areas that he considered to be critical were the Pacific gateway project, the national transportation initiative, the pine beetle initiative and a national training strategy.

To the Premier: why, when other Premiers were fighting for child care spaces for their provinces, did you, our Premier, not include securing the over \$600 million in federal child care funding as a priority for your government? In other words, Mr. Premier, why didn't child care make your priority list?

Hon. G. Campbell: Well, I'm sure the member opposite is aware that I have actually communicated with all of the federal ministers. I have included child care and our goal of making sure that children and families in British Columbia have the support they need. I've also included a national Pharmacare program. I've also included working with the federal government on the national wait times strategy. I've also included with the federal government a national productivity strategy, a strategy for post-secondary education and a strategy for early childhood learning.

I know the side opposite wasn't very good at working with the federal government. We have been good at working with the federal government. We believe we're all there to serve all of the people of British Columbia. We'll continue to do that on behalf of children, seniors, middle-income earners — all British Columbians from all parts of the province. We continue to strengthen British Columbia and strengthen Canada.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Coquitlam-Maillardville has a supplemental.

D. Thorne: In spite of the comments of the Premier, his silence on child care has been deafening. While the Premiers of Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia have publicly been demanding that the federal government honour signed child care agreements, our Premier has been silent.

A simple question for the Premier on this budget day: why is he so willing to forgo the balance owing of over \$500 million that would have ensured quality, affordable child care spaces for all B.C. families in need?

Hon. G. Campbell: As I have said in the past in the public, in the Legislature, we continue to work with the federal government, whoever is elected federally. We think there's an opportunity here. There's an opportunity to build a new relationship in British Columbia between aboriginal British Columbians and the rest of the province.

[1420]

There's an opportunity for us to lead the country with regard to that. There's an opportunity for us to

continue to focus resources on early childhood development, on child care and on early children's learning. There is an opportunity for us to build and strengthen the social infrastructure of Canada. There is also an opportunity for us to build additional training and skills development on a nationwide basis across the country.

I notice that many of the members opposite think the way to do that is to go and confront the federal government. What our goal is, is to make sure that all of the resources of all Canadians are put to work benefiting each Canadian and making sure that British Columbia continues to lead the way. That's why we have led the way with regard to the Pacific gateway. We have led the way with regard to a national fair Pharmacare program. We have led the way with regard to expansion of post-secondary spaces across the country, and we will continue to lead the way in British Columbia.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members. The member for Coquitlam-Maillardville has a further supplemental.

D. Thorne: In spite of the Premier's comments, he has to know and his government has to know that the federal Finance Minister has already stated that the child care deals are dead. But Prime Minister Harper has already negotiated a separate deal with the province of Quebec.

Will the Premier commit today to finally make child care a priority and pledge in this House to all of us that he will fight to obtain quality, affordable child care for the families of British Columbia, just as the Premier of Quebec has already done?

Hon. G. Campbell: The member opposite should know that we will continue to provide British Columbians with a broader range of options than were ever existing under the NDP. We have expanded the number of child care spaces in British Columbia by 77,000. We've got 10,000 more families who get subsidies for their children in child care in British Columbia than has happened over the last few years. We've made sure that the threshold for subsidies has gone up so that, in fact, more families are included in getting the kind of support they need for child care.

Let me be clear about this. The federal government has already expanded what they initially thought they were going to do with regard to child care. We intend to continue to work with the federal government. We have commitments for this year and for next year. We will continue to work to make sure this happens — that families and children in British Columbia get the choices, the options and the quality of child care they deserve in the province of British Columbia.

FUNDING FOR HYDROMETRIC WATER MONITORING SERVICES

S. Simpson: The decisions of the Ministry of Environment to not commit longer-term, stable funding to

our already under-resourced hydrometric water monitoring system has led to the mothballing of upwards of 50 hydrometric stations.

We have heard from the tourism industry, the Council of Forest Industries, the UBCM, the Mining Association of B.C., the Steelhead Society of British Columbia and the B.C. Agriculture Council. All of them are telling this government that this is a serious mistake. It will hurt industry, it will hurt the environment, and it will hurt our communities. This lack of support is a serious story of mismanagement and lack of commitment to an essential service.

My question to the minister is: can he explain to this House how this decision to not adequately support water monitoring services long term is good for business, our communities and the environment?

Hon. B. Penner: I can certainly explain why hydrometric monitoring is important, but I can't explain why the critic isn't more informed. Here are the facts. The Ministry of Environment has secured funding for our provincial share of this important federal-provincial program. We have always met our commitment provincially in terms of funding this program. Unfortunately, in 1997 the federal government did cut their share of funding by about \$1.2 million, and that has put pressure on the system.

[1425]

I'm pleased to announce today that last Friday, following a meeting with the new federal Environment Minister, Rona Ambrose, I was able to secure a commitment from her and her officials that these 50 monitoring stations that the member refers to will not be closing on April 1. This is a very good example of the cooperative working relationship that the Premier's referred to, between the province of British Columbia and the federal government.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. The member for Vancouver-Hastings has a supplemental.

S. Simpson: Well, it's interesting. I understand this minister scrambles to cobble together a few dollars at the last minute to get through another year. I had discussions today with the organization Water Highway B.C., which is the strongest advocate for water monitoring in this province, and they told me that the minister was likely to tell me about scraping together this money to get through the year. But what they also told me is that there is no long-term commitment. This government hasn't made the commitment; they haven't told us where that funding will be long term.

The reality is this. Our economy, whether it's forestry, mining, oil and gas or agriculture.... They all rely on water and the information provided by those services. This government has not made that commitment. Up until last week when they got embarrassed by people in the industry, they weren't making that commit-

ment. The minister has scrambled in the last minute to put it together.

The question I have for the minister is: will he commit today that he's going to guarantee the funding long term — not through the end of next year, not just for those 50 stations, but also for the additional supports that we need around hydrometric monitoring?

Hon. B. Penner: Some people just don't like good news. Whether it's more jobs created than any other province in Canada or keeping those stations open, the NDP just can never seem to accept good news. So, here is the good news: those stations will be kept open, according to the federal Minister of Environment that I met with last Friday. We have secured funding for the 2006-2007 year through the Ministry of Environment and other stakeholders, and we will be working diligently with other stakeholders, because it is a partnership, to make sure that this program continues to serve the needs of British Columbians into the future.

COMPLIANCE OF COPEMAN CLINIC WITH FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL LEGISLATION

D. Cubberley: After allowing the Copeman clinic to open in November, the Minister of Health said that he had concerns but that "they're not huge concerns." Then in February he decided the clinic's enrolment fee constituted a barrier to public access but that "the annual fee does not appear to be a problem." Last week in this House the minister stated Mr. Copeman would be out of compliance if he's setting up a barrier to public access to insured services.

So can the minister explain why, in his mind, the annual clinic fees do not constitute a barrier to public access?

Hon. G. Abbott: I'm delighted to canvass this topic again for, I guess, the third week running. I think every week we're making a little bit more progress.

I am concerned that the member takes little pieces of things that I say at different points in history and trots them out as if they're some kind of answer here. The fact of the matter is....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. G. Abbott: The answer here is very simple, and I'll state it for the record again. If the services that Mr. Copeman is providing are insured services under the Canada Health Act and the Medicare Protection Act and if he charges a fee that would pose a barrier to those services, then he will be out of compliance with both the Canada Health Act and the Medicare Protection Act.

[1430]

Though I don't know how much clearer and simpler I can be about this issue, I know it's a delight to bring the member up to date each and every week. Hopefully, he's found it useful again today.

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

D. Cubberley: I enjoy the weekly updates. I hope I can continue to have them. A position so nuanced that it can't be clearly understood isn't really a position at all.

The Copeman clinic offers preferred access to doctor services in return for annual fees. Selling access to faster or better doctor services offends the Canada Health Act. Obviously, the annual fees are a barrier to public access. The fees create two tiers of people: those who pay big bucks for better service and the rest of us.

The act obliges the minister to ensure that the same standard of access to doctors applies to everyone in British Columbia. So why is the minister avoiding acknowledging that it's the clinic's billing scheme itself — selling better and faster access to doctors — that does not comply, and when is he going to take action?

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for that sermon. It is always instructive to hear from the member, and I appreciate that.

The member mentioned at the outset that it's a difficult position, I believe he said, that can't be nuanced. I sense that the position of the NDP here is a nuance that can't be positioned. That's the way I'd tend to....

The problem with the Copeman clinic is, actually, as the member has stated, that the business model, the billing practices, the website, the advertising associated with it suggest at this point that the clinic is going to be charging fees for services that are insured under the Canada Health Act and the Medicare Protection Act. That is the core of the problem here.

Again, I know the NDP is always quick to convict and then have a thorough look at the issue later. We want to be fair to Mr. Copeman and resolve this issue.

CLOSING OF MOBERLY MANOR IN REVELSTOKE

N. Macdonald: On February 24, 2005, the Interior Health, through a press release, made a commitment to the people of Revelstoke with regards to the senior housing facility, Moberly Manor. The promise was that Interior Health would continue to operate Moberly Manor until new facilities were ready.

Last week residents were informed with letters that Interior Health would stop operating Moberly Manor in April. The new facilities are not ready yet, nor will they be ready in April. In fact, the assisted-living component has not even been started.

The question is to the Minister of Health. Will the government keep its promises made to the people of Revelstoke?

Hon. G. Abbott: I actually think the Interior Health Authority has done a wonderful job on behalf of the people of Revelstoke and the people of the interior in providing excellent service to those British Columbians who live in the Interior Health Authority.

The members across the way, I think, are often way too critical of the capable and dedicated public servants who serve us remarkably well. The IHA has done a terrific job of providing new facilities.

Remember, for ten years the NDP didn't do the investment in places like Moberly Manor. They allowed...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. G. Abbott: ...those facilities to deteriorate. The IHA is bringing them up to standards. We are going to have the best assisted living, the best residential care of anywhere in Canada, anywhere in the world because of the efforts of Interior Health and this government.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Columbia River-Revelstoke has a supplemental.

N. Macdonald: I do, Mr. Speaker. If the people of Revelstoke were happy with Interior Health, Wendy McMahon would be here, not me.

[1435]

You're wrong to be dismissive of this issue. The fact is that what you are doing is moving people. There are ten people that will be moved. The facility is going to be moved from complex care to assisted care without changing. They were supposed to move to assisted care when the new facility was built. Three of those people are going to go to the second floor of a hospital and wait for the completion of the facility that is going to take them.

These are seniors. You are going to move them. It is not a joke. It is serious. The commitment was clear. It was given on February 24, 2005. It is a commitment that is being broken.

The question is simple. Does this government keep its promises on health care, or does it not?

Hon. G. Abbott: I think this is an absolutely serious matter. I think it's unfortunate when we hear members fearmongering about these issues when, in fact, I know full well that the Interior Health Authority has been working over and over and over again with this member to ensure that he is plugged into all of their processes and that he understands why people are being moved, when they are being moved and why they are being moved.

We need to upgrade the facilities at Moberly Manor. It cannot be done without work on the opening. The member should try to work with Interior Health. Interior Health is doing a great job. If this member would work with them, I think the whole system would work better.

CLOSING OF RESIDENTIAL CARE BEDS AT QUEEN'S PARK CARE CENTRE IN NEW WESTMINSTER

C. Puchmayr: We have seen the catastrophic impacts that the demolition of St. Mary's Hospital has caused in the Fraser health region on the delivery of

health care in that region. The minister knows that the observations being made are being quantified by leaders in that profession in the field.

The Fraser Health Authority is now evicting the entire third floor of the Queen's Park care facility, a public care facility, and forcing the long-term tenants to find other care — some in private, for-profit facilities — 150 residents. Will the minister tell this House why he is now displacing seniors from the Queen's Park public facility?

Hon. G. Abbott: It would be remarkable, I think, on hearing the member's question, to think back to 2001 and the fact that at that time, British Columbians waited approximately one year to access residential care. Today, among the health authorities, the range of....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.
Carry on, minister.

Hon. G. Abbott: Today, Mr. Speaker, the range of wait times is between a low of 18 days in Vancouver Coastal and about 38 days in the Interior Health Authority. We have come a long ways. Not only are people getting access to assisted living and residential care much more quickly than they were four years ago, but qualitatively as well as quantitatively, the lives of our seniors have been dramatically and measurably improved.

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

C. Puchmayr: The minister can spin all he wants, but the bottom line is that seniors at Queen's Park are being evicted. The move has traumatized seniors that are in the twilight of their lives. Many have become distraught, despondent; some have died. Will the minister tell British Columbians if this is a further transformation of the public health care system that has been so creatively woven through the throne speech?

[1440]

Hon. G. Abbott: I understand that the members across the floor hope someday to form a government in this province. I think that's good. I think one of the things they will need to do.... So far I'm not seeing a lot to recommend that possibility, Mr. Speaker, but I think they would like the opportunity to form a government.

One thing that I think they should do along that journey is start thinking about Fraser Health Authority — thousands of people dedicated to providing better care to the residents in the Fraser health region. These are people who get up every morning and try to find ways to make people's lives better. To disparage their efforts in the way that this member has done is entirely offensive — entirely offensive.

SECLUSION ROOM WASHROOMS IN MENTAL HEALTH FACILITIES

C. Wyse: Best practices in mental health state that seclusion rooms have individual toilets. Does the Minister of Health support that statement of best practice in mental health?

Hon. G. Abbott: The seclusion rooms to which the member refers were seclusion rooms that, by and large, were built in the 1990s under his former government. The practice around seclusion rooms — and I've just reviewed this matter, so I thank the member for raising this issue.... Seclusion rooms generally have washroom facilities within three to ten feet of those seclusion rooms. What we are doing in concert with the health authorities is providing further technology so that the signalling apparatus for those who are in seclusion rooms to the staff on duty can be done very expeditiously. We appreciate the issue, and the situation is being improved.

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

C. Wyse: I assume that was a yes to whether the minister supported seclusion rooms having toilets, which leads into my supplementary question.

For the last four years advocates for the mentally ill in northern B.C. have been unsuccessful in having washrooms placed in four seclusion rooms in the Prince George Regional Hospital. The following testimonial describes the result of what occurs when an individual must get the attention of a staff by waving at a camera to go to the washroom.

My family member was committed four weeks ago. She was placed in the secure room in a small hospital while awaiting a bed in a psychiatric facility, and she begged and begged to get out to go to the bathroom. She was forced to urinate in the corner. Now we have to deal with her humiliation and shame as well as her first bout of mental illness. As a family member, I am appalled and disgusted at the way my loved one was treated during her crisis. We live in the 21st century, not in the Dark Ages.

My question: when will the Minister of Health ensure that the seclusion rooms in Prince George Regional Hospital have toilets?

Hon. G. Abbott: The seclusion rooms at the Prince George facility do reflect the best practices of the 1990s when those seclusion rooms were made. Again, this is a serious issue — no question about it.

The challenge here is that, obviously, people are in seclusion rooms for a particular reason. Often they're going through a psychotic episode, and there are challenges around what facilities can be provided within those seclusion rooms. Seclusion rooms are not a place of ongoing habitation. Seclusion rooms are for a specific purpose to allow people to get — uninjured — through a difficult, often psychotic episode.

Again, we are adding some technology to those seclusion rooms in the form of buzzers or signalling devices that will allow the staff to access the patients more quickly. As I said at the outset, the washrooms are within just a few feet of the seclusion room, but a more effective signalling system is being put in place.

[1445]

AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES IN RURAL AND NORTHERN B.C.

G. Coons: In Prince Rupert young Leon Haldane suffered a broken wrist and a severely fractured jaw. He spent three days in a hallway waiting for a room. A surgeon became available in Prince George for him, but Leon wasn't on the priority list, so he couldn't be medevacked. The young man's family drove the 1,800 kilometres at an expense of over \$1,000.

Can the Minister of Health please explain how traveling 1,800 kilometres with a broken arm and a broken jaw is an example of health care when you need it and where you live?

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for raising the issue. It is difficult for me to comment on the specifics here because I don't believe the member has, to this point, alerted me or my office as to the specifics around this case. I would appreciate if the member would bring the case file forward to me.

I am always concerned when British Columbians don't get the service that we believe they merit from the system. I want to get all the facts on the issue, so I'd like the member to bring that forward. I do want to say to him with all sincerity, as I do to all members in this House, that members opposite have brought a large number of case files to me, and generally, they get satisfactorily resolved, so I do welcome the member's submission as well.

Mr. Speaker: The member for North Coast has a supplemental.

G. Coons: Perhaps I can give the Minister of Health the letter that he signed, which he sent to me about the situation. In my investigation of this, I approached the Northern Health Authority, who were very helpful and said the ministry is looking after this.

In your letter you indicated that the Ministry of Health is not directly responsible for or involved in the decisions regarding the delivery of health services, including the transport of patients between regional facilities. I would hope that the minister would get a better grasp of his file. Is this just another example of this government's uncaring lack of concern for rural and northern residents?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

G. Coons: To the minister: what's being done to ensure that this tragedy doesn't repeat itself? I hope it doesn't include another 1,800-kilometre bus ride.

Hon. G. Abbott: I apologize to the member for not having that particular case file at my fingertips. Appreciate that I do see a few hundred of them every month. I hope the member can accept my apology for not immediately being able to call that one up to memory.

As it turns out, we are attempting to address issues like the one that the member raises. I've just been advised that the letter we sent out does reference the Health Connections program we put in place, which will help all northerners and all rural British Columbians with the challenge of travel costs to facilities. I do hope that the member's constituents as well as all constituents in the House here have an opportunity to do that.

Again, the system is not perfect. I'm not going to form any conclusions about this one. The system is not perfect, but it is the best in Canada and one that we should be very, very proud of.

[End of question period.]

Petitions

N. Simons: It gives me great pleasure to present to the House today two petitions. I'll start with the first from residents of the Powell River area who are concerned about logging in a particular sensitive area. It gives me pleasure to present that.

My second petition is signed by over 1,500 young people from the Sunshine Coast — a testament to the involvement that they have in their communities. They are calling for a land and resource management plan for the Sunshine Coast. I'm proud to present that on their behalf.

[1450]

Orders of the Day

Hon. C. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I move that this House at its next sitting resolve itself for this session into a committee to consider the supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

Motion approved.

ESTIMATES OF SUMS REQUIRED FOR THE SERVICE OF THE PROVINCE

Hon. C. Taylor presented a message from His Honour the Administrator: Estimates of Sums Required for the Service of the Province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, and a supplement to the estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, recommending the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. C. Taylor moved that the said message and the estimates accompanying the same be referred to the Committee of Supply.

Motion approved.

Hon. C. Taylor: I move, seconded by the hon. Premier of British Columbia, that the Speaker do now leave the chair for the House to go into Committee of Supply.

Budget Debate

Hon. C. Taylor: Hon. Speaker, it's my pleasure to present Budget 2006, the second of five budgets this government will table in its renewed mandate. Like the budget update we presented in September, it's another step forward for our province and the people of British Columbia.

We have come a long way since 2001. We've overcome a long list of challenges that during the '90s held our province back from achieving its potential. Now we're back in a leadership position. Our economy is strong, and we've all seen the numbers, but success as a province means so much more than just statistics.

We know that we're doing well, because people are optimistic. Travel around. Talk to people. All across this province it's a stark contrast to the gloom of the '90s. People are excited. They're making plans, and they're doing so with confidence. They see how far we've come, and just as important, they see the possibilities for British Columbia's future, for their own future, for their families' future. Our challenge now is to build on that, to continue moving forward to ensure that this is a province where people choose to live and choose to build their futures — a province where success is limited only by the scope of our imagination.

In that spirit, today we take one more step forward building on the hard work our citizens have done to get B.C. back on track. Budget 2005 focused on seniors, the people who literally built our province. Budget 2006 focuses on children and the British Columbia we are building for tomorrow.

As I've said before, we can't do everything we want to all at the same time. It's about choices. This budget is one more step towards a future of virtually limitless possibility. Nowhere is that sense of boundless possibility more tangible than in our children and our youth. They are tomorrow's leaders and decision-makers. What they learn and experience today will affect every single one of us in the years to come. But young people aren't just our future. They are also very much, most importantly, our present.

It's our responsibility as adults to educate, to support, to protect and to inspire them. As a government, we work hand in hand with families to make sure that children get a good start in life. We provide things like health care, child care support, early learning programs for babies and toddlers, public education — programs that help young people make healthy choices.

For many families, that's the extent of their interaction with government. Their children get the care and support that they need at home, and their families are sufficiently resilient to overcome the challenges that they face from day to day. But raising a family is hard

work. Parenting is one of the toughest jobs there is, and I don't think there is one parent who feels that they do it perfectly.

We all have moments where we need support, and we can't always get it from our friends and from our family. Every year in this province tens of thousands of children, youth and families access services like counselling, mediation, parenting support, help with addictions, help for kids with special needs, help resolving parenting conflicts and a long list of other services that help keep families strong and help prevent challenges from turning into crises.

[1455]

With this budget, we are investing \$421 million over four years to strengthen these supports — \$421 million to support our children, to help ensure that more of our young people have the opportunities they need to grow with confidence.

The largest portion of this new funding, \$173 million, will be used to enhance services for children, including more social workers and other front-line staff to stay in closer contact with those families that are at risk; more counselling, treatment and support to help prevent problems such as child abuse, neglect and family breakdown; more culturally appropriate services for aboriginal children and their families; and increased support for extended family members caring for children under kinship agreements, and for foster parents, without whom we could not provide safe, loving homes for children and youth unable to live with their own families.

Effective April 1, 2006, the foster parents' transportation allowance will increase by 50 percent, recognizing that in addition to driving kids to lessons, school, appointments and so on, foster parents have the added role of keeping children connected to their families. This increase is the first in more than a decade and will benefit approximately 3,500 foster families provincewide.

Foster families do an amazing job on our behalf. They care for some of the most vulnerable children and youth in British Columbia, and so do parents whose children have special needs. They often deal with more, and more complex, challenges in one day than some of us could ever imagine. Government provides a range of services for these children, youth and their families, but in several areas demand has grown faster than capacity.

Today we're responding to that challenge with new dollars, part of the \$173 million that I just mentioned, to shorten waits and increase capacity in four important service areas: child and youth mental health; the infant development program, which provides one-on-one support for parents who are concerned about their babies' development; supported child development, which helps child care providers accommodate children with special needs to help ensure their families have a full range of child care choices in their communities; and therapies such as physical, speech language and occupational therapies.

In addition, \$30 million will be placed in a family independence fund. This fund will allow families with

children with developmental and multiple disabilities to actually live a better life. It will provide grants for specialized vehicles that accommodate wheelchairs, for instance, and home improvements such as lifts and ramps that allow British Columbians to keep their sons and daughters at home and keep their families together.

All of these initiatives will help to ensure that the children in our province who face the greatest challenges will get the support they need to reach their full potential. But we do know there is still more to do for our children. Therefore, we have set aside an additional \$100 million over three years for future enhancements to child protection and family support services.

With this budget, we are also making new investments in another priority program, one that affects every child and family in this province. We are increasing funding for public education by another \$112 million, which, combined with previous increases, amounts to \$437 million in new funding for our education system, K-to-12, in the next three years. This works out to \$7,338 per student in '08-09, the highest ever in the history of this province.

[1500]

We're also investing \$4 million over three years to double the school start-up allowance for some of B.C.'s neediest children. Families on income assistance will now receive \$84 for each child under 12, \$116 for each child 12 or older. This increase — again, the first since 1993 — will benefit 29,000 children and help them start the school year on more of an equal footing with their peers.

Of course, our responsibilities and our worries as parents do not end as our children grow older. I doubt that there's one person in this House who has not been touched, either directly or indirectly, by the frightening spectre of crystal meth addiction. It devours the independence and the strength of our young people's minds, it poisons families, and it threatens the future of so many of our youth.

This government is committed to attacking crystal meth head-on. In the past year we've moved ahead with an integrated, multi-year strategy — the first of its kind in all of Canada.

As part of that strategy, \$2 million is being directed to community assistance, with grants of up to \$10,000 for community and first nations organizations to help fight crystal meth at a grass-roots level, and \$1 million is being directed to school-based awareness programs focusing on students, parents and educators. These new programs will start in our schools during 2006. Two million dollars is going to initiatives to increase access to treatment — including such things as the Meth Kickers pilot program in Kamloops, specialized treatment for psychosis and increased outreach to youth at risk; and \$2 million will fund a public awareness campaign to increase knowledge and help prevent crystal meth use and addiction.

Lastly, the Solicitor General is holding a series of community forums to provide information on the dan-

gers of crystal meth and to answer people's questions. If anyone in this House has the opportunity to go to one of those forums, go. It is shocking, and you will not believe what we have sitting in our community, which we all have to work on.

Today we're building on that integrated strategy. We are investing another \$2 million over three years for the crystal meth secretariat, a central body to integrate and coordinate all of the work that's happening on this front throughout British Columbia. That includes efforts to combat production as well as the use of crystal meth. Quite simply, this drug has already compromised too many lives and too many of our young people's futures.

We believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to live a full and rewarding life, so we've chosen in this budget to invest a total of \$421 million of new money in our children and youth, particularly those who face major challenges. We want everyone in British Columbia to look to the future with a real sense of confidence.

That is why we chose to make these investments, but let's be clear. Having choices is a privilege, one we wouldn't have as a province if we hadn't done the hard work to build a strong economy. B.C. is doing very well right now. We're seeing good results right across the province and across almost every economic sector.

With this budget we're projecting economic growth of 3.3 percent for 2006 and 3.1 percent in each of the next several years. Private sector forecasters are even more optimistic. Business and consumer confidence is strong. Retail sales for 2005 are expected to reach their highest levels ever — close to \$50 billion — and the latest quarterly survey by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found that "Alberta and B.C. continue to be the most optimistic...."

People are moving here as well. Since 2001 our net population has increased by about 175,000 people, the equivalent of another Kelowna or two new Prince Georges. And B.C.'s job growth is second to none in Canada, with almost 275,000 jobs created just since December 2001.

[1505]

Our unemployment rate has fallen to its lowest level in 30 years, with new investment, new activity and new innovation provincewide. As the Premier has said, instead of people looking for jobs, as we did in the '90s, today in British Columbia, jobs are looking for people. That is a great problem to have, but it is a challenge nonetheless.

Over the next 12 years B.C. is expected to have one million job openings. That's one for every young person graduating from high school during that period, plus another 350,000 openings. All of this goes to say that we need more skilled people, and with strong demand right across the country, we can't count on bringing them in from other provinces. We have to focus more on the untapped potential we already have right here in B.C.

For example, we know that rates of unemployment and underemployment are higher in aboriginal communities. We know that many women, for a variety of

reasons, face challenges entering or re-entering the workforce. We know that there are barriers for many new immigrants seeking work in their chosen professions. We know that many people who have disabilities want to work, but they've not been able to find an opportunity that matches their interests and their abilities. With this budget, we are allocating \$400 million over four years to increase training and skills development and to help more people connect with the opportunities, starting with enhanced support for new British Columbians.

More than 30,000 immigrants come to our province every year. Most are of working age, and many have the skills and experience that this province needs. In 2005 we introduced a program called B.C. Skills Connect for Immigrants. It provides one-on-one support to help people find work in their professions. In the next two years it will help 5,000 recent immigrants connect with jobs in sectors and regions of the province that are currently facing skills shortages.

There are still many talented and trained new Canadians who are drastically underemployed in our communities — builders, doctors, engineers and others — and wanting to work but running into roadblocks. This government will work with the federal government and professional regulating bodies to reduce the time it takes for accreditation. Sometimes the stumbling block is a lack of proficiency in English, so today we're investing an additional \$5 million over three years to enhance our ESL training efforts to help our new immigrants participate more fully in our communities and in our economy.

Another important investment in our future is the \$17 million over two years that we're investing in computer technology, access and training for first nations people. We will provide bands with computers, and they in turn will provide the facilities to develop local computer access centres for their own communities. Key members of participating bands will receive intensive training so that they can take that knowledge back, and they will serve as the mentors in their own communities. This is the kind of capacity-building we're focusing on with first nations — giving people the tools they need to open up a whole new realm of social and economic opportunities.

We're also taking steps to open up more opportunities for youth at risk and those in B.C.'s rural communities to develop the skills they need to become active participants in the workforce. This includes expanding the BladeRunners program, which currently operates in Vancouver, Victoria and Nanaimo. This program offers youth at risk a chance to enter construction trades with on-the-job preapprenticeship training. The program was scaled back during the '90s when we had a less active construction sector but is widely recognized as a successful, proactive initiative. Now, with the industry going flat out, we're investing \$3 million over three years to expand BladeRunners to other communities such as Prince George so that more young people who face major challenges — remember, these are youth at risk — will have an opportunity to turn their lives around.

We're also investing \$2 million for new youth training in mining and mineral exploration. The program will be similar to BladeRunners but will be focusing, this time, on rural communities.

[1510]

You know, the mining and mineral industry has such great potential. It currently employs about 10,000 British Columbians, with average salaries and benefits worth more than \$94,000 a year. This industry is poised for further expansion, and with this new training program more of our youth will have a chance to get these good jobs, establish careers and build their futures in British Columbia.

We also want to provide more opportunities for people with disabilities and other barriers to full-time employment. As we announced earlier, starting March 1, 2006, people who have disabilities will be able to earn up to \$500 a month without losing any income assistance. That's an increase of 150 percent just since 2001.

With this budget, we are also more than doubling our commitment to the community volunteer supplement, a monthly payment for people on income assistance who aren't expected to find work but do choose to volunteer to support their communities. This will give them \$100 a month to offset expenses and acknowledge the value of their contributions. The supplement currently goes to about 1,400 people. We're increasing funding by \$9 million over three years to extend the benefit to another 2,500 individuals.

We will also continue to support those who can work to move to jobs from income assistance. Since 2001 our employment programs have placed more than 44,000 income assistance clients in jobs. These are people who want to work. They have skills, and they have experience, but many just need a hand to find the right opportunity or to market their skills to employers in the right way. In the coming year we expect another 14,000 British Columbians will move from income assistance to work, raising both their confidence and their standard of living.

We are also developing a mentoring program for women who, for whatever reason, are entering or re-entering the workforce after a lengthy absence. British Columbia needs these women in our workforce, and we can help with their transition.

All of these initiatives will help more people connect or reconnect with jobs, but this is just the beginning. We know that there's still more work to be done and more ideas we need to explore to ensure that our people and our economy have the skills that we all need.

We have listened to the calls of industry to offer more creative incentives to encourage skills training. Today, Budget 2006 allocates \$90 million in tax credits over three years to encourage business to be part of the solution and to help government meet the challenge of training our workforce in both our traditional sectors and our emerging industries. This program of tax credits will be designed in consultation with industry representatives from around the province.

We are also increasing the budget for the Industry Training Authority by \$39 million over three years, bringing its total annual budget to \$90 million. This is essential at a time when entire construction projects are being put at risk because we don't have enough skilled tradespeople. This new funding will allow us to increase the number of registered apprenticeships from 14,000 in '03-04 to 35,000 apprentices in '07-08.

We also continue to enhance opportunities for British Columbians in higher education. With this budget, we're investing over \$90 million in one-time funding for projects that support and encourage the diversification of our economy and the promotion of excellence.

Fifty million dollars will create a new natural resources and applied science endowment. It will support new partnerships with industry for advanced training and research in sciences and engineering to create new knowledge and new innovation, which are critical to ongoing economic development and diversification.

The balance of this new funding, \$40.5 million, will help to establish a new world centre for digital media education, as the government first announced in last week's throne speech. This project is being led by four institutions: BCIT, Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, UBC and SFU.

[1515]

All of this is being done in partnership with industry. They are developing a whole new approach where science and technology will merge with art, design and our unique culture. We have a critical mass of talent and expertise in new media in British Columbia, and this new initiative will build on our worldwide reputation as a centre of excellence. Government has also partnered with industry to build a new centre of oil and gas excellence at Northern Lights College in Fort St. John to provide vocational, trades, career and technical programs starting in the year 2007.

You can see the pattern we're developing here: government working with industry; government working with our educators; government working with communities; government committing \$400 million to directly, proactively and aggressively face the challenge of our skilled labour needs.

All of these initiatives will help our economy and, at the same time, help create more opportunities for British Columbians to build their careers and futures right here at home. But as government, it's part of our job to balance what we do for the economy with what we do for British Columbians, and that includes ensuring that our taxes are both competitive for business and fair for individuals.

In 2001 we lowered B.C. income taxes by an average of 25 percent. Families earning less than \$30,000 a year saw their income taxes reduced by 28 percent. B.C. now has the lowest personal income tax rates in Canada for the bottom two tax rates, and most people earning up to \$16,000 a year pay no provincial income tax at all. A year ago we went further, with nearly half a billion dollars' worth of tax and MSP premium reductions over three years for the province's lowest-income

earners. We've also brought in a series of measures since 2001 to attract new investment and help business grow, including lowering the general corporate income tax rate by 27 percent.

Today we're announcing further measures to keep our taxes fair and competitive, starting with tax relief for homeowners. We are investing \$309 million over four years to help address the challenges that come with soaring real estate values, especially for families and seniors on fixed incomes.

For almost 50 years the homeowner grant has helped to keep home-ownership affordable. With this budget, we're improving it in three ways.

First, we are increasing the basic grant by 22 percent to \$570 — or \$845 for seniors, veterans and the disabled. This is the first increase in this important grant since 1993, and it recognizes the challenges that many families are facing as real estate prices have soared.

Second, as we announced last month, we're raising the threshold — the point at which homeowners qualify for the full grant — by \$95,000 to \$780,000 in assessed value. Without that change, up to 27,000 households would have seen their grant reduced.

Third, we're expanding eligibility for the supplementary grant to include more people with disabilities. As of the 2006 tax year, that higher amount will be available to those disabled individuals who purchase homes already modified to meet their special needs.

These improvements to the homeowner grant are worth a total of \$309 million over four years. That's more than a quarter of a billion dollars back in British Columbia pockets.

We're also moving forward with a series of improvements that will benefit businesses as well as individuals and help to encourage continued economic growth. These include extending the B.C. mining flow-through share tax credit to the end of 2008 to help maintain the momentum in mining and mineral exploration; expanding eligibility for the use of lower-taxed coloured fuels to all unlicensed vehicles; raising the threshold for the vehicle surtax by \$6,000, recognizing that many people in the north and other rural regions need pickups and sturdy vehicles to work; and we are broadening the PST exemption on production machinery and equipment to include businesses providing manufacturing services to companies that already qualify for this exemption.

[1520]

Effective midnight tonight we will also eliminate the PST on services provided to install, modify, repair and maintain computer software. This is an important incentive for businesses as well as individuals who use computer technology and who use it to its fullest potential, whether it's in a commercial application that generates jobs and revenues or on a more personal level to study, learn, communicate and interact with the world around us.

In total, the tax changes in this budget are valued at \$733 million over four years. Approximately two-thirds of that money will benefit individuals, while the balance will support our businesses. These tax changes

will help our province continue to grow and help our citizens meet the challenges that come with a strong economy. But let's not forget that a strong economy is only half the picture when it comes to the budget. Sound fiscal management is essential. Otherwise, we risk squandering the benefits that British Columbians have worked so hard for.

The single largest dollar item in this budget, by far, is our provision for public sector compensation. As we announced in November, we are allocating up to \$6 billion for agreements and incentives through 2009-2010. The negotiating framework has three parts.

For starters, we have put on the table \$1 billion of one-time money that government received this year as revenue, primarily from high natural gas prices. This is an incentive for bargaining units to reach early settlements. If you do the math, that is potentially \$3,300 for each and every public servant employee, and this is above and beyond their negotiated wage increases.

Second, we have allocated \$4.7 billion for basic wage and benefit improvements that will differ from sector to sector to reflect varying labour markets.

Finally, part three, for those signing contracts of four years or longer, we have designed a dividend option valued at up to \$300 million if the province outperforms its fiscal targets. That is a total of up to \$6 billion for British Columbia's public sector workers. That is a lot of money. It is more than the annual budget for the province of New Brunswick. It represents half of all of the money available for new spending in government over the next four years. One dollar in two will go back to our public sector workers.

I have to say frankly that it does mean that some other issues we'd like to address will have to wait, but we believe that the balance we have struck between spending on public sector wages and, on the other hand, spending on our children, health, education, skills training and other public services is a fair one. It's fair to our workers. It's fair to taxpayers. It's fair to the people of British Columbia.

More than 300,000 public sector workers are in line for these wages. New, stable, sustainable agreements will not only help enhance our quality of life, they will also make a real difference to more than a quarter of a million families. This negotiating framework is creative, it's proactive, and it's generous. It offers our union leaders and our employers the opportunity to truly negotiate.

Before I conclude, I want to congratulate the superb staff that I have the privilege of working with in Finance and on Treasury Board under the strong leadership of Deputy Minister Tamara Vrooman. All British Columbians are well served by this talented and dedicated team, and I thank them all for all of the hard work and late nights that have gone into Budget 2006.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2006 is dedicated to our children and to helping more of our citizens get the skills they need to seize opportunities and keep this province growing with confidence. We have come a long way since 2001. B.C. has regained its historical role as a leader, but leadership engenders its own set of chal-

lenges. We must work hard to maintain this momentum. We cannot allow B.C. to fall behind again.

[1525]

Right now we are in an enviable position. Our economy is strong. People are optimistic. Worldwide demand for our exports and our expertise is high, but we cannot take this success for granted. Our job in government is to take the long view, to look ahead and ask ourselves: what can we do now to ensure that we continue to enjoy this level of prosperity in the future, and what can we do that will help our children enjoy it as well?

There will be times when we will face a difficult global economy for sure. There will be times when we face natural disasters and challenges whose nature and magnitude will only be revealed with time. We cannot ever become complacent. We cannot ever stop striving to improve, because if we ever stop pushing forward, the province will start slipping backwards again, and the people of British Columbia have just worked too hard for that to happen.

Budget 2006 is one more step forward. It invests in our greatest strength, our greatest resource, our greatest source of confidence: the people of British Columbia. We're investing in children, investing in training, and overarching all of that, investing in our growing reputation as a place where people want to be, where they can choose their futures and contribute to the future we all envision: a future of optimism, confidence, prosperity and boundless opportunity.

J. Kwan: I rise to respond to the budget. I have to say I was looking for a lot more from this government. I think British Columbians were looking for more as well.

This budget is disappointing, and I think it's a missed opportunity to help those who've paid the highest price for Liberal cuts and lost services. Today marks the seventh attempt by this government to deliver a budget, or budget updates, that meets the needs of British Columbians, the seventh try to finally meet their long-term care promise — 5,000 long-term care beds that seniors are still waiting for.

It's the seventh opportunity for the government to put a strategy in place to manage the shortage in skilled workers — the seventh time. It's the seventh time that choices could have been made to make life more affordable for ordinary British Columbians.

After seven tries, this should have been the time that this government finally put a plan in place for forest health and forest sector restructuring. There's still no plan for economic diversification in B.C.'s communities when the beetle wood is gone.

For the seventh time, this budget ignores the real challenges facing ordinary working people throughout B.C. This budget is more about government trying to position itself on key political issues than about positioning the province for the future. Today's budget lacks long-term vision. It is an ad hoc budget for the moment, not for the future.

The Minister of Finance just told this House that this budget was about children. Finally, this govern-

ment has opened its eyes to the consequences of their budget slashing and restructuring. It should have happened years ago. It should not have taken an opposition to push them into it. The government was negligent, and today's budget finally acknowledges that.

Despite the minister's focus on children, there are significant pieces missing. British Columbia has the highest child poverty rate in Canada, and homelessness rates in our communities have more than doubled since this government came to power and began slashing programs. These are shameful distinctions that this budget does not address. In fact, the direction this government is going could very well make the situation worse.

[1530]

There's nothing in this budget that points to a sustainable housing plan. Instead, the government is moving to a landlord subsidy program that will not help families living in poverty to find safe, secure, affordable housing. Homeowner grants will help some, but it will not help renters. It will not help those trying to get into the market, and it will not help the homeless.

There is also no plan for child care. The federal government has abandoned the five-year child care plan, but this Premier has yet to stand up for British Columbians to fight for universal child care.

B.C. families are struggling to make ends meet. Tuition fee hikes, gas tax, transit fares, MSP premiums, prescription drugs, long-term care fees, constant ferry increases, hydro rates, ICBC rates, property taxes — the list is long. The new benefits for homeowners will make a difference to some, but we all know that this government will find other ways to take that money back.

This budget also misses the mark on B.C.'s skills shortage. Today's commitment fails to make up for the five years of poor management of B.C.'s apprenticeship programs. The government cut funding for apprenticeship programs. They closed recruitment offices. They bungled the restructuring plans. The result is clear. Our completion rates are falling, and we now lag behind provinces like Alberta. Alberta has more than 41,000 students enrolled in their training programs, while B.C. has just 25,000. Today's funding announcement does not even make up for the funding cut out of the system over the last four years.

Last week the throne speech put forward a lot of questions about health care, but it didn't give any answers. This budget is the same — no answers. How about those 5,000 additional long-term care beds? The Minister of Health has admitted a net increase of 600 to date. That broken promise has sent shock waves through the health care system. Longer wait-lists, acute care bed shortages, home care cuts, overcrowded ERs and hallway medicine.

Our crystal meth plan. Now, I am happy to see that the government took our suggestion to implement a coordinating body on this important issue, but there is nothing for new beds to help people recover.

This budget also ignores the promise this government made to B.C. communities outside of the lower

mainland. Remember the heartlands? Apparently, this government has chosen to forget about that buzzword. Where's the plan in funding for forest health? Where is the economic diversification strategy once the pine beetle wood is gone? Where is the support for communities losing their mills? There is no support or strategy for communities in transition. With high commodity prices and a growing world economy, B.C. has an opportunity to set long-term economic and social goals, but this budget doesn't do that. Too many people and communities are left behind, and this government does not have any long-term vision.

Nothing on climate change. No class size strategy. There is \$1.7 million added to the Premier's office, though, but nothing for women's centres. If the Premier can find money for himself, surely he can find a way to fund B.C.'s women's centres.

Frankly, I think British Columbians across the province will be disappointed by this budget. They expected more, and they deserved more. In the coming weeks the 33 opposition members will be pouring through these budget books. We will be responding one by one to the budget, highlighting the issues and concerns that we've heard from British Columbians and that this government has continued to ignore.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

[1535]

J. Kwan moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

Hon. C. Taylor presented a message from His Honour the Administrator: bills intituled Budget Measures Implementation Act, 2006; Public Agency Accommodation Act; and Agriculture and Lands Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

Hon. C. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, these three bills implement some of the measures announced in the 2006 budget. Bill 2, the Budget Measures Implementation Act, 2006, includes amendments to reduce taxes for individuals and further improve British Columbia's investment climate and competitiveness.

Three changes to the homeowner grant will help offset the rising costs of home ownership. The basic homeowner grant is increased to \$570 from \$470, and the grant available to seniors, veterans and the disabled is increased to \$845 from \$745. Second, as announced in January, the threshold at which the homeowner grant is phased out is increased to \$780,000 from \$685,000. Third, eligibility for the higher grant is expanded to include disabled people that purchase previously modified homes.

Measures to further encourage economic growth and investment include introducing a provincial sales tax exemption for modifying, repairing and installing

software; extending the mining flow-through share tax credit for three years; expanding the eligible uses of lower-taxed coloured fuel to all unlicensed vehicles; and expanding the sales tax exemption for production machinery and equipment. Bill 2 also includes several other measures to reduce taxes, improve fairness and clarify the application of British Columbia's tax statutes.

Bill 3, the Public Agency Accommodation Act, repeals the British Columbia Buildings Corporation Act and dissolves the corporation. The legislation transfers all of the corporation's assets and obligations to government. This bill confers on the Minister of Labour and Citizens' Services such powers as are necessary to manage these assets, including administering the real property assets.

Bill 4, the Agriculture and Lands Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, amends the Land Act and the Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing Act by allowing the minister to delegate his or her powers under these acts to other ministers.

Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 2, Budget Measures Implementation Act, 2006; Bill 3, Public Agency Accommodation Act; and Bill 4, Agriculture and Lands Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

Motion approved.

Hon. C. Taylor: I move that the said bills be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bills 2 through 4 introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Tabling Documents

Hon. C. Taylor: I have the pleasure to rise to table the *Budget and Fiscal Plan*, which fulfills the requirements of section 7 of the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act. I table, on behalf of the ministers responsible, the government's 2006-2007 to 2008-2009 overall strategic plan and service plans required under the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act.

I have two packages that I will give to the Clerk. The first package contains service plans for the Office of the Premier, 19 ministries and three related organizations. The second package contains service plans for 27 Crown agencies. That second package also includes a list of organizations which have been exempted from section 13, service plans, of the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act and for which service plans are not being filed.

Hon. M. de Jong moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: The House stands adjourned until two o'clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

HANSARD SERVICES

Director
Anthony Dambrauskas

Acting Production Manager
Robert Sutherland

Assistant Production Manager
Jill Ainsley

Editorial Supervisors
Janet Brazier, Christine Ewart

Galley Editor
Heather Bright

Technical Operations Officers
Pamela Holmes, Emily Jacques

Research
Jaime Apolonio, Mike Beninger
Dan Kerr, Cristy McLennan
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,
Marg MacQuarrie, Constance Maskery, Jill Milkert, Lind Miller,
Lou Mitchell, Karol Morris, Melissa Nelson, Dorothy Pearson,
Erik Pedersen, Janet Pink, Melanie Platz, Robin Rohrmoser,
Robyn Swanson, 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

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