



Second Session, 38th Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT OF
DEBATES OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, March 1, 2006

Afternoon Sitting

Volume 6, Number 16

THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

ISSN 0709-1281

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

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Her Honour the Honourable Iona V. Campagnolo, CM, OBC

SECOND SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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Honourable Bill Barisoff

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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2006

The House met at 2:03 p.m.

Prayers.

Introductions by Members

Hon. C. Hansen: It's with great pleasure that I introduce to the House the new consul general from India, Consul General Ashok Kumar. He was here for the budget presentation last week, but this is actually his first official visit to Victoria and his first official visit to the Legislature. I hope the House will make him very welcome.

D. Routley: I wonder if the House could help me welcome a member of Cowichan tribes, Ms. Normaleen August. Ms. August's nephew Matthew Louie is currently employed by the opposition caucus, and she is proud to come and witness her nephew at work here in the Legislature. Please help me make her welcome.

Hon. S. Bond: Canada's Outstanding Principals program is an initiative of the Learning Partnership and the Canadian Association of Principals, in collaboration with the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management. The program is in its second year. The award recognizes the unique and crucial contribution that dedicated principals of publicly funded schools make to students and the local community. Thirty principals were honoured across Canada this year, in 2006. These principals will be inducted into the national academy of principals. We want to celebrate excellence in public education.

[1405]

Today I am delighted to have had the pleasure of having lunch with four of Canada's outstanding principals who actually live and work here in British Columbia. They are here with me in the precinct, in the Legislature, today. I want to introduce them and then ask all members of this House to recognize the excellence of the work they do.

From Kamloops Secondary School, Victor Bifano, who has had 33 years in education, including 18 years as an administrator, and has used the phrase "unity of purpose" as he has worked in the public education system.

From Pearson Elementary School in Kelowna, Susan MacNeil, who took on a school with a poor reputation and results and addressed the areas of discipline and achievement, focused on respect and brought in school uniforms. The results have been incredible.

From Cowichan Secondary School in Duncan, Patrick Duncan guided staff at Cowichan Secondary through the journey of becoming a professional learning community — commitment to success for all. An excellent job. I had the pleasure of visiting the school. It's an outstanding accomplishment.

Finally, Janine Roy from George Jay Elementary in Victoria, an inner-city school in Victoria where 81 per-

cent of the students are identified as vulnerable. The focus was on building hope and improving student achievement and literacy and numeracy.

These dedicated administrators, along with their outstanding staff, have made a difference in the lives of British Columbia students. I am very pleased today to recognize four of Canada's outstanding principals.

J. Yap: We have with us today a group of students visiting from Richmond, led by teacher Ms. Risa Goodman and several parents. We have grade 5 students here with us from the Richmond Jewish Day School. Would the House please make them feel very welcome.

Hon. O. Ilich: I'd like to welcome Mayor Chris O'Connor, the mayor of the village of Lytton, B.C., which is situated at the confluence of the mighty Fraser River and its largest tributary, the Thompson River. Lytton is also known as the rafting capital of Canada and as Canada's hot spot, and it's most recently branding itself as the other Olympic village. Mayor O'Connor is a tireless advocate for resource communities. I ask the House to please make him feel welcome.

Hon. W. Oppal: I have the pleasure of introducing Emma Seckel. Emma is a grade 5 student at Queen Mary Elementary School in Vancouver. She is the daughter of Allan Seckel, the Deputy Attorney General. She's involved in a very worthy project at her school, as are other students at the school. They're involved in a project called Historica Fair, whereby students research Canadian heroes, Canadian legends, Canadian milestones and achievements. They put them together in a public exhibition. Emma is doing her particular project on the history of the legislative buildings.

Hon. M. de Jong: And you.

Hon. W. Oppal: And me — right. Let us welcome both Emma and Allan Seckel.

N. Macdonald: I just noticed two people in the gallery who've come all the way from Golden — Ms. Mino and Ms. Scott. I'd like you to join me in making them feel welcome.

Welcome to Victoria.

[1410]

Statements (Standing Order 25B)

GIL BLAIR

J. Yap: On February 1, 2006, we lost a great citizen of Richmond and a British Columbian who gave his life to public service. I'm speaking of Gil Blair, Richmond's mayor from 1973 to 1990. Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor made mention of his passing in the throne speech, and I want to expand on his life and legacy.

First elected as an alderman in 1970, Gil Blair was the great-grandson of Thomas Kidd, one of Richmond's earliest pioneers. Gil's initial career aspirations were not in the political arena, as he had a keen interest in aviation and actually wanted to join the air force. However, he enlisted in the army during World War II. After the war, Gil earned a degree in agriculture from UBC and began his career as a potato farmer on the family farm.

Gil's early community involvement included being a strong supporter of sports. He coached youth soccer, and he helped organize the minor lacrosse league of Richmond. He was also a chairman of the B.C. Coast Vegetable Marketing Board as well as executive of the B.C. Federation of Agriculture. During Gil's watch, Richmond transformed from a predominantly rural agricultural and bedroom community to a vibrant, urbanized, multicultural city with major commercial, industrial and retail centres.

Major accomplishments of his time in office included the following: conversion of Lansdowne Park from a horse-racing track to a major retail mall, construction of the Knight Street Bridge, construction of the second parallel runway at YVR, construction of the Arthur Laing Bridge and development of the Terra Nova lands.

Richmond adopted its current coat of arms with the motto, "Child of the Fraser," while Gil was mayor. Gil served as deputy chair of the planning committee of the GVRD and also chair of the GVRD. Those who knew and admired him describe Gil as a man of integrity, a true gentleman with high ethical and moral standards, of shy personality who came by his skills naturally. He was passionately committed to his family, to serving people and his community. Richmond, British Columbia and indeed Canada are the better for it.

PROTECTION OF PROVINCIAL PARKS

G. Gentner: Today is Strathcona provincial park's birthday. Strathcona is a wilderness of over 250,000 hectares that dominates central Vancouver Island. Created in 1911, Strathcona is the oldest provincial park in British Columbia and the largest on Vancouver Island. Della Falls, the highest waterfall in Canada, with an overall drop of 440 metres in three cascades, is nearly eight times higher than Niagara Falls.

What does this historic moment of 1911 mean today? Over half a billion dollars per annum is spent in total expenditures related to provincial parks. Of this, over 90 percent of total expenditures is represented by visitors. For every dollar invested by government in protected areas, there is a payback of over \$10 in visitor expenditures. Tourism in this province has become a significant economic generator, and when commodity prices and gas revenues fall and when the dollar nose-dives, it is tourism with a legacy of world-class parks that sustains British Columbia.

We must maintain and preserve that tradition. For example, mining in the '60s was permitted at Buttle

Lake, where today toxic metals leach into what were once pristine waters. In the '80s there was an attempt to introduce mining in Strathcona, which in turn triggered a new renaissance in protection of our parks, followed with an advertising campaign of Super, Natural British Columbia.

Let us acknowledge Strathcona Park as a major benchmark, and let us ensure that our parks remain sincerely natural and that consequently, our economy will remain super. Today and every day let's never forget the principles behind our parks and hold up high the standards they truly represent.

ROLE OF MLAS IN ASSISTING CONSTITUENTS

R. Cantelon: I rise today to remind the members of this House that we're elected not only to represent our constituents but to help them wherever possible, and I have an anecdote from my office in Nanaimo. A constituent contacted my office asking for assistance on a rather large — several thousand dollars — MSP bill she had received. Her husband had, unfortunately, passed away in December, and he had been the bookkeeper in the family.

It was a very complicated matter. The constituent and her partner had left Canada in '99 without informing MSP about the departure. The couple had an outstanding balance when they left. They continued monthly payments, and they thought it had been cleared up. When they returned in June 2004 and began to use the services, they were presented with a rather large bill.

My office worked with the constituent to ensure that the MSP received tax assessment notices, which helped confirm when they'd left and returned to Canada. This cleared up her outstanding account, and this grateful 90-plus woman was left with a small credit, which went towards her medical accounts. She is now eligible for premium assistance, and my office has helped her apply for Pharmacare as well.

Part of the point is that we all owe our reputation of our good offices not only to our work but to the hard work of all our constituents, and I would also like to acknowledge the very cooperative help that we received from the department of health in this matter in resolving this amicably for my constituent.

[1415]

VICTORIA SCHOOL PRINCIPAL JANINE ROY

R. Fleming: It is with great pleasure that I inform the House today of an award given to Janine Roy, the principal of George Jay Elementary School in my constituency. As was mentioned by the Minister of Education, Principal Roy has been recognized as one of the top public school principals in Canada for 2006.

This is a wonderful honour. It is a true testament to her hard work as an educator over her 22-year career. It's a significant recognition, I think, of the dedication

and commitment she has demonstrated to her students, her staff and the community at large.

As was mentioned, George Jay is an inner-city school. It has some unique challenges. It has been identified by the Greater Victoria school board as having one of the highest percentages of students living in poverty in the city. To support this incredible capacity for academic achievement that principal Roy has seen in her students, she has administered additional supports for her students to improve their learning conditions — things like a breakfast program, a hot lunch program, a clothing exchange program and a parent room.

I know that Ms. Roy would be the first to credit her students and the teachers she works with for the success that occurs at George Jay Elementary, but I think she deserves credit for her tremendous leadership skills and for her daily commitment to improve the lives of her students. Let me just say that I'm very proud to have Ms. Roy as one of my constituents and of the wonderful work that she does in my community. I hope the House will join me in applauding and offering congratulations to Ms. Roy for receiving one of Canada's outstanding principal awards.

B.C. ARTS RENAISSANCE FUND

L. Mayencourt: I take this opportunity to bring some good news to this chamber for members on both sides of the House with respect to British Columbia's arts scene. Today the B.C. arts renaissance fund is handing out \$5.3 million for arts and culture groups across the province.

I just got off the phone with the program director, Mauro Vescera, and he tells me that almost \$1 million per month has flowed from this fund, which was established in 2005 through a grant from this government. That \$25 million fund from the province helps us secure the future of arts organizations across our province.

Over the past year 40 new permanent endowments by B.C. arts organizations and 48 individual grants have made a difference to British Columbia arts stability. I would specifically like to mention the Judith Marcuse projects, the Arts Club and the Arts Umbrella, three agencies that work in my neighbourhood that are receiving money today.

Not only does Vancouver benefit. Many B.C. communities will be getting money, as well, from this fund today. Victoria, Kelowna, Abbotsford, Prince George, Chilliwack, Salmon Arm, Salt Spring, Chemainus, Langley, Castlegar, Surrey, Duncan and Richmond are home to arts and culture organizations that are going to get money as well.

Some 115,000 people work in our arts communities, and it is a \$4.5 billion industry. I found out today that seven of Canada's top ten rural arts communities are located right here in British Columbia, starting off with Squamish-Lillooet leading the pack.

I strongly believe in the arts community and how much it does contribute to British Columbia. Some-

times we don't recognize that. That's why it is very important, and I am so pleased, that our government provides funding to ensure that the arts scene thrives. I would also like to thank the Vancouver Foundation and its advisory committee for a job well done.

PUBLICATIONS ON HISTORY OF NEW WESTMINSTER

C. Puchmayr: It's a privilege to rise here today to speak of two new literary works that were published by authors in my community of New Westminster. The first is titled *Royal City: A Photographic History of New Westminster, 1858-1960*. The author is Jim Wolf, a long-time resident and historical activist. The book is a joint project of the New Westminster Heritage Preservation Society, the city of New Westminster and the Arts Council of New Westminster. It has been nominated for the prestigious Haig-Brown book prize.

The second book is titled *A New Westminster Album: Glimpses of the City That Was*. It's written by Gavin Hainsworth and his wife Katherine Freund-Hainsworth. It, too, has been nominated for the Haig-Brown book prize, as well as for the Lieutenant-Governor's Medal for Historical Writing. It is currently the best-selling book published by Dundurn.

[1420]

Gavin and Katherine bought a character home in New Westminster a few years ago, and while they were doing research on their home, they found an incredible wealth of history. That's what motivated them to write this work. They even document the theft of the Legislature from New Westminster to Victoria, and with no disrespect to my colleagues in Victoria, I'm sort of glad you took it.

Gavin and Katherine are members of the New West preservation society, New West Historical Society, national historical society of B.C., and they were co-conveners of Write on the River, a very successful writers' project in New Westminster. Both publications are available in the Legislative Library. They're also available in libraries across B.C. and in progressive book stores across B.C. If not, ask for them. Please join me in acknowledging those gifted New Westminster residents.

Oral Questions

GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON ASSIGNMENT OF SENIORS CARE BEDS

C. James: Three years ago seniors were being split up by this government. Three years ago we heard the Premier say, "Never again," and here we are today. The report delivered by the Health Minister today shows that the Premier didn't keep his word to seniors in our province. It shows that the government says one thing and does just the opposite. To the Minister of Health: when the Premier promised three years ago that seniors would never be split up again, why are we finding out today that things haven't changed?

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question, the issue of seniors being separated. There has never been, and there never will be, a policy with respect to this government — nor, I hope, any government in this province — that contemplates seniors being separated unnecessarily. That has never been the case. I do hope that it never will be the case.

The first-available-bed policy. I should note that when there is a medical necessity and the frail elderly need to be moved to an appropriate level of care, sometimes for a temporary period they have to go beyond what their preferred facility would be. It is always the policy of the health authorities and this government to reunite those seniors when they have been split up. The first-available-bed policy is not new. It has been around for 30 years, including during the tenure of this NDP government when they were in office in the 1990s.

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

C. James: It is very clear that it's this government's mismanagement of the health care system that has caused the separation of seniors that we see today. I want to quote from the minister's own report. The report shows that medical practitioners cite "a complex array of rules and barriers to accessing resources, unpredictability of commitments made for home care and home support, and...difficulties...supporting patients and families."

In other words, there is a systemic problem, as we have been saying all along. In other words, this government made another promise to seniors and again they broke that promise. The government knew there was a problem three years ago. They promised to fix it then.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Member.

C. James: To the Minister of Health: why are we today reading a report about seniors being separated against their will, three years after the Premier promised that that wouldn't happen again?

Hon. G. Abbott: Again, I appreciate the opposition leader's question. As I noted, the first-available-bed policy has actually been around for about 30 years. In fact, it was utilized all through the 1990s, when this government was in power.

It's not fair, though, to say that they didn't do anything with the first-available-bed policy. On October 1, 1999 they actually added a provision in the first-available-bed policy around client rates for long-term-stay patients awaiting placement.

[1425]

Under this policy, as of October 1, 1999, the NDP government was charging clients, patients, who were resident in acute care facilities and who for one reason

or another hadn't found a placement that was suitable for them. The policy put in place in 1999 allowed them to be charged every day that they were not moved on to that facility. This....

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, minister.

Hon. G. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

C. James: Once again we see the Health Minister, just as we've seen with other ministers in government, refusing to take responsibility for his own actions and pointing fingers elsewhere. This is about accountability — accountability from a government which says one thing and does another.

This is the government that promised health care where and when you need it. They broke that promise. This is a government that promised to build 5,000 long-term care beds, and they broke that promise. This is a government that promised more resources for children at risk, and they broke that promise. This is a government that promised seniors wouldn't be split up, and they broke that promise.

My question is to the minister: what assurance can the minister give to the seniors of this province that the promises he is making now are any more important than the promises he broke three years ago?

Hon. G. Abbott: A week ago I saw a problem. I sent my deputy in to ascertain the facts with respect to that problem. She has provided me with a report. We're going to be taking action, and we will emerge with an even better, stronger health care system as a result.

I think the people of the province can forgive a great many things. One of the things that I think they have trouble forgiving is hypocrisy, and that's what we're hearing from the folks across the way. Not only did this former NDP government allow the situation to deteriorate in the residential care sector such that people were waiting a year to access residential care; they also put in place....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. G. Abbott: I'm glad to share this with the House. They also put in place, on October 1, 1999, a policy that provided for daily charges for those frail elderly who weren't prepared to accept what was offered to them under the first-available-bed policy.

ROLE OF INTERIOR HEALTH AUTHORITY
OFFICIALS IN REVIEW OF
SENIORS HEALTH CARE

M. Farnworth: The minister sent his deputy, Penny Ballem, up to the Interior Health Authority to do his

investigation. In a media interview earlier today, Ms. Ballem stated that senior officials in the Interior Health Authority refused to engage in her investigation. Can the minister clarify: what does "refused to engage" mean?

Hon. G. Abbott: If the member checks the record very carefully, he will find that Dr. Ballem did not use the term "refused to engage"; she indicated that they had not engaged. That was of concern to her. Again, this whole situation that I was concerned about.... I'm entirely frank when I say that no incident, no situation, has concerned me more in the nine months that I have been Health Minister than what happened with Mrs. Fannie Albo. Nothing concerned me more than that.

We went in. We got the facts. We have not only an understanding of what occurred but also a set of recommendations and directions that will move us forward to having a better relationship between health care providers, the Interior Health Authority and patients and families in the Trail area of Interior Health.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain has a supplemental.

[1430]

M. Farnworth: Ms. Ballem felt concerned enough to remark, and she found it remarkable, that they did not engage. So whether it's "refused to engage" or "did not engage," the fact is they did not engage.

I can understand why the minister isn't in charge of the Premier's health mission. But guess what. This was his mission. He sent his top official up to investigate a very serious situation. The fact that the deputy minister felt compelled to remark that senior officials did not engage is more than remarkable; it is appalling.

My question to the minister is this: who is in charge of his ministry — himself or the Interior Health Authority?

Hon. G. Abbott: It's always good to hear the righteous outrage of a former Minister of Health as he tries to assess what actually...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. G. Abbott: ...a Health Minister should do in a situation where he sees a problem, steps in and takes action to deal with it. Perhaps the former Health Minister never had any experience with that and as a consequence is going fishing for red herrings here.

The fact of the matter is that we are concerned about the culture that exists within the medical community, within the care community in Trail. We are concerned about that. I'm concerned about many aspects about that. That's why I asked my deputy minister to look at this situation. That's why I asked my deputy minister, who is a widely respected practitioner as well as a widely respected administrator, to give me

her best recommendations. I'll be acting on those recommendations. British Columbia's health care system will be the better for it.

CARE BEDS FOR SENIORS IN KOOTENAY AREA

K. Conroy: Seniors and their families in my communities have been telling this government about the problems detailed in this report. The report today backs up what I have been telling the minister in this House.

What the report doesn't mention is the connection between the chaos in the health authority and the poor treatment of seniors and the fact that this government has cut over 900 long-term care beds and nearly 400 acute care beds in the Interior Health region alone. There are currently several seniors from the area who were forced to move away from their home communities. When will they be able to return home?

Hon. G. Abbott: I think it's unfortunate that the member deals with what I thought was a very thoughtful and comprehensive report by Dr. Ballem with even more hypocrisy and blather about what's actually going on in this province. I think, first of all, that the member should acknowledge that in fact we have remediated or added some 4,900 residential and assisted-living units in this province since we took office.

One of the challenges that occurs when you have facilities that are in large measure composed of three- and four-bed wards and you convert them to single rooms that are actually homes for the frail elderly in their declining years is that it gets tough to make the equation balance. But the fact of the matter is we've invested over a billion dollars in qualitatively and quantitatively improving the lives of the frail elderly in this province, and I'm very proud of it.

Mr. Speaker: Before we continue, I would just remind the minister to be careful in the words that he uses when he's answering a question.

The member for West Kootenay-Boundary has a supplemental.

K. Conroy: I do have to say that the many families I have spoken to do not think it's hypocrisy — the things that we are bringing up in this House. Morris Lessey was moved from Castlegar to New Denver, a four-hour return trip for his medically fragile wife, a woman who is on daily dialysis and has severe osteoporosis. She wants Morris home. He is suffering, and she is suffering.

[1435]

As I said yesterday, Win Guesford's family wants her home. There are a number of families in our communities who are facing financial ruin trying to keep their families home. Why? Because this government closed residential care beds. Not assisted living — residential care beds are what our community needs. It's what those people need. It's what our families need.

Now that we know there is a systemic problem in the Interior Health Authority, now that we know what's happening out there, will this minister offer an apology to all those families and give those families the beds they need in their home communities?

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for her question. Anytime there is a concern about the treatment or the experience of patients with the health care system that they find unsatisfactory, I do appreciate members on both sides of the House bringing them forward to me. I don't know whether the member has brought this case forward to me previously. I don't know. If she has, we will be dealing with it. If she has not, I'd appreciate her providing me with the details in respect of it.

One thing that I hope comes out of Dr. Ballem's report that I think is very important is around the issue of when it is appropriate or not appropriate to have a medical transfer. Clearly, in the case of Mrs. Albo, it was medically inappropriate and medically unacceptable to do a transfer. I can't speak for the case the member cites, but if she would provide me with the information, I would be glad to look into it.

REVIEW OF SENIORS CARE IN HEALTH FACILITIES

D. Thorne: Stan and Ruby Shenton have been married for over 65 years and live together in a seniors residence in Penticton. Ninety-year-old Stan Shenton's health is deteriorating, and he's now in need of long-term care. Ruby Shenton, 91 years old, has been informed that her husband will be moved to a care home in Oliver, one hour away. When Ruby raised the concern that she would not be able to visit her husband if he was moved this far, 91-year-old Ruby Shenton was supplied with a bus schedule.

Is this how this government treats seniors who are facing the prospect of being separated from their loved ones after 65 years of marriage — with a shrug of their shoulders and a bus schedule?

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for bringing forward the case that she has. Again, I don't have any details in respect of that, but if she would care to provide them to me, I would be glad to look into it.

What we try to do, just so the record is entirely clear here.... We are developing a continuum of care in this province that tries to provide the frail elderly, those people that need that care, with an appropriate level of care, whether it's assisted living or whether it's residential care. What we have tried to do....

Actually, one of the best examples I've seen in the last couple of weeks is in the Leader of the Opposition's riding, the James Bay manor. What we have done there is not only take three- and four-bed wards and create private rooms out of them; we have also created, within that complex, rooms for the frail elderly to live together as a couple, should that be their wish. That is what we try to do in every instance.

There are occasions when medical necessity separates parents, when it separates couples. I lived through that with my mother and father. It is not a good thing when it happens, but sometimes medical necessity happens.

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

D. Thorne: Ruby Shenton was also informed that she can only refuse one long-term care bed for her husband. Otherwise, he will be taken off the list for a publicly funded bed.

My question is to the Minister of Health. We know that seniors are routinely being forced to leave friends, family and their community when they need long-term care in the last years and often the last days of their lives. Will the minister now commit to an expanded review of senior care in the province of British Columbia?

[1440]

Hon. G. Abbott: Again, just so the member understands: by the end of December 2006 we will have had a net increase of 2,800 units of housing for the frail elderly in this province and, of course, 5,000 by the end of 2008. People now are only waiting between 18 days, which is good, and 88 days, which is too long, for residential care. When we took office, it was one year.

Further, the member says the lady in question was only offered one refusal. Well, as it turns out, under the policy that was enacted by the NDP on October 1, 1999, the charges started kicking in without even the first refusal. The NDP tries to talk an exceptionally fine game here, but I'm afraid that when they were in office, reality was a different thing.

C. Puchmayr: My community has just lost 86 care beds in Queen's Park Care Centre. Yesterday a family in my constituency was told they have 24 hours to decide whether or not to take the first available bed for a celebrated New Westminster resident — their father, who is now in need of long-term care.

They were told that the bed might be in Boston Bar, many hours away over treacherous mountain roads. The family was also told that if they refused the placement, the father would be taken off the publicly funded list.

Will the Minister of Health commit to an expanded review into senior care so that families across this province are not being forced into separation at the last and fragile years of their lives?

Hon. G. Abbott: This member has raised this issue before, and I have spoken to the Fraser Health Authority with respect to it. I understand that the Fraser Health Authority has been in touch with this member on at least a couple of occasions to go through this situation with him. I think he understands clearly. I'm disappointed that after care by the Fraser Health Authority to ensure the member understands why the improvements are being undertaken at Queen's Park, he raises it in this particular context.

What we are going to do at the Queen's Park Care Centre is add a sub-acute floor. It will be a tremendous improvement. In the interim, while those improvements are being made, the Fraser Health Authority has spent a number of months working with all the patients in the area that will be affected in order that there can be a kind of seamless accommodation for the important renovations that are going to occur.

Again, Fraser Health has made it very clear to this member. I'm disappointed that he would not undertake to share that knowledge with the House.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Member, the member for New Westminster has the floor.

C. Puchmayr: Hon. member, I'm sorry. To the Health minister: this is far from a seamless transition. I tell you that, and the minister himself should go investigate. This family is distraught, to say the least. The daughter tells me that if the father is moved to Boston Bar, he will simply give up life. He needs to be close to his family, his friends and, most of all, his cherished granddaughter.

We all know by now that these are not isolated cases. The families know there is a problem. The seniors know there is a problem. The ministry staff know there is a problem. Will the minister expand the review so that at the very least he will know there is a problem?

Hon. G. Abbott: I'm glad to provide the facts here, given that the member doesn't seem to want to do that on the part of the Fraser Health Authority.

The redesign of the Queen's Park Care Centre and a ward at RCH, creating a new convalescent care program and sub-acute rehabilitation program for residents of New Westminster and surrounding communities, is what is aimed at. The new program requires more floor space than the current 87 residential beds operated on the third floor; it will operate out of 45 beds. At the same time, Fraser Health has added 70 new residential care beds in the Fraser north area.

[1445]

Occasionally, when one wants to make improvements to the system, one has to have a transition period. I think, in fairness to Fraser Health, they have approached this with thoroughness and sensitivity, which is entirely appropriate. Again, I'm glad to stand up here and take the lumps on occasion. They are not warranted in this case.

EMERGENCY SERVICES AT ROYAL INLAND HOSPITAL

C. Wyse: Last December a trauma patient from 100 Mile House was refused admission to Royal Inland Hospital, contrary to the no-refusal policy for such situations. Precious time was lost while the patient bounced through similar refusals at the Kelowna re-

gional hospital and Vancouver regional hospitals, with approximately two to three hours of precious time being lost before finally being admitted to Royal Inland Hospital.

The emergency room at Royal Inland may be new, but there simply aren't enough beds to handle the demand at a regional trauma centre. My question: when will the minister acknowledge that regional bed cuts are preventing the emergency room at Royal Inland Hospital from functioning properly?

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the hon. member for raising this situation. I have been briefed on the issue that's raised by the hon. member. I can't make a lot of comment on it because of the privacy provisions around it, but I can say this. There are protocols with respect to admittance to hospital. I believe that in the case the member cites, there was an error made, and a protocol was not observed. My understanding is that Interior Health has been working with all of the parties in respect of this to ensure that protocols are observed in the future and that patients do get the timely care that they deserve.

This is not a case of Royal Inland Hospital not being able to manage. They were busy at the time. That does on occasion occur, but there were protocols with respect to the movement of patients that were not observed. That is the core of the problem.

REVIEW OF HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

D. Cubberley: You know, it's interesting to see the minister working so hard day in and day out to avoid acknowledging the impact of bed cuts on care in this province.

Interjection.

D. Cubberley: Well, the minister knows — he has to know, member — that the bed crunch isn't just in the minds of members opposite, as he likes to say. The IHA, his own health authority, says that hospitals are too full and that we need to do something about it. It says: "There is ample evidence that we're overcrowded" Ample evidence. Not scattered evidence; not isolated incidents. It also says, by the way, minister, that alternate-level-of-care patients in hospitals are up by 125 percent over '03-04.

Interjection.

D. Cubberley: It says in the IHA report. Sorry. Will the minister recognize that the IHA document shows hospitals are stretched beyond capacity and accept that his own government's rash cuts to residential care beds and acute care beds are to blame?

Hon. G. Abbott: I think the report the member quotes from was a report delivered by, I think, the medical director at IH to the board. The board neither accepts nor rejects that report, as I understand it. Not-

withstanding that, occasionally we do have a challenge around acute care beds. Just so we're clear, throughout the 1990s the number of acute care beds in this province declined. There is an abundance of....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members, members. Let's listen to the answer.

[1450]

Hon. G. Abbott: Through the 1990s the number of acute care beds declined, and that's a fact. It reflected in part the increasing use of laparoscopic and other ambulatory surgeries to deal with issues that used to take days in acute care beds. I think we also have a challenge, because I see it at Shuswap Lake General Hospital, I see it at Kelowna, and I see it at other hospitals on occasion.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, minister.

Hon. G. Abbott: Thank you. I will complete it on the rebuttal.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Saanich South has a supplemental.

D. Cubberley: I do. I find it interesting. One of the biggest problems of the health care system today is that Ministers of Health don't want to hear what their staff are telling them about conditions in the delivery system. Yesterday the minister pointed at the new ER at Royal Inland, and he said that was the solution to the problem. But the IHA report says that increasing the capacity of the emergency room to accommodate more patients without doing other things is like broadening only the large end of the funnel. There is not enough forward movement. There's inadequate capacity, and that, minister, would be bed capacity.

Hospitals overcrowded. Inadequate capacity. Seniors separated. Cancelled surgeries. Patients turned away. Minister, when are you going to acknowledge the crisis caused by your government's cuts to hospital and senior care beds and agree to an independent system-wide inquiry?

Hon. G. Abbott: To complete what I started just before that question.... I think one of the challenges that we have is in areas like the Okanagan and other corners of the province where there are very large retirement communities. We're starting to see some of the impact of that demographic on our hospitals. What that points to is a need to reinvest in the capital side of those regional and other hospitals in those areas where we are beginning to see the front end of the silver tsunami that will be coming at us in even greater force.

We did not see that level of reinvestment in the 1990s. Our government, because we've actually taken steps to ensure that we have a strong economy, is in a position to reinvest. We will have an even better health

care system as a consequence of that increased investment.

[End of question period.]

CHILD PROTECTION INVESTIGATIONS

Hon. J. Les: I would like to respond to a question asked of me yesterday by the member for Surrey-Panorama Ridge. That question relates to the tragic case of Halaina Dawn Lascelle, a little girl who was killed in April of 2001 by her uncle. Criminal proceedings against that uncle concluded in January of 2005. As the member knows, no investigation by the coroner can begin until the conclusion of criminal proceedings. It should also be noted that this was also the practice that was followed by the previous Children's Commission.

I am advised that the investigation by the coroner is still ongoing due to the serious complexity of this case. The coroner in charge of this investigation has publicly stated as follows:

It is because this death raises so many important and complex questions that it has taken a significant period of time to conclude this investigation. Identifying the issues and questions in a death is often the easiest part of an investigation. Addressing each issue with the goal of formulating reasonable and practical recommendations that could prevent a further similar future death is the much more difficult and time-consuming part of a coroner's investigation.

She also indicated — and rightly so, in my view — that she would not sacrifice the quality of her investigation and any recommendations because of external political pressure to complete the report faster. I expect that the coroner's office will be making a decision in the near future as to whether this case will be concluded by a judgment of inquiry or whether an inquest should also be called.

C. Evans: I ask leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

[1455]

Introductions by Members

C. Evans: A friend and sort of mentor of mine, Joan Reichardt, and her daughter Cathy Olson are in the gallery. Joan taught me lots about seniors and health care.

Joan, if you hang around for a little while, you get a chance to see if I got it right. Anything I say that's wrong is my fault. Whatever I get right is to the credit of Joan Reichardt.

B. Simpson: I ask leave to present a petition.

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead, member.

Petitions

B. Simpson: I present a petition on behalf of 240 members of my constituency. The petition reads:

[A coalmine and gasification plant should not be built on farms, ranches and property in the long-established communities of Alexandria, Australian and Kersley. They would be detrimental to water quality and quantity, air quality and, in general, our health and quality of life.]

The petition asks for the revoking of two coal licence tenures and for the rejection of two that are in application.

Reports from Committees

R. Fleming: I have the honour to present the report of the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts for the first session of the 38th parliament entitled *Annual Review of Auditor General Reports*.

Mr. Speaker: The question is: is the report to be taken as read and received?

Motion approved.

R. Fleming: I ask leave of the House to permit the moving of a motion to adopt the report.

Leave granted.

R. Fleming: I move that the report be adopted, and in moving the adoption of the report, I wish to make the following comments. I would also like to note that this report addresses the work of the committee from October 6, 2005, to February 8, 2006.

The resulting recommendations of the committee address the following reports: *Financial Statement Audit Coverage Plan for Fiscal Years 2006-07 through 2008-09*; Auditor General report 10, 2004-2005, *Building a Strong Public Service: Reassessing the Quality of the Work Environment in British Columbia's Public Service*; Auditor General report 6, 2005-2006, *Monitoring the Government's Finances*; Auditor General report 4, 2005-2006, *Building Better Reports: Our Assessment of the 2003-04 Annual Service Plan Reports of Government*; Auditor General report 5, 2005-2006, *Keeping the Decks Clean: Managing Gaming Integrity Risks in Casinos*; Auditor General report, November 2004, *Financial Statement Audit Coverage Plan for Fiscal Years 2005-06 through 2007-08*.

I appreciate the opportunity to move the adoption of the committee's report. I would also like to extend my thanks to all the members of the committee for their diligence and attention to detail and their thorough work at the committee. In particular, I would like to thank the member for Richmond-Steveston, who has acted as the Deputy Chair. We've enjoyed a very good relationship in getting this committee to wade through what I think could be characterized as a backlog of reports that are now before this House.

Motion approved.

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. de Jong: I call continued debate on the budget.

Just a reminder to all members: pursuant to the rules of this House, the vote on the budget is expected to occur at the conclusion of business tomorrow.

[1500]

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

Budget Debate

(continued)

J. McIntyre: As I'm continuing from yesterday, I just want to step back to where I was for a moment. After having reiterated the almost \$2 billion and \$437 million that the government has allocated to health and education respectively over the next three years, I was stating and hoping that the opposition better not continue to perpetuate the myth that this government has cut funding — as the facts, as validated by the Auditor General, certainly belie what they have been saying just to score political points.

I've quickly learned that whatever we do and however much more we add to the pot, their attitude is that it's never going to be enough. So it's increasingly difficult to take the NDP criticisms seriously. And on with my speech, Madam Speaker.

In this budget our government has identified key initiatives to ensure that we will continue with momentum to progress on the right track. These measures include the interministerial focus on children that is designed to improve and expand on services, particularly for those most in need or at risk; efforts to further tackle surgical wait times and expand training and the number of surgeries to ensure health care is available to our aging population; providing new residential assisted living and supportive housing; as well as health prevention, with an additional \$15 million for ActNow, for example.

Further, we are harnessing the power of new knowledge and creativity, modernizing education and skills training, and providing supports for our classroom teachers, on-line students and parents. The \$400 million committed by the Finance Minister to skills and training programs over the next four years is an outstanding step towards addressing B.C.'s skills shortage and assisting more people to achieve their potential in a timely fashion.

An emphasis on skills training is most important in fast-growing areas of the province, in areas such as my riding of West Vancouver–Garibaldi, where 2010 is approaching quicker than we imagined. Construction at the Olympic venues in the Callaghan Valley and Whistler and the continuing work on the Sea to Sky Highway safety upgrades coupled with fast-growing communities have created significant labour pressures in the Sea to Sky corridor.

However, at the same time, the ever-increasing demand for labour may be beneficial in situations such as allowing workers at Woodfibre, the aging mill that's closing near Squamish, to be retrained and relocated into substantially family-supporting jobs without too

much distress. This boom has created new opportunities for apprenticeship opportunities on the highway work, in construction and in the forests for our first nations residents, providing not only an economic benefit but adding to capacity.

Transformation, a predominant theme in the throne speech, is the operative word for the region that I'm so privileged to represent. Virtually all the communities in this region, stretching from Dunderave in West Vancouver up the Sea to Sky corridor to Pemberton and D'Arcy, are undergoing transformation as we speak. There are many competing interests for the land and water resources that I'm optimistic can and will be worked out over time. We must learn to share the resources like never before and find innovative ways to ensure our practices are sustainable.

Going forward, we can all likely take some lessons from VANOC's plans for the venues at Whistler, where they are planning to make the lightest footprint possible with innovative building, heating and waste management techniques. This is all unfolding in a resort community that for years has been dedicated to leading environmental sustainability practices using the natural step framework. So while there are pressures in the corridor, there are also many common interests that can be explored with dialogue and common goals that I believe can be reached with collaboration.

To this end, as the MLA, I hosted an elected leaders forum on February 2, a full-day workshop deliberately planned to follow the municipal elections. Before proceeding, I would like to interject with my official congratulations to all the newly and re-elected local officials in my riding — unfortunately, way too many to name. The forum we held was designed to allow mayors and councillors, school board chairs, Squamish-Lillooet regional district directors and first nations representatives to get together for networking as well as identifying and addressing the varied issues facing us, including the advent of the 2010 games.

[1505]

I'm happy to report that it was a resounding success, with nearly 20 in attendance, including the chair of the Squamish-Lillooet regional district, the chair of the Howe Sound school district and five mayors — all but West Vancouver — all in the same room at the same time, which I think revealed the level of enthusiasm and commitment to constructive dialogue. The primary goals were to identify our strengths and our opportunities, as well as the challenges, and to identify priority opportunities to work together in the short- and the long-term future. William Roberts of the Whistler Forum facilitated and will be reporting out shortly.

When speaking of the Sea to Sky corridor, which is the major link to most of my constituency communities, I would be remiss in not providing the House and any interested viewers at home with an update on the progress of the highway safety upgrade. This is a \$600 million, P3 highway project that is making a notorious road much safer and more efficient to travel. I should add that the project just won a gold award nationally.

As a further testament to the innovative construction and well-managed nature of this megaproject, I had the privilege this past November of attending the opening of the seven-kilometre, four-lane, divided stretch south of Lions Bay. The minister was there to open it, and I was there. We opened all four lanes, and the traffic came roaring through. It was completed a full year and a half ahead of schedule, and it's already making a very positive difference for travellers. Any of you who have travelled it will notice the difference.

Communities up the corridor, starting with Lions Bay, are very pleased with the results. We have minimal closures, traffic well managed, public consultation and, most of all, a successful outcome. This highway expansion is opening up the corridor. The mayor of Squamish has been in the media, praising the fact that a safer and more efficient highway is encouraging more families to locate in the community.

This is a good-news story, a megaproject ahead of schedule and on budget. In fact, in addition to this anecdotal evidence, B.C.'s Auditor General in December '05 provided a review of the value-for-money project report that was released by Partnerships B.C. It concluded, and I will repeat here, that the report fairly describes the assumptions, the context, the decisions, the procurement processes and the results to date.

The Minister of Transportation expects value for money on the Sea to Sky Highway to be achieved due to three main areas: due to a strong competitive selection process; through the efficiencies gained by combining design, construction, operation and financing into one long-term contract, resulting in more accountability; and thirdly, by enabling the private sector to provide additional scope and improvements for a fixed — repeat, fixed — price. Value-added in this case amounted to many additional safety features, including dividers, rumble strips and many additional miles of added lanes.

Construction is now about to start with work on the Eagleridge Interchange and the overland route. Some may have heard via the media that there is a disgruntled local neighbourhood group still concerned about the choice of the route. Well, I'd like to explain the facts. First, our government recognizes how important it is to preserve our wilderness and minimize the impact of highway projects. When the overland route was chosen nearly two years ago, I must add — nearly two years ago — it was based on sound reasons, based on four primary considerations: safety, capacity, fiscal responsibility and the environment.

Both options that were eventually evaluated — and I must add, with the district of West Vancouver's approval — had impacts, certainly, and both were carefully reviewed in a joint provincial and federal environmental assessment. That process concluded that the overland option meets all environmental requirements and can be built to minimize any environmental impact. This, of course, was subsequently proven in court when West Vancouver's legal action failed, with costs.

Let me reassure this House today that many steps are being taken to mitigate impacts, again, despite the

unfortunate misinformation being spread by a local, vocal group — and, I must point out, headed by the deputy leader of the Green Party, who unsuccessfully tried to make this an issue in the provincial election — who by their very recent actions now appear bent on tarnishing the Olympic experience.

[1510]

This table of environmental commitments for the Sea to Sky Highway is available on the website seatoskyimprovements.ca, and anyone will see that it's very extensive. Our role now as elected officials — and I call on all municipal officials — should be to monitor that the work proceeds according to plan, rather than to prolong and fan the flames of hope that the decision will be reversed in favour of a four-lane tunnel that was so expensive as to never, never be a serious consideration from the very outset.

I notice, also, during this whole process that no jurisdiction stepped up to the plate, willing to pay the additional tens of millions of dollars that would have been required to blast through the mountain over a fish-bearing stream and under the wetlands, possibly draining it. I think it's pretty easy to criticize when you're not actually paying for it.

I think it's pretty difficult and, frankly, fiscally irresponsible to justify spending fully one-third of that entire \$600 million budget in the first kilometre and a half. When members of our communities are losing lives on that highway, I continue to believe fervently that the dollars are much better spent on safety features. Certainly, safety is the number-one priority of the ministry, as it should be. This upgrade, I'm happy to report, is designed to reduce accidents by 30 percent in the corridor, and that is really, really significant. Now, as planned, visitors and commuters will soon have the absolutely spectacular view as they round that corner, driving up the highway north to Whistler.

I also would like to take this opportunity to note that, despite rumours to the contrary, extensive consultation has taken place, especially with the district of West Vancouver. I understand that they were privy to nearly 30 different scenarios before the final four options went before the general public in meetings way back in 2004. Their four-lane-tunnel exclusive choice was cost-prohibitive and consequently, unfortunately, ruled out, much to their obviously continuing dismay, so I do understand their frustration.

Also, for the record, fixing the existing highway — which would be a logical alternative, as it's essentially being done everywhere else up the highway — was unfortunately not viable in this particular very narrow and steep area as you descend into Horseshoe Bay from the north. For starters, the highway would have to be shut down for many hours, for long periods of time — in effect, shutting down a very busy transportation corridor that's a lifeline to places like Squamish and Whistler.

When this highway upgrade is completed in 2009 and communities like Britannia Beach, Furry Creek and Squamish are three more years into their growth and revitalization plans and Whistler is on the verge of

hosting the world, the Sea to Sky corridor will indeed be transformed — and for the better, I might add.

In winding down today, let me say that I applaud the continuing efforts of our government to keep the economy going strong; to ensure a competitive tax regime to attract investment to our province; to boost opportunities for skills training and education; to open serious dialogue on health care; to forge new relations with our first nations; as well as to care for those in need, whether it be children, seniors, those with disabilities or those on lower incomes who need supports.

I'm proud of our balanced approach to governing, I'm proud of our balanced budget yet again, and I'm proud that we are responsibly managing this province. We are moving forward with confidence, with genuine leadership.

C. Evans: I'm pleased to get a chance to respond to the throne speech and to the budget this year. Last year and sometimes in history I've kind of tended to try to infuse moments like this with some humour. I think it's easier to hear what you think if it's delivered without utter seriousness.

[1515]

However, this year I feel that the times — and the government's response to the times that we're living in and the failures of the government's response — require a somewhat formal address. So, hon. Speaker, please don't think I've lost my sense of humour. I just hope you think that I take this opportunity seriously.

To respond to the budget and the implications of the budget this year, I want to start by congratulating the Minister of Finance, firstly, on her sense of timing in becoming the Minister of Finance at this point in the history of British Columbia and, secondly, on the differences that I see that she's put into this budget from those that we saw last year.

I stood here last fall and tended to deprecate the tax cuts to the corporate classes — instead of the resolution of some of the problems that we face, such as teacher bargaining. I was very pleased this year — and I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for the fact — that I read the budget without big tax cuts to the wealthy classes or to corporations.

I was very pleased to find money in the budget for hiring social workers to work with kids, because obviously, that crisis has preoccupied this building and British Columbia. I was very pleased to see money for provincial bargaining, so we perhaps won't see a repeat of the debates we had last year around teachers.

I congratulate her on her timing in getting this job, because this minister has become Minister of Finance at a time in British Columbia that is unprecedented, in my experience. In preparation for this speech I read the budget speeches of every government from 2005 back to 1970 in five-year intervals in order to try to ascertain the differences between this....

Yeah, I know. It's an amazing chore. It's all in the library. If there's anything critical in what follows, please understand that I did the homework first.

What's happened here is that this minister has become minister at a wonderful moment — a moment with the explosion of capitalism and growth in China and India, a moment of unbridled commodity prices and a health in our budgetary situation that we have not seen, I would suggest, back since 1970.

I'm going to quote from a couple of the historical budgets — none of them when this party or that party was government, in order that you will see this as a bipartisan comment. In 1970 the Minister of Finance said in the speech: "However, our dependence on world markets for the sale of the greater part of our productive wealth and our lack of control over those economic conditions and certain realism indicates that we should not anticipate an annual growth in provincial government revenues at the extraordinary rates of the 1960s." In other words, in 1970 commodity prices were beginning to go downhill.

Take 1980, in the budget speech. The budget said: "Total natural resource revenue is forecast to decline at 4.3 percent from the 1980 fiscal year."

In 1984 that decline was followed by another, and they said: "By early 1982 forecasts showed a pattern of rising deficits with no prospect of returning to fiscal balance even within the normal cycle of economic recovery. British Columbia, like all other provinces and the federal government, has developed what is commonly referred to as a structural deficit."

In 1984 — again, not a New Democrat or a Liberal time — the Minister of Finance said: "In common with most other resource-dependent regions in the whole world, the provincial economy was weaker than expected and is estimated to have shown little growth in 1984."

Then, we all know about the Asian flu and the crash of entire markets in the 1990s. We know about the crash of the price of coal. We are developing coalmines today that we closed in the 1990s because, of course, the world didn't need the coal. On and on up until the present time when, for the first time in decades, the hon. minister gets to be the Minister of Finance in a moment in our history where there is unprecedented opportunity, and it calls for vision. It calls for a vision, I think, greater than that of the Ministers of Finance for the past 30 years, because this is the moment where you might actually make structural change after a period of falling commodity prices around the world.

Thus, while I praise the budget for the dumb things that it didn't do and the good things that it did do, I would like to criticize the budget and the government for their utter lack of vision and leadership at a moment unprecedented in history — when they could be doing stuff, making changes, to improve British Columbia.

[1520]

For my first example, I went through the throne speeches and the budget speeches back for 30 years. Traditionally in this room the throne speech sets out the government's vision, and then the budget speech says what we're going to do with money to make the

vision work. That's how parliamentary democracy works: throne speech, ideas, budget and money.

This year I'm stunned. We have a throne speech that gets up here and basically talks about health care — and then a budget in which health care is almost no part of the presentation. There is the appearance between the throne speech and the budget speech of this year of absolute disconnect in the government between, perhaps, the Premier's office and the Ministry of Finance. If in fact the government in 2005 was interested in fixing health care, I would suggest that the budget would have reflected that and talked about that.

I gave a talk to college students in Kamloops the other day that was essentially on the subject of cynicism. I was begging these young people: "Do not see the parliamentary system and democracy through the vision of cynicism." But hon. Speaker, what else are they supposed to be except cynical when we come into this room and say, "We believe in health care, and we're going to fix it, and add a whole other principle to the Canadian health care policy," and then it's a disconnect? We come back one week later, and in the budget, health care isn't there. Health care — it's no part of the structural changes that the budget intends to make.

I think that kind of disconnect, that kind of lack of vision tends to make people lose faith. I've never been one of those people. There are people out there who in their cynical views tend to think that there might be an intention here in Victoria to make health care not work in order that we as citizens would throw up our hands and say: "Okay, try something else to privatize it." I have never been part of that cynicism, because I don't think people who work here would take apart what their grandparents put together. But in order to fight cynicism, you have to give hope, and in order to create hope, you have to have vision.

I would argue that this budget might then have said something about fixing the problems in health care. This House has been captured for days, maybe weeks, on the subject of health care. Just day after day, through question period, we talk about the tragedies experienced by seniors, especially the folks in Trail. The Minister of Health gets up in his place, and he responds by saying: "Yeah, we're going to fix that. That's an isolated case. Maybe it's four cases, but it's not an endemic issue."

I would argue that where we are with seniors issues in this room is exactly where we were with the tragedy surrounding children when we were debating last year the death of one child — before someone found that in a warehouse there were, in fact, 713 more files that were not being debated in this room.

We are debating seniors as if the isolated case that the deputy minister has reported on was an anomaly, was a failure of somebody's judgment or was an accident — as if it was not a built-in public policy result of the things that have happened in this room in the last five years.

The minister stood in his place just the other day and stunned me by using the word "decrepit." He de-

scribed the facilities in which seniors were being housed in British Columbia as decrepit. I couldn't believe it, so I went and looked it up. "Decrepit" is defined in the dictionary as: "Impaired by use or wear; worn out;" — in big letters — "fallen into ruin or disrepair."

Seniors facilities are something I know a little bit about. In the 1990s I worked in this building as an MLA and was involved in the investment in a bunch of those seniors facilities that the minister describes as decrepit. I had the good fortune.... It's good for your soul, hon. Speaker. I lost in 2001, went home and got a job. The job that I got was as executive director of a non-profit society that happened to run home care in the Arrow Lakes.

[1525]

It was a bidder to the hon. minister to provide assisted living in the town of Nakusp. Therefore, I was involved in this room, in the construction, reconstruction or renovation of some of the buildings we're now describing as decrepit and then as an outside, non-government bidder — when I did not work in this building — to provide assisted living and home care services.

I think, therefore, that I am qualified to suggest that I do not think things that happen in Trail and are being debated as an anomaly are an anomaly at all. I think they're the result of direct public policy that happened earlier in this century — in the years 2001, 2002 and 2003. I think the groundwork was laid for what we're debating here as public policy and not as an accident, as surely as the layoffs in human services for children resulted in those 713 files stored in that warehouse, that we now have come to understand.

I imagine — and I was not there; this was not part of my speech that I could research or find in the library — there was a meeting between representatives or officials of this government and of the developer community in the early part of this century. The developers said to the government: "You know what? Yes, we will build long-term care or assisted living facilities. But in small towns in British Columbia there will be no market for the service that we offer unless you, the government, first close the facilities that are there."

I think that meeting happened, and it is the.... I know that this government is not stupid. While I disagree with the hon. members on the other side, I wouldn't say one of them is stupid. If they do stupid things, it has to be because they meant to. Their intelligence and the intelligence of their staff and the intelligence of their political staff and the intelligence of the Premier would preclude them doing this by mistake. So I believe there was such a meeting, and the developer said to the government: "You're going to have to close the facilities in order that we create a market, because we can't raise capital for assisted living unless you first close government facilities." It is the only rational explanation for what happened.

Now I'll get on to what happened. In 2001, 2002 and 2003, as a result of direct public policy, this government closed long-term care facilities all over British

Columbia. That is true. But while three-quarters of the people of British Columbia live within the GVRD, and therefore you would expect three-quarters of the closures would happen in the GVRD, that isn't what happened at all — is it? Nod, even if you disagree with me, because you know the majority of the closures happened in the small towns of British Columbia where the developer class needed to close the long-term care facilities before they could build assisted living.

In fact, between 2001 and 2004, 2,665 government-run long-term care beds were closed in British Columbia, 1,567 of them — what is that? two-thirds? — in the small towns where there are not alternatives, where there are mountain ranges, lakes and highways between one town and another. It's not like closing a facility in Vancouver, where we'll just take the bus over to Surrey. It's like: "We'll close a facility in your town, and you can go over a mountain range and across on a ferry boat if you want to visit your family."

Hon. Speaker, I've got a list of them here — an entire page of closures in small-town British Columbia: Cranbrook, Vernon, Grand Forks, Williams Lake, Fernie, Salmon Arm, Golden, Nakusp, Enderby, Kelowna, Kimberley, Trail, Rosland, Kelowna, Revelstoke, Penticton, Salmon Arm, Creston, Kamloops, Kamloops again, Salmon Arm, New Denver, Lytton, Fernie, Osoyoos, Kelowna again, Summerland, Armstrong and Nelson.

Those are not towns where the family has choices, are they? Those are towns where, if you close the facility, that's it. If you close the facility in order to create a vacuum so a developer can raise capital to fill that vacuum, that's it until the building gets built and the developer raises the money. That's the end.

The minister says those buildings were decrepit. I want to deal with decrepit. He says we had to close those buildings: they were old-fashioned; the doors weren't the right size; there were too many people in a room; they were decrepit.

Mount St. Francis, in my constituency: 80 beds closed. It was built in 1950. It's younger than I am. It's younger than this building. It's younger than the majority of the buildings that we're doing renovations on to run as public schools right now — built in 1950. It was built like a brick.... I'm not going to say it on the record; it's unparliamentary.

[1530]

It's a good building. Proof of that is that the IHA itself is now going to move into the decrepit building that they kicked the seniors out of. It's so decrepit that it's IHA-qualified for their administration staff but not okay to renovate for their seniors.

That was in Nelson. How about Pioneer Villa? It was built in the 1980s in Creston. I was involved in the restructuring of Pioneer Villa in the 1990s. We rebuilt it to accommodate Alzheimer's patients. The 1990s isn't old history. It's just the last decade. We had to close Pioneer Villa because we said it was decrepit. It's so undecrepit that now that they've had a breakdown in the sprinkler system in the other facility in town, the

people are moving back into the building that we closed and claimed was decrepit.

How about Halcyon Home? Halcyon Home's dear to my heart. Halcyon Home was built in Nakusp in 1980. It was built, in part, by the community's labour. That means guys with cats came and made a flat place and people volunteered their time to drive nails, and the community and the government built a seniors centre. I've been in the basement of that building, hon. Speaker; it's strong enough to hold up this building. But it was decrepit, eh?

The doors weren't wide enough. I cop to that; the doors should have been wider. We should widen the doors. Half the people in this building have the construction skills to widen the doors in Halcyon Home. It's so undecrepit that the organization I was executive director of said: "Okay, if it's too decrepit for you, we'll run it." The IHA said: "Okay, widen the doors and you can have it back."

The minister.... He's a wonderful man and an honest guy. If he thinks the buildings are decrepit, it's got to be because somebody is giving him briefing notes about an event that he wasn't at, in a time when he wasn't minister, that aren't true. Of course, there are no liars in here and no liars in the ministry, so someone must be mistaken.

I'm just talking about the little towns I live in. Everybody here could tell a story like that — I know about Halcyon Home because I've been there. But there's silence, I think indicating that my story about the meeting between the government's representatives and the developer class has to be the truth, because: (a) they're not stupid; and (b) it happened; ergo it needs a reason.

I accept the government's right to govern. I accept that totally. That's one of the principles I hold dear. They won. They have a mandate. They have a right to govern. But if they want to close public buildings to open private buildings, they have to do it in a way that doesn't impose pain on the citizens that sent them here. They have the right to their ideological convictions. If they want to end the public system and replace it with a private system, they can do that. I do not blame them for their ideology. I really, really blame them for closing those 1,700 beds in small-town British Columbia without building the alternative down the street first.

If they wanted to follow through the implications of what they believe was their mandate or their business plan, if they wanted to create private care, they could have said: "Okay, developer class, we'll underwrite the new building. You go build it, and when it's built, we'll close long-term care facilities run by the government." They could have done that, and all I'd have had the right to argue is how they think. I would not have had the right to argue that they had created pain in citizens.

What they could have done is they could have said: "We're going to close these buildings in five years, and in the meantime, we'll double home care so that citizens can be looked after at home while we're building new facilities." Did they do that? No. They walked in here one day, and they closed dozens of facilities around the province, called them decrepit, and then cut

home care by 50 percent. I'm not making up that number. I didn't have to look it up in the library. I was running the home care facility when we got our contract — 50 percent. We cut the hours of service from an hour and a half an hour to old people to 15 minutes to serve the same number of people with half the money.

[1535]

They are not dumb. These guys are smart guys. I even think they're caring guys, so somebody is running a number not just on the seniors, but on all these people here — unless you believe that they meant to have it happen.

I'm going to tell you a story. I was running.... I'm going to tell you a story about how it actually feels to be a senior in one of those buildings. I was running Arrow and Slokan Lake Community Services society the day they closed Halcyon. One of the things we did at our society was we offered counselling for mental health folks, for people in emotional crisis. The week after they closed Halcyon Home our counsellors were flooded with requests by nurses, real working nurses.

We had to run groups for nurses — not individuals; groups. Why was that? Because they came and said: "This isn't just evicting somebody from their home — they're 84 years old. They can't remember. They go to sleep at night. They wake up. They say, 'Something's wrong here,' and they say: 'What is it that's wrong here? I can't remember what's wrong.'" The nurse has to say: "Actually, you're evicted again."

Every single day. Starting with 26 people, and they're down to five now — 26 to five. One by one, evicted every day. And then ultimately they pass away. The IHA in Pioneer Villa and Halcyon Home....

Look up, you guys. You're all looking down as if you've got something to study. I'm telling you the results of your presence here, and you can honour my words with at least paying attention, even if you don't believe a darn thing I say.

The results of the closures are: you move from 26 down to 20 down to 19. Now they're down to five. There are these folks living in Halcyon Home and in Pioneer — all over the province — and they know there's something wrong because all the other people that used to live in all the other rooms.... They're not there. The IHA is not going to close the building till they're gone. They don't have to literally evict people, but the helplessness in the place is damaging the community. It's damaging the workers, and more than anything, it's damaging the seniors.

Imagine. We all get old progressively year by year. This all happened four years ago. Every single year there ought to be ten people moving in, but since 2002 nobody has got to move in. That makes 40 people out living in the community, which we ought to be serving with home care, but we cut that in half. This situation that we're discussing in here on a daily basis, these buildings that we describe as decrepit, is not happening in Vancouver or Surrey. It's happening in a little town where if they close the facility in your town, then you've got to go over the Monashee to Kelowna, or if it's in Creston, you've got to go over the steepest moun-

tain pass in Canada to Castlegar. Oh, can't go to Castlegar. That's actually where the last crisis happened, so you gotta go over the next mountain range.

This isn't an accident. It's not an anomaly. It's not a case that happened in Trail. It's public policy brought in by the folks in this room, exactly like the cuts to social services and children. Workers with children resulted in the tragedy that we are now dealing with. Of course, I'm dead serious in the debate about this budget, because I think we can avoid this. I don't think it has to be like this.

I would like to make some suggestions. I started out by saying I was thrilled that the Minister of Finance made some changes in this budget different than last fall. I like to think that that's because there are 33 folks working here. We're not too stupid either, so we notice things and bring them up, and she hears that, and then some changes happen from the old days when there was no opposition.

I do not believe that the situation that seniors find themselves in today has to be this way. I think the government could actually fix it. I think the Minister of Finance could fix it. I'll go back to the beginning of my speech. She can fix it, because for the first time in 30 years in this building there's a minister with excess that she could apply to crisis. And because the government created the crisis, and I don't think really wants us to have to keep raising it in here every single day, it seems to me that she might actually want to apply it to the crisis.

There's an easy solution. It would be wrong of me to stand here and criticize the Minister of Health, the Minister of Finance or the government generally and say, "Gee, I oppose. You guys are doing everything wrong," and end it at that. That's just cheap criticism, so I wish to propose a solution. I would like to propose a solution, hon. Speaker, if I could get just one of them to look up.

[1540]

It is possible to fix it now. If the government wanted to follow through with their ideological commitment to the private sector without hurting families or even killing people, all they've got to do is take the funding for home care and double it for three years until the buildings get built so that we can look after them at home.

All they've got to do is provide a budget for home care nursing so those seniors presently in acute care beds in the hospitals could be looked after at home. All they've got to do is run Pioneer Villa and run Halcyon Home and all the other closed facilities in the province that are actually still running and put the staff back in there. There are five people, five lonely people, in there waiting to die. Put the staff back in the building, fill the other 19 or 22 beds, and you will end the crisis while you build assisted living to finish your ideological commitment.

It's all over the province. It's in every single town that we represent. Half those members that aren't interested enough to pay.... You could reopen the beds because the buildings are still there. The staff is still in

the town. You treat this as an anomaly, and it's just as if the child that died last year was the only one and not just one of 713 files in a warehouse.

Public policy created this problem. The Minister of Finance has the money to solve the problem. Even if the Minister of Health believes the briefing notes that said the buildings are decrepit, I would ask him to go out and look. Come with me. I'll hold his hand. We can go and look at these buildings and see if they can't be.... If they're good enough to house the administration of the IHA, they are good enough to house those people the IHA is evicting.

They've got the money. I have just explained the solution. The solution is affordable. If you don't do it.... If they — those people in this room and those maybe, I hope, watching from their offices — do not invoke a solution now, then it proves my argument that there was a meeting in which folks opposite committed to hurt people, to create a vacuum, to attract capital. I can't bring myself to believe that about these fine people, so I offer this chance for them to prove me wrong.

Hon. Speaker, I used to be a Minister of Health, and you may have noticed that I have yet to stand in my place and attack the government for killing somebody. That happened to me, and I understand that no minister is responsible for an individual case, but I will come back here as long as they let me work here and attack the government for public....

Deputy Speaker: Member. Member. Take your seat for a moment, please. I'm going to remind members to consider the language that they are using in the chamber. It is verging on unparliamentary, and I would ask the member to please temper his remarks. The other thing I'd like to remind members of is about making personal observations of members on either side of the House. That is not parliamentary either.

Continue, member.

C. Evans: Thank you, hon. Speaker. I apologize for anybody I've impugned, and I thank you for your comments, because it is true I actually care enough that it's possible that I might impugn somebody, and I did not mean to.

I meant to say that I think there's public policy hurting people, and there's a chance to fix it, and there are no lack of resources to fix it. If it isn't fixed, it can only be because my assumption of the excellence, intelligence, commitment and caring of friends opposite is mistaken.

H. Bloy: It's a real pleasure for me to stand here today. Before I start to make some of my remarks, I'd like to refer to a few things from the member for Nelson-Creston. He stated: "This is no humour...." Well, this is serious business running government, and it considers a thought process that might be missing there.

[1545]

Also, this member is totally against the private sector. You know, there's nothing against the private sector. It is the way of the '90s — tax and spend, tax and

spend, tax and spend — so that the members can all hear that. They were good at that through the 1990s. They spent and spent and spent. They spent the future of my future grandchildren, of their grandchildren and of their children. It's up to us now, through the prudent management and the thought process that's put in by this Minister of Finance, to make for a better British Columbia for what the NDP did to destroy our province.

The only reason I'm here is because of the great people that live in the riding of Burquitlam. They are the ones. I thank the ones that elected me, that voted for me. The ones that didn't vote for me — I appreciate them participating in the election process. But I am only here for the people of Burquitlam and all the province, but it's the people of Burquitlam that have sent me here to this great House twice. I'm proud to stand and give my full support to the budget speech today.

I want to thank the government team that I'm part of and the cabinet and all the work that they've done to put this budget together.

Before I get into the throne speech, there are some people I would like to congratulate. In Burnaby we have two newly elected council members, Gary Begin and Garth Evans, and in the city of Coquitlam we have a new mayor Maxine Wilson and new councillors, a former colleague of ours in the House, Richard Stewart, former Mayor Lou Sekora and Brent Asmundson and Doug MacDonell.

Federally in my riding, I have one new representative, MP Dawn Black, and re-elected Bill Siksay. As you can tell, the riding of Burquitlam is the only riding with a nickname in the whole province, and I represent part of Burnaby and part of Coquitlam.

In my riding and the cities I represent, volunteers are what make our communities. The volunteers are the heart of our communities and the soul. If it wasn't for them, we wouldn't have the communities we live in.

I'm a proud member of the Burquitlam Lions Club. There we support Jimmy Christmas manor. In fact, we raised the money and helped build the manor. I've worked long and hard to help people to have affordable housing within my riding. This building, Jimmy Christmas manor, and Burquitlam Lions Club long-term care centre are run by Renee Danylcznk, and she and her staff do a great job providing for its many residents.

As a coach and a volunteer for minor lacrosse, which two of my children play, I worked with Rochelle Winterton of B.C. Lacrosse to help them to host the World Men's Field Lacrosse Championships, 2008, and I look forward to that taking place.

I've been a member of the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce, and I recently attended the president's gala. At the president's gala each year we present the business excellence awards. I would just like to mention who the winners are. We have: AMEC Dynamic Structures, outstanding business and newsmaker of the year; Ken Woodward from Unistrut Building Systems

for chamber member of the year. Linda Balzer is our citizen of the year. Jim McKinley and Robert Farr of PTI Punch Tools for entrepreneurial leadership — and it's that entrepreneurial leadership that drives British Columbia — and Bill Weselowski of InnerVisions Recovery Centre received the legacy leadership award.

I'd like to congratulate all the new winners, and I'd like to congratulate the new president of the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce, Brian McCristall. He's also the publisher of the *Tri-City News*. I'd like to thank all the volunteers who made that a great evening.

[1550]

In my riding for the last two years, I've held gaming seminars. This year I held them with my colleagues from Port Moody-Westwood, from Burnaby-Willingdon and Burnaby North, and we hosted over 400 volunteers in two different seminars. The reason for the seminars.... Non-profit groups volunteer so much time. They're the crème de la crème of the communities, and they give up time away from their families. This is a way to help them fill in the forms and to get by the government. It's really enjoyable.

I just wanted to read a few comments that we got from it. "Thank you very much for your assistance in registering for this course. The speakers, Ursula Cowland and Rick Caulfield, were both informative and enthusiastic about imparting their knowledge." Anna Gallant, Services Canada.

"I just wanted to say thank you for this great seminar. Ursula is not only a very skilled accountant, but she also displays great personal and professional skills. Thank you for hosting this." Annette Faver.

I have more good things to say too. "Last year's seminar gave me the tools to file a successful application with less work and time than holding a fundraiser. Thank you, Harry, for doing this again this year." That's Heather Jack from Burnaby Information and Community Services. Through the different societies that she runs, they got nearly 100 percent of their requests from ACCESS this time.

"Attending this seminar was the best thing we did last year to help our group." Bernice Macleod, Burnaby Seniors Outreach Services Society.

I want to say how lucky I am, in my job as an MLA, that I get to meet so many great people in my community — people that volunteer, that give up their time and that make a commitment to what we do. It makes my job so much easier.

I wanted to say — again, following on the Premier's lead — that to have the most literate province to ever host the 2010 Olympics, I am giving a book to every kindergarten child in my riding. I go into each class personally, and I talk to the children. I encourage them to take it home and to read it with a family member.

I am busy in the community with lots of volunteers. Just over the past week I visited the Vancouver Japanese Language School and Japanese Hall to celebrate 100 years of education and community spirit. I met with the Canadian Chinese Business Development Association in celebrating their 20th anniversary.

I do a lot of work with the Korean community and the many dedicated workers there: Yonah Martin, Ron Suh, Charlie Kim and Michael Hwang. I'm working to bring funding for a Korean War memorial to be installed in Burnaby's Central Park.

I could not do any of this work if it wasn't for the support that I get from my office staff, Jennifer Duke and Dave Teixeira. They work very hard. They work long hours in helping the community that comes to our office and in helping me in the work I do.

Some of the community work that goes on. This is Red Cross Month, starting today. I would like to read a proclamation in honour of Red Cross Month.

Canada, province of British Columbia. A Proclamation. Elizabeth II, by the grace of God, of the United Kingdom, Canada and her other realms and territories, Queen, head of the Commonwealth, defender of the faith.

To all to whom these presents shall come — greeting. Whereas the Canadian Red Cross has been engaged for over 100 years in preventing and alleviating human suffering across Canada and around the world; and whereas the Canadian Red Cross has helped thousands of Canadians through its emergency disaster relief and community services, including our own citizens of British Columbia; and whereas the Canadian Red Cross is a reflection of the Canadian spirit of generosity, caring and selflessness; and whereas the Canadian Red Cross mission of "improving the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity" embodies this spirit; and whereas our Lieutenant-Governor by and with the advice and consent of the executive council, has been pleased to enact order-in-council 903 on October 11, 2002.

Now know ye that we do by these presents proclaim and declare that March 2006 inclusive shall be known as "Red Cross Month" in the province of British Columbia. In testimony whereof we have caused these our letters to be made patent and the great seal of our province to be hereunto fixed.

Witness, the Hon. Iona Campagnolo, Lieutenant-Governor of our province of British Columbia, in our city of Victoria, in our province this eighth day of February, 2006, and in the 55th year of our reign.

By command.

[1555]

I believe that the Minister of Finance has brought a unique approach to this budget, and it's moving along. Each budget has a uniqueness, and this one is dedicated to the children of British Columbia.

I want to go through the budget and review it a bit, because there are lots of positive things in our budget. When you listen to the opposition.... You know, the opposition has a job, and I'm one that truly believes in freedom of speech and being able to say what you can say, and I think they should have the opportunity to say that. But the job of an opposition person, an individual, isn't just to speak. It's to provide thoughtful suggestions to the government of the day — to work — but all I hear is whining and whining. I don't know which country they drink their wine from, but there's no cheese with it. There's absolutely no substance to the whining I hear.

Every new budget is an opportunity for British Columbians to take another step forward. Balanced Budget 2006 provides more social workers and other

front-line staff, improves support for families at risk and for children with special needs and increases funding for public education to its highest level in provincial history.

Balanced Budget 2006 increases training and skills development; expands post-secondary education; and enhances opportunities for youth, first nations, recent immigrants and those with disabilities. Balanced Budget 2006 helps to keep home ownership affordable and provides a range of other tax reductions for individuals and businesses. On top of all of that, we've also provided \$6 billion to settle the public civil servant contracts.

We talk about improving expanding services for children — \$421 million over four years. What does this mean? There are 3,050 additional children who will benefit from the infant development program; 5,200 additional children and youth who will benefit from therapy programs; 1,150 additional children with special needs who will receive the support and services needed to include them in their regular child care; 1,000 children who'll receive specialized fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and other developmental behaviour intervention; 800 additional families who will benefit from respite care; and 650 children with complex needs who will receive specialized services.

Skills and training is mentioned in our budget. There is \$90 million for a new tax credit program that will work in conjunction with the federal government's program, and this is something that businesses have been asking for all around this province. They say: "Why can't we train the people? Why can't we get more Red Seal programs at our workplaces? Why won't you let us do it?" We are. This is what they asked for. They're going to get credits for training the young people of British Columbia so that they can all have good paying jobs to stay here in British Columbia.

We put in \$39 million more for the Industry Training Authority, \$50 million for natural resources and applied sciences endowment, \$17 million for computer training to create computer access centres in the first nation communities and \$2 million for mineral exploration.

I find it hard, because I have people saying: "I can't find a job. I'm a welder. I can't do this." Well, there are so many jobs in British Columbia, and if you're looking at the mining industry, they are looking for people in northern British Columbia. If anyone from Ontario is listening, come on out, because there are lots of jobs here for you.

Post-secondary education budget increases. There's a \$460 million total increase for budget increases. We've got the world centre for digital media, and we have supporting research and innovation. Just in my riding alone, Simon Fraser University receives many grants for research and is expanding all the time.

[1600]

In our Balanced Budget 2006, we have tax reduction for homeowners. For the first time since 1993, we've increased the threshold for the grant amount of your house taxes, keeping taxes fair and competitive. We've

eliminated PST on labour charges for maintaining and modifying computer systems.

Let me say that just this morning, I was back in my riding at a company called Swiss Water Decaffeinated Coffee Co. They take the caffeine out of coffee. They have been working for a couple of years, and they wanted to add a second line. Well, I pushed the button to open the second line this morning. It was a \$20 million investment in British Columbia for that line, and over \$13 million of it was spent with three companies in Burnaby.

The jobs that go with that line and the \$20 million were going to New Orleans in the United States, and the reason they didn't go to New Orleans, they tell us, is because of our tax structure, because of taking the 6 percent tax off the manufacturing equipment. That's what saved the jobs for British Columbia.

The Minister of Finance has come up with a negotiating framework. It's \$6 billion for the public servant contracts. One billion is available to sign before your contract expires. That's about \$3,300 per worker in the province. There's \$4.7 billion over the next three years to settle their contracts, and then there's a \$300,000 bonus for going into a fourth year, where the workers of British Columbia, the public sector, will be able to share in the growth and wealth of this province. That's laid out, and this is so unique.

I hear from people in my riding, from teachers, from nurses — well, bus drivers aren't part of that contract — but teachers and nurses, in particular, and from the maintenance people at Burnaby Hospital. They're encouraging their union to settle early. They say: "Harry, it seems like teachers.... We've always been in this position. We've never negotiated with any government for 12 or 13 years." They have always had to be legislated back to work because of the mentality of the leadership. The mentality of the leadership, and some of it is present in this House, but....

Interjection.

H. Bloy: It's worth repeating.

What they're telling me is: "We're encouraging our rep at the school to tell them to settle the contract, to take advantage of the bonus, to listen to what the people of the province want. Yes, we care about class size and composition." That's what I hear as the number one issue, but they want the contract settled. They want that, so I applaud the Minister of Finance for coming up with this framework to settle these contracts in British Columbia.

Balanced Budget 2006 strengthens communities. It helps community living in B.C., natural resources and sustainable development. We've put in even more money again for the pine beetle infestation. It's just something we have to be able to take under control and eliminate from our lands here. Tourism and international opportunities — well, there's money going to be spent in British Columbia.

I think most members in this House can remember that when we had Expo 86, there were naysayers. It

wasn't going to work. You know, it's too much, and it's only for the people of the lower mainland. It will never help me. I live all the way out in Falkland, British Columbia. I can tell you that the people in Falkland, British Columbia, said that. They're so happy that Expo 86 worked, because they had friends from around the world who came. Tourists came there. They took the tourist routes, and they visited all of British Columbia.

That's what's going to happen with the Olympics. If you're from Texas, you're probably not going to be sitting up here in February 2010 to watch the downhill skiing, but you'll go to Whistler in the summer, one of the summers before the Olympics, so that when you're sitting at home when the Olympics are on, you'll say: "I've been there. I've been to Whistler, British Columbia — beautiful Whistler, British Columbia. I've been to Vancouver. What a beautiful province. I've been there in the summer in all its glory. I've been up there, and I've gone up on the lift. What a great place."

[1605]

That's public relations. That's what we got from Turin, Italy when people talked about us, when we put up our house there. We have the most beautiful province, and there's no reason why we are not going to have so many tourists before the Olympics. This is what has happened at many of them. Even Lillehammer, Norway, will say that they planned for tourists for the Olympics and after the Olympics, but they didn't plan for them before the Olympics. They were really taken aback.

Investing in infrastructure, Balanced Budget 2006. You know, we often hear W.A.C. Bennett mentioned by both sides of the House as the person who created this province because he had the foresight to build the dam. He built this great dam. Do you think we would have the lower mainland we have today if it weren't for Mr. Bennett?

What we have to get through, or the opposition has to understand, is that if we don't continue to invest in infrastructure, if we don't continue to look at new ways, we will continue to go backward. This is why we're investing in the infrastructure of British Columbia. We have to build health facilities, and we are building them.

Just in my riding alone, the light rapid transit system is going to go from Lougheed town centre up North Road and Clarke Road, through Port Moody to Coquitlam town centre. I'm encouraging TransLink now to add one last stop to that, and that's at Douglas College, which is just above, because it's known....

On the Expo Line the largest ridership or largest stations for destination shopping are Metrotown, first, and Pacific Centre, second. We have the Expo Line that carries about 186,000 passengers a day, and we have the B-Line bus that runs from Richmond to downtown Vancouver and carries about 114,000 passengers a day. I'm hoping the Millennium Line is going to continue to grow. It's nowhere near capacity yet. It's heavily subsidized, but I'm hoping that when we add the light rapid transit onto it, we'll get more ridership on that.

When I listened.... I just can't remember which member it was, but he was talking about health care in British Columbia and how there's a report that said we were the best in British Columbia, and he was whining about something. We were the best in Canada, but I don't accept "the best in Canada" until we can serve every person in this province. I agree with everybody in the House on that, but why can't we be the best in Canada? Why can't we be the best in the world? Why are we looking so negatively and so small at what we do here from the opposition? I say we can be the best in the world, and that's what we have to strive for.

On education. We're putting more money in K-to-12. In the last ten years we've seen a loss of about 80,000 children in British Columbia. In the last ten years we've lost 80,000 children in the public school system, yet for the remaining children, we've added \$1,200 for every child in British Columbia. Each child is now funded at the rate of \$7,338.

Sound fiscal management. That's what we have under the leadership of our Minister of Finance. I'm proud to say I'm part of the Liberal team that is striving for a better British Columbia, working toward being the best in the world, working toward hosting the 2010 Winter Olympics and all the jobs it will bring to British Columbia and all the relatives of all the members of the House in this province that — they may not know it yet — will be out to visit, I'm sure, at some point before the Olympics.

I'm not sure how to do this. I've said how proud I am, but I do get concerned about the negative comments that keep coming out of this House. We have these negative comments. Some we hear inside the House and some outside the House. We just went through a federal election. The opposition.... You know, an NDPer is a city councillor, a provincial member and a federal member. They have no bounds. They're just one big party.

[1610]

They want to tax us and tax us. The last member from Nelson-Creston: "Double the spending on this; double the spending on this. Double this, and we'll dance, and we'll do this." That was the last member for Nelson-Creston. Boy, they could sure spin a tale, but he did it.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order.

H. Bloy: He did it in the 1990s, and he worked us. You know, he taxed us and taxed us to death, and at death they want to tax us all over again. Can you imagine? These people here in this House want to tax us after we die. With all the work we do as contributing members to society, they want to take that money from our family members or where we want to give it to a charity. They want to take it from us. I find that so disgusting. They tax us while we're working, and then they are going to tax us after death and tax us and tax us.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, members.

H. Bloy: I guess this comment.... They're wondering what we talk about, but when you're an NDPer, when the party boss in Ottawa says that that's it, because.... When the party boss here says it, who the hell knows what she's going to do?

Deputy Speaker: Member, I would ask you to keep your language parliamentary.

H. Bloy: Thank you.

But who knows what the Leader of this Opposition will say? I don't know. One thing here, and another thing outside. It can be point after point where she's had three or four opinions, depending who she has talked to or, as I understand, who has talked to her last. But then we have their leader in Ottawa who gives them direction.

I'm proud, so proud, to be part of this strong leadership of the Premier of this great province and of the Finance Minister in the cabinet of the B.C. Liberals.

D. Cubberley: It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to present in the chamber again and to see you in the chair, Madam Speaker, and to feel your judicious hand on the interactions in this chamber guiding them toward reason and away from emotion.

Perhaps the member for Burquitlam was a bit caught up in his own passion. Perhaps he was stirred into that by the passion of the member for Nelson-Creston. I won't be partisan and assert that I felt that the passion from the member for Nelson-Creston had a closer association with reason and balance than the passion of the member for Burquitlam.

It is a pleasure to have an opportunity to respond to the provincial budget, both the substance of the budget, which I think was sorely lacking, and the bumf, which was of course superabundant and continues to play in the chamber today.

I just want to take as an example the opening pitch of the budget, which was that every budget is an opportunity for our province to take another step forward. I have to say that I did very much agree with the member for Burquitlam when he made the point that we should definitely not continue to go backward. I agree strongly with that point, but what we see in this budget isn't anything near a step forward. At best, I think you'd have to say it's a step sideways, if not outright backwards.

Perhaps it might be more apt to describe it as an opportunity missed, an opportunity to acknowledge the clear message delivered last May about agendas lacking in conscience; cuts foisted on the vulnerable; initiatives taken in secret; leadership veering off a promised course of openness, accountability and transparency into unilateral action; privatization by stealth; and a general climate of disrespect for working people and signed agreements.

It might have been an opportunity not to gloss over but rather to acknowledge the need for a more balanced approach, one that respects the public's desire to see public health care stewarded and sustained, renewed through innovation and imagination, with shortened wait times for access to surgery, better access to primary care and a system of seniors care that gives hope and allows individuals to plan their futures with a degree of certainty that care will indeed be there when and where they need it — patient-centred care, when and where you need it.

[1615]

To me, that actually sounds like a very good slogan. I think it's one we should keep right in front of us, but it does ring hollow in the context of a lack of caring and mismanagement of the hospital emergency sector and seniors care.

I recall it was a new-era promise — care when and where you needed it, patient-centred care — one made but clearly not kept through the actions that followed the promise. This time it was not kept in the throne speech, either, and it was not reflected in the budget.

I'm not talking about the amounts of money that are being spent. The members opposite used to say over and over again when they were in opposition: "There's enough money in the system. It's how you're proposing to spend it that's the problem." Well, there's a kind of time lapse involved there, and now there's an irony in being on this side of the House, listening to members opposite resort to endlessly citing how much money is being spent on health care, how much additional money they are putting into the system and how difficult it is to sustain it, but forgetting their former focus on how the money is being spent. Today, in the budget context, the issue is: how you are and aren't proposing to spend it.

Now, my critic responsibility is health care, so for me, the budget itself has to be considered in that context. I have to say, frankly, that it was a damp squib. There was nothing new. There were no new initiatives. There's no sign of innovation. There's no sign of change, which you would have to acknowledge is rather baffling in light of the fact that the throne speech was all health care. The throne speech's dynamic intent about transformative change to build on all the wonderful things that have been done and take them further.... There we have it.

The budget comes along, and the transmission for intent turning into action is, of course, the budget. The budget comes along, and there was nothing in it at all about health care — not much more than an allowance for inflation. If you use the inflation factor the budget gave, deduct that from what was announced and eliminate money announced previously, which is not new money now, the budget is right where it was.

That's okay. I said it wasn't simply about how much money but how the money's being spent. In that regard, I have a concern, because there was nothing in the budget that showed any commitment to addressing the issue of wait times on a systemic or a systematic basis and nothing to address the chronic and increasing

waits for joint replacement in British Columbia, which, of course, is a topic of high interest in my constituency.

There's no dawning awareness in that budget of the need to establish better patient flow to eliminate bottlenecks, to expand capacity in new directions or to borrow good ideas that are being tested in other jurisdictions, some of them immediately adjacent to us.

You know, joint replacement is a topic of great interest to seniors — a rising portion of our population, a portion we are all approaching joining, if not already in. It's one of the two groups that this budget purports to be about. Yet there's \$560 million in government's hands, roughly, in federal money. It's in the bank for British Columbia to spend specifically to bring wait times down for joint replacement and other surgeries. That \$560 million could make a lot of change if we were interested in transformative change in British Columbia.

Now, members opposite, I'm sure, would be eager to remind me about the UBC surgery announcement. It's something that I've publicly acknowledged as a step in the right direction but, nonetheless, it's a baby step in the face of a pressing problem involving huge and utterly unnecessary suffering of seniors.

Members opposite might also wish to remind me about the money for health authorities to reduce their backlog surgeries — a small amount of welcome money, I'm sure. But let's just point out that the first thing we saw with that money is the health authority announcing that it would use the fund to purchase some surgeries as a stopgap in the private sector, not to build capacity in the public health care system. I also want to hasten to point out that the \$25 million for the dedicated UBC surgery is less than 5 percent of the money sitting in the bank to bring wait times down.

[1620]

Real change, if we care about the suffering of seniors — and the suffering is real and widespread — will require an action plan on a much broader scale. To put it in human terms, I am hearing on an ongoing basis — and within my own sphere, not just from people who approached me from outside — from seniors who are suffering near-complete immobility, often for a period of years, while waiting for joint replacement surgery. Joint replacement surgery is not rocket science — it's well understood how you do it — but joint replacement surgery in British Columbia is a scarce commodity, and people are waiting entirely too long.

What we hear from government is that the median wait time for quality-of-life surgery is X number of weeks. Of course, the median wait time is a bit of a shell game, because no one waits the median wait time. The median wait is the midpoint between the longest wait and the shortest wait. We don't know how many people fall on either side of it. We don't know how long people are actually waiting.

What we don't get is a frank acknowledgment that median wait is not it for anybody, that most people wait far longer for a surgery than government is acknowledging — six months to a year is common from the time the surgery is booked — nor, especially, that

the wait for surgery once the specialist actually books the surgery, once you get to that point, is the shortest part of the cumulative waiting that patients do. People have been suffering for years by the time they get to see the surgeon and the surgery is booked.

The waiting begins when the hip or knee reaches the end stage of arthritis. As members will know, if you have a member of your family or, heaven forbid, if you're reaching that stage yourself, arthritis locks into end stage very quickly, and mobility is lost. It happens very suddenly. That's when a senior typically sees the doctor — who then either tests, diagnoses and refers that person to a specialist or may immediately refer the person to a specialist, who then does the diagnosis.

The problem is that the specialist-wait is a killer. A year is quite fast in British Columbia. Up-Island, it is two years. Upcountry, I understand, it's two years. That's two years in which a person is confined to using a walker, barely able to get from bed to bathroom, utterly dependent upon a caregiver, if there is one, and unable to work or stay mobile enough for good health — and that's just to get to see the specialist. From there, there's another wait or waits. This situation is increasingly typical among seniors.

It was this situation, in fact, this very situation, that led to the Chaoulli case at the Supreme Court. This situation led to the determination that wait times were too long. It's this situation that's driving change and moving governments to bring wait times down from Quebec to Alberta, by way of Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan — the invisible border is there — but apparently not in British Columbia, where we have the money but do not have the political resolve to face the problem.

That's right. We have the money — courtesy of the federal government transfer sitting in the bank, earmarked for wait-time reduction — and what is government doing? Government is sitting on its hands, sitting while seniors suffer. The budget clearly indicates a lack of resolve. We've been commending the specialized surgical clinic model in the public health care system to government for some time — not with a great deal of traction, I might add. Maybe it's the quality of the message or the messenger, but it's not being heard.

However, the use of dedicated surgical centres is one way to move high numbers of patients through a repetitive procedure in a cost-effective manner. That is being demonstrated across the country. It gets patients out of the crowded, oversubscribed general hospital operating room, which has to handle every class of surgery, and it allows them to be dealt with quickly and cost-effectively.

I know the members opposite believe that there's nothing to learn from Manitoba, but Manitoba has demonstrated how you can do a much higher volume of joint replacements or cataract surgeries much more quickly at much lower cost. In public health care, on the clinical side, I think we need to be interested in how we can do things better, more safely and more economically. Ultimately, that's one of the pillars that sus-

tainability rests on. One of the others, of course, is improved population health, but that's a topic I'll have to explore another time.

[1625]

You know, if you're resistant to learning from Manitoba — and I get the sense there's resistance to the idea that you would learn from one of those social democratic provinces or, heaven forbid, from the initiative of a social democratic provinces or, heaven forbid, from the initiative of a social democratic government — deeply into "subsidiarity," I might add, but that's another question. You're resistant to learning from Manitoba. Why not try learning from Alberta? That's right. I said Alberta. Alberta — imagine it. Learn from Alberta, a place where they actually elect some of the people who sit on health authority boards.

An Hon. Member: No.

D. Cubberley: No, Alberta, a place where innovation isn't the exclusive property of the private sector. Imagine it. You know, a dose of Alberta medicine on wait times for joint replacement would do B.C. a lot of good. Indeed, it's just what the doctor would order, if we actually took the time to demonstrate to doctors and to government how well it can work. It works very well.

The Alberta Bone and Joint Health Institute has demonstrated clearly that by creating central assessment clinics where patients who may require orthopedic surgery — that would be a joint replacement — are examined by a team of professionals in one visit. You collapse all of the sequential waits into a single visit. It takes a day, and you get to the specialist.

Remarkable reductions can be achieved through those centres. Most remarkable, to my mind, was the reduction in the time waited from the first orthopedic consult to the surgery — down from 47 weeks prior to the test to 4.7 weeks after the test. You think of what that kind of innovation could do to bring needed care and a renewed mobility to seniors who are confined to a wheelchair — and to do it, I might add, before they lose function.

The problem with what we're doing now, forcing people to wait, is that their quality of life tanks, of course. Their relationship becomes strained because they can no longer take care of themselves, and they actually begin to lose function to a degree that once the surgery occurs — because it will, either through the public system or because they take matters into their own hands — once they get the hip replacement or the knee replacement, they don't get back to 100 percent of capacity, because the wait has lowered the bar.

Put it in a B.C. context. If the median wait in this province to see the specialist is a year, and that is probably where it is, it's reasonable. I'm not being political. You could drop it to 1.2 months by implementing the Alberta system — from a year to 1.2 months. Think of that in terms of quality of life. How many fewer British Columbians would be forced, pressed,

urged to go elsewhere to get the care they need if this government mobilized to get it done here?

You know, it takes time to gear up for change — transformative change, real transformative change — especially transformative change that is going to bring wait times down to lengths that are manageable, during which time seniors don't lose function and capability — function and capability they'll never get back when they get the surgery. Now that's transformative change that the public wants to see. It's what it wants to hear about — a focus on shorter wait times.

We have the money available, but the money didn't get mobilized in the budget. It's not set in motion on behalf of transformative change that's needed and that can be done now.

One wonders: why is that? It's the perverse side of my nature. I wonder why. The money's in the bank. It's not being used. Can it be that if the problem of wait times is effectively addressed within the public health care system, the pressure for access to private parallel health care, for-profit clinics and user fees drops to zero? There is no pressure if you eliminate wait times.

If that's the reason — that having people impatient for service that's needlessly rationed by government leads to more clamour for options outside the public system and leads more people to take a plunge into private care or to head to the United States or to India, which is what is going on now for those who have money, so they can get it done quickly, get on with their life, get back to their life and optimize what's left — then that would be what economists call perverse incentive. And that is something we need to focus on and eliminate.

[1630]

Another area in public health care not addressed in this budget is the issue of acute care beds in our hospital system. This is obviously very current, because we've been talking about it in question period. Acute care beds in B.C. were cut by something in the order of 19 percent over the first mandate of this government. The assumption, I gather, was that ambulatory care was taking so many out of the overnight-stay category that the skeleton crew of beds remaining could handle the demand — the demand coming through operating rooms, through emergency rooms.

Mr. Speaker.... Madam Speaker, I apologize. I wrote it for Mr. Speaker, but I'm giving it to you, and it gives me pleasure.

Madam Speaker, the emergency room at public hospitals....

Interjection.

D. Cubberley: These member jokes are....

I'm going to try again. The emergency room at public hospitals remains a key access point to care for the majority of people, especially elders — the more so for the frail, the more so the fewer family doctors there are available at the community level. There is nowhere to go after four or 4:30 in the afternoon. There's nowhere to go during the day with most doctors if you have a pressing need, because there is no time in their sched-

ule and there is not going to be any time after five o'clock. If you have an urgent need, you're going to the emergency room. It's part of the health care system. I'm sure you've all been there. Everyone who's got a kid has been there, and you know how that works.

Clearly, if we are dispassionate about it when we look at conditions currently in hospitals across British Columbia as they relate to emergency rooms, from Surrey to Vancouver General to Kelowna to Kamloops to Campbell River — it doesn't matter; you pick — hospitals are struggling to deal with the volume of demand relative to the resources and in particular the staffed hospital beds that they're being allocated.

This problem of bed shortages is worsened because of the widespread closure of residential care beds for seniors without any replacement. I believe the member for Nelson-Creston was enlightening us as to how that works in his community and across British Columbia. It's something that began happening across British Columbia shortly after the creation of these overaggregated health regions that we have.

The fact that there are too few beds available for senior care has led to many beds in hospitals being occupied by seniors waiting for placement into care facilities. There's nowhere to go. You stay in the hospital bed until one of the too few spaces out there is opened up, and then you are whisked into that first available bed.

Shutting down care facilities, especially workable facilities — and I believe the member for Nelson-Creston referred to this — like the Gorge Hospital, like Ponderosa Lodge in Kamloops when there are no options available was a formula for congestion and gridlock at emergency rooms, and that is exactly what we see today.

An Hon. Member: Shame.

D. Cubberley: It is a shame.

To have a situation this extreme, which leads to cancelled surgeries and lengthening wait times as a stopgap to offset this bottleneck in the system is demoralizing. It's demoralizing to care providers. It's unacceptable to patients. It's unacceptable to communities. If you talk to people in communities — I don't care; Kelowna, Kamloops; those are places that I've been — they're not happy. A budget that's proposing a step forward needs to take steps in the direction of acknowledging and addressing key problems in the health care system that are a direct result of government's choices in its first term in office.

There's more to say on this topic, but I want to take a little bit of time to flag a couple of other omissions in the budget that matter to me and to the people that I represent in Saanich South. I know you will tell me when I'm close to the witching hour.

Speaking just for a moment to the issue of urban sustainability, one of the most formidable challenges we face across British Columbia, right the way across Canada, is how to begin to diversify our way out of reliance upon a single mode of transportation, the pri-

vate automobile, and to give ourselves the opportunity to choose to get around our cities using other means. It's obviously imperative for sustainability in transportation itself.

[1635]

If you look at the research on transportation, the study of congestion in cities, there is no possibility to out-build congestion. Every expansion of capacity re-creates congestion on an expanded scale. If you haven't looked at the congestion index at the Texas Transportation Institute, which logs it for North American cities, look what happens, irrespective of the investment, to congestion. Study it. It's sobering.

It's imperative for sustainability in transportation, else we risk replicating the mistakes of major American cities, Los Angeles being only the most extreme example. We do that principally by overspending on freeways and undernourishing public transit and our alternative, our more active modes. This is not simply a question of transportation sustainability. It's a matter of environmental sustainability, and it's a matter of the sustainability of population health. I know that this will not be lost on members opposite, because some of them, I know, take this issue seriously.

Overreliance on the automobile is the single most significant factor undermining sustainability in all three dimensions. Trying to build our way out of congestion is simply a recipe for further deterioration. Without offsetting investments in other modes of transportation, we will reproduce more of the same.

A sustained focus on transit — on providing options, as well, that enable walking and cycling across urban regions — is the path towards sustainability. Yet we see no such focus in the budget, nothing near resembling it.

Outside of the lower mainland, where at least some offsetting investments are being proposed for a car-based strategy, the picture for transit is gloom. The budget merely confirms provincial plans to freeze grants to B.C. Transit for the next three years. While the government, according to its own past plans, is spending something in the order of \$1,000 per resident in the lower mainland on transit and transportation, the picture outside the lower mainland — for example, here on southern Vancouver Island — is dreary. It's \$10 per capita on southern Vancouver Island, and the grants to B.C. Transit are frozen.

What a missed opportunity that is. Here we have a public dealing with high gas prices, predisposed now to use public transit as never before, and we see government refusing to use a share of its gas tax revenues to expedite the delivery of better service to communities. I heard talk of investing in infrastructure before. Why is transit outside of Vancouver not an infrastructure requiring investment?

Demand is rising for transit, but provincial investment is capped, and in real terms, that means it's falling. The province is paying, as a result, a declining share of transit's expenditures. Transit commissions must come, cap in hand, begging for a chance to add additional gas tax as a dedicated revenue stream.

In the interim what do we see? Monthly bus passes increase. It gets more expensive to take transit. Less benefit is passed on to the patron. Then we see, as well, increased taxes on the residential property tax bill. A singularly inappropriate place to try to finance public transit from is residential property tax. We need to get much closer to the idea of the tax that's paid at the pump financing the investments in alternative modes of transportation, especially when you consider that the environment is used as a free good by the drivers of automobiles.

As a result of the budget and of government's choices and priorities, transit in B.C. continues to take a distant back seat to the car. As a result, in a community like Victoria with high ridership and untapped potential the bus system continues to run with fewer service hours than it had in 2001.

It's hardly a golden decade for transit, not even a silver decade or a bronze. In fact, the opportunity being missed by this budget is the one that would see the province move transit systems in growing cities to the next level of service and ridership. If we wish to meet the other objectives of the golden goals for the golden decade, if we wish to see people walk and cycle more, if we wish to see an environment which is sustainable, we will have to invest in public transit. Why is it so low in the order of priorities?

[1640]

Here in Victoria, if we saw that investment, we would see an express bus service come into being that would enjoy dedicated lanes on the existing highway. It would make transit competitive. It would take it out of gridlock traffic. It would give it an advantage over congestion in ways that would make it much more likely to be used because it would be advantageous to patrons.

Linking growing centres by high-speed, comfortable, attractive transit service is the only way to take the steam out of rising automobile dependence. I think an important thing to remember.... I was telling the member for Nelson-Creston earlier today that if we remind ourselves that every transit trip involves two walk trips and if you took the bus to and from work, you'd have four walk trips a day. As the members opposite I'm sure know, 15 to 30 minutes a day, five times a week is the recipe for accessing the full spectrum of health benefits that come from physical fitness — 15 to 30 minutes a day. It's not large, and that could be added on easily to the end of a transit trip twice a day.

Madam Speaker, I see I'm having an electric effect on the members of the....

C. Evans: That's great. You got the gender right too.

D. Cubberley: I know. I'm getting there. You know, it's slow. I'm slow to learn, but it's growing.

You won't be surprised to hear me say that another imperative neglected in the budget is the need to diversify choice, to reduce dependence upon motorized modes and to increase our engagement in walking and cycling — a need that relates to environment, to trans-

port efficiency and above all to community livability and to that elusive goal of personal health and fitness.

We're all increasingly aware of the rise in physical inactivity around us. Despite best intentions, the growing problem of obesity and the resultant problems of type 2 diabetes and other lifestyle diseases are exerting phenomenal pressure on our health care system. Presently diabetes and its complications throughout life use up something in the order of 7 percent of the provincial health care budget. That's a single disease, and the trend line is like this: straight up. It kind of parallels automobile dependence.

Madam Speaker, I am truly pleased to have had this opportunity to share my insights with all members of the House and have appreciated your indulgence of my minor foibles.

Deputy Speaker: The Chair feels compelled to make some comments. The Chair does wish to remind all members that with the privilege and the right to speak in this chamber comes the responsibility, as well, to keep your comments and your conduct parliamentary.

L. Mayencourt: It's an honour to rise in this debate and state my support for our seventh budget.

Budget 2006 is a significant step forward for all British Columbians. Together we're moving forward, and we're growing with confidence. It's a great day and a great year for every citizen in British Columbia.

You don't have to take my word for it, Madam Speaker. The member for Nelson-Creston, in a recent interview, stated: "I thought the budget was better. I thought it was enlightened. I thought the choices that they made three, four, five years ago have evolved." He was very emphatic about it. He said: "I need to say that I'm pleased because I'd got used to the idea that the Liberals' agenda was subsidies and tax cuts for the rich and corporations and cuts for everybody else, and that seems to have been ended with this budget."

I've got to tell you that it was with some surprise that I listened to his comments today, because he seems to have changed his tune just a little tiny bit. Maybe he was quoted incorrectly in the paper, but he sounded pretty enthusiastic. He sounded quite emphatic that it was a good budget for British Columbians. As a matter of fact, he said: "I hope that it serves to give hope to progressive people everywhere."

Well, it does. It does on both sides of this House. Unfortunately, there are 33 members over there that don't want to admit it. They seem to be choking on it. They seem to be trying to find some traction, but they're slipping all over the highway like a Mustang on the Coquihalla in December.

[1645]

The member for Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain got up a few days ago. Our economy is firing on all cylinders, and he says: "You're not responsible." We've got nothing to do with it. We didn't fuel the roaring growth in oil and gas. We didn't spark a sleeping and depressed mining industry to invest \$200 million this

year in exploration. We didn't ignite the passion of all Canadians with our efforts on 2010. We didn't drive the strongest job growth in the history of British Columbia. We didn't make the single largest down payment on the accumulated NDP debt. No, we didn't do it. We just got lucky.

The government had nothing to do with it. Every piece of data that puts British Columbia at the top of the poll was just plain old dumb luck. So I ask you: is it possible that the only reason B.C. stalled in the '90s, the only reason we parked our dreams in a decade of decline, was luck — pure old, dumb bad luck?

I think it's outrageous. You see, in one stroke the member dismisses our successes and washes himself clean of any responsibility for his government in the '90s. That member sat in this chamber as a member of the NDP government through 1996. He had the opportunity to lead, to take British Columbia into a brand new millennium. Yet his decade was one of despair, decline and delayed opportunities.

If you follow his logic, if we're not responsible for hope, prosperity and unprecedented growth today, then his government wasn't responsible for the worst decade in B.C. history. They were just unlucky.

Well, I say that his government may have experienced some bad luck, but no one was more unlucky in the '90s than working families. Loggers, miners, fishers, teachers, nurses, hospital workers — why, even the good people that worked for this government, the BCGEU — all British Columbians felt the crush of their bad luck. But it wasn't his fault.

I ask that member: if government means nothing to our economy, if it cannot bring jobs and investments and inspire a culture of excellence, if our destiny is not the result of hard work and dedication but rather of luck, then why are we here? In fact, more to the point, why is he here? I don't understand how a member....

Deputy Speaker: Member, member. I would ask that members not impugn other members on either side of the House. Keep your comments tempered.

L. Mayencourt: Madam Speaker, I will certainly do my very best to stay within the bounds of parliamentary language.

I certainly do respect and honour the contributions that the member for Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain has brought to British Columbia. In fact, I admire the goodness of all 33 members on that side of the House. But I see a little bit of inconsistency. I just wanted to point it out, and I want to understand why that inconsistency exists.

Members opposite can lay blame for all that is bad at government's feet. They can come in here at question period every single day and lay on us everything that goes wrong in this province. They can complain. They can criticize. They can confuse the facts.

But I understand — I've been in this chamber for five years — that there is more to this job than kicking the heck out of members on the government benches. There's actually something productive that we're here

to do. We're here to offer something. We want to give something to British Columbia. We all say in this House that we came here to make British Columbia better, so what about the words that say...

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, members.

L. Mayencourt: ...this is good, and this is what we can contribute? This is what we see that is good, this is what is bad, and we'll help to work together.

We are actually a government with opposition. I don't mind that a bit, but I do think we have a greater obligation than to criticize, and that is to offer some positive comments and to propose some good things that might make everything a lot better.

[1650]

The member for Malahat-Juan de Fuca was standing here a few days ago, and he addressed this issue. He stated it very clearly. He said: "I am here to oppose the government." He promised that he'd be here every single day for the next three years to oppose our government.

He's right. That is his job as a member of the opposition. It's just an aside, but with a teeny bit of their luck and a little bit of our luck, he will be opposing our government for a little longer than three years.

I ask you: is that all there is? Is your only point in being here to be in opposition? What can you offer? Why are you disappointed? Why can't you...?

Deputy Speaker: Member, through the Chair.

L. Mayencourt: Why would members be disappointed when a government is doing something good, when it's succeeding, when its population seems to be thriving and people have jobs? More people in British Columbia have jobs than at any other time in our history. We have the highest retail sales in our history. We have the highest house prices in our history. We have an economy that's literally firing on all cylinders. Isn't that something to be proud of, on both sides? Isn't that something that we should celebrate? And isn't it something that we should work together on to make sure it happens — not just in my neighbourhood, but in Trail, in Vancouver-Kingsway, in the Kootenays, in every community?

This is what I've learned here in the last few years: I'm here because I'm here to contribute. I can have my problems with what some people say, but I'm here to contribute, and I want to make a stronger province. That's why I'm here.

The last couple of weeks there has been a theme that has run through the opposition benches, and I want to address it. It is seniors care beds. I can't imagine any government reducing the complex needs of seniors to one word called a bed. I can't imagine suggesting that our only obligation to frail seniors is a bed. This is wrong.

I want to tell you about my personal experience with some of those beds. I think the NDP calls them beds because in the 1990s the only thing you could fit into one of those rooms was a bed. I want to tell you about my father's bed at a Coquitlam nursing home in 1998. He was transferred there from a very nice place in February because he was quite ill. He moved into a tiny room with another gentleman. The only thing that separated them was a soiled, flimsy curtain. That's where that government sent him.

I walked in, and I went: "What a dump." There was no bathroom. He had no personal belongings in there other than his clothing. He had no privacy. His wheelchair wouldn't fit in the room, and his walker filled up almost all of the available space that was there. His room was devoid of personal belongings, except he had one single picture, and that was of his newest grandchild at the time. That was all that was really permitted. I don't understand that, but that was the policy.

Last week the member for Columbia River-Revelstoke, who is a guy I really respect... I think he does a great service to his community, and he does a great service in this House. Last week he brought something to this House that was very important. He talked about a hospital's secure room, a place where someone with a mental health issue, an episode, can be kept safe. He raised the fact that there wasn't a bathroom in the secure room. I think he quite rightly raised that that was a question of human dignity. I can understand that, and I can support that idea.

But what about my dad's room? What about his dignity? What about the dignity of the other people in that care facility? Did they not count? My father and many others were denied a bathroom by that government. He shared a room that was 15 feet by 10 feet. That makes 75 square feet for him and 75 square feet for the other guy. That's 25 square feet less than a single-room-occupancy hotel in the downtown east side that we condemn because it is warehousing the poor.

If you follow that logic, it could only mean that that government was striving to warehouse the elderly. The only difference was that unlike the poor in the downtown east side, there was no one in this House on the NDP side to speak up and say to them: "Enough."

[1655]

The TV lounge was a joke. There was a two-level seating area that none of the seniors could climb onto. It was good for me — I could get in there — but the rest of them had to cram their walkers and their wheelchairs into a tiny, smoky room. They didn't smoke there anymore, but somebody had smoked there for many years.

My dad called this place a prison, and on the very last visit that I had with him, I had to agree with him. The reason he was in prison was that he was a senior in the '90s. I don't blame the NDP for his fate as they have blamed our Health Minister and our government for the death of seniors this past week. He was old, and he was dying. That's why he was there. That's why many people go to long-term care facilities. But surely they

could have given him his own room. Surely he could have had a bathroom. Surely he could have had an accessible room.

Do you know what? The NDP members on that side counted that room. That's one of the rooms they're talking about in this House — those 75 square feet for my father without a bathroom, without privacy, without any personal belongings. That was one of the rooms they wanted us to keep open.

I'm proud to say that we closed that centre. Now, the NDP will chastise us, but let me tell you, if I could have done it with my bare hands, I would have taken it down myself. I was ashamed that British Columbia was sending its seniors into such a place. There was nothing worthy of the name of a care centre in that place other than the dedicated and demoralized — and I mean really demoralized — caregivers there.

These caregivers knew they were cramming seniors into a firetrap. These caregivers saw their pleas for decent facilities go unheeded for a decade — caregivers that collapsed under the weight of a decade of benign neglect from the NDP, caregivers that decided to leave this province in droves from 1996 to 2001. You know, the NDP have talked here about caregivers — the nurses, the care aides, the dedicated family members — but what did they ever do for them?

Did they give them respite or provide for the needs of patients and the support of families? Did they upgrade their skills? Did they attract young people to the health profession? Did they provide opportunities for those who wanted to come into the profession to be able to go to nursing school, to become a doctor? Did they provide that? No. They broke their spirit.

Members opposite have to answer those questions, not because I can compel them to answer those questions in question period, as they can with the members of our cabinet, but because it's the right and moral and just thing to do — something that they know in their hearts. They know they're under no obligation to acknowledge the fundamental rightness of this position I take right now.

They know that those questions must be answered by them. Later today, maybe in caucus, maybe in the dining room, maybe on their way home, they'll ask themselves the question about the 75-square-foot care bed with no bathroom, no personal belongings, no access for the wheelchair and no access for.... I mean, really, it was terrible.

You know what? I'm not the only one in this province with a father that was in that condition. In fact, some of the beds that we're talking about today — in Nelson and Trail and wherever else — are just like those beds. Didn't we pass into the new millennium? Aren't we in 2006? Don't we understand that seniors deserve dignity?

The members over there have asked, quite rightly, what we are doing for seniors. We're happy to answer that. One of the things we did is closed some pretty decrepit care facilities like the one I spoke of earlier. We have placed each and every one of those seniors that we've taken out of those facilities into facilities that are safe, clean and hospitable.

[1700]

We have created 4,900 new assisted-living suites for the frail and elderly, allowing them to be independent as long as possible. These suites have bath and kitchen facilities. They have wheelchair and scooter availability. They have a common dining room and sitting rooms so that the seniors can get together and do that. They have on-site care so that if someone becomes sick, they can get the care they need. They have a room for their personal belongings, for their stuff.

I have worked with seniors. I know my experience with my dad, and I know my experience with other seniors. I've seen my friends that are my age seeing their families age and go into these facilities. There is one thing that people really underestimate when someone's going to "the home," and that's people's stuff and what it means to them. Photos, furniture, a favourite rocking chair, a bookcase, their own TV — these things are really incredibly important to seniors. Why should they have to dump their lifetime of mementos, their treasured gifts they've collected over the decades, at a Sunday garage sale?

The B.C. Liberals did close some NDP beds, but we built homes — homes that seniors in every part of this province can be proud to live in. They can be proud. They can have their own belongings there. They can have their family over for tea and not be embarrassed, can have a place where they're safe and secure. When the time comes and it's needed, they can receive health care from knowledgeable, caring, supportive caregivers — old and young caregivers that can be proud of their workplace because the state-of-the-art apartments we've built demonstrate that our society cares for our seniors and, with the WorkSafe initiatives, that we value our nurses, care aides and volunteers.

Today the member for West Kootenay–Boundary stood in this chamber, and with rage she cried out: "Seniors don't need assisted living. They need residential care beds." Like the one my dad was in? No thanks. We don't want those. We think seniors are too important to warehouse them in 75 square feet. We have a bigger vision, and through good fiscal management, or perhaps some luck, we have been able to deliver on that vision.

What else are we doing to ensure that low-income seniors can thrive in British Columbia? We increased Fair Pharmacare benefits and lowered their MSP premiums. We gave them a guaranteed income supplement, and we lowered their taxes. We increased the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters. We increased their homeowner grant. Madam Speaker, the list is long. While the NDP can trash us in question period, the people that really matter in this debate, low-income seniors, know there has never been such a focus on securing stability for seniors than right now. I am proud of our efforts for seniors, and I am proud of our record on health care.

We've increased health care funding by an additional \$301 million over the next three years. Now, combined with previously announced increases, that means an extra \$2 billion. When you really look at the

health budget in 2000, it was sitting around \$8.5 billion. Today, look at where it is. Does that look like a cut to you? The member for...

Interjection.

L. Mayencourt: No, no, the one right behind you.

...West Vancouver-Garibaldi stood up here today and talked about this myth of the cut. She said: "You know, this is not right. This myth has to be dispelled." You know how we can dispel the myth? We can ask people. We can challenge people.

[1705]

Go into your MLA's office, whether he or she is NDP or Liberal, and ask for this. Have a look at the balanced budget for 2006. You will see what we spent for health care in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and what we're doing in 2006. Not only that, you'll know today what we're going to be spending in 2007, 2008 and 2009. That brought stability to our health care system so that health care providers could plan for facilities, could plan to build up a health care system and make it work for the people where they live, so they can get it when they need it. That's what our government has been doing with health care. That's what we've been doing.

We have also had to deal with many, many things — like wages. I'm really proud that our government... We did some pretty good stuff in the last five years. You know what? We've got a dividend. That dividend is \$6 billion, and that dividend is for the people that work for the province. They helped us get to the point we're at now. They made it possible for us in British Columbia to have balanced budgets, to deliver the care and services that people call for. We have set aside \$6 billion to compensate them for that and their efforts over the next three years. I think that's great.

I think that \$6 billion is going to filter down into communities all across British Columbia. I think that \$6 billion is going to be reflected in how many doctors we have, how many nurses we have. I think it's going to reflect how many new teachers will come into the system, because they know they have a government that can manage its finances and deliver on payday. I think that's a very important part of what we are trying to accomplish here.

I talked a little bit today about the arts, and this is something that's really important to me. I really believe in the arts. I don't think the arts are just paint on canvas or someone dancing across the stage. I think the arts are an entry point for understanding other people, other cultures, other ideas. For many people, it's the only way they connect with their community. I really think we have to do so much to ensure we have a stable arts community.

I was really proud today when I got to announce \$5½ million that went to arts organizations for stabilizing their efforts, but there's more. We increased the B.C. Arts Council funding. We have funded organizations from the B.C. Arts Council, B.C. Gaming and directly from the Ministry of the Arts. There are other vehicles that we utilize to fund and support this impor-

tant industry. Almost a million per month has flowed from the renaissance fund, and that \$25 million fund, which was put in there by the province last year, helps us secure their stability.

Members opposite have asked over the last few days why we called this a children's budget. Let's just go through some of the things we're doing with the \$421 million that was added to the children's budget this year. The \$421 million will help to ensure the well-being of vulnerable children, and it will enhance services to children with special needs. It will better support caregivers and family members that are caring for children and youth at risk. It's \$72 million to get more social workers. It's \$72 million to make sure that we can support our foster parents. It's \$100 million to enhance the child protection system, targeting early intervention services so that the safety and well-being of children in this province are secured. It's \$34 million to increase funding for the child and youth mental health plan to better serve the approximately 140,000 children in B.C. with mental disorders.

I'm proud of that. I'm proud of those contributions, and there are more on this list. It includes \$2 million for the crystal meth strategy. It includes \$31 million to support aboriginal child and family development service authorities. It's \$36 million to reduce wait-lists in our province for services to children and youth with special needs and to their families. These are significant contributions by all British Columbians to the well-being of all British Columbia children. It's important that we make these investments now. I think this one piece of it was probably the inspiration behind the member for Nelson-Creston's statement that this was an enlightened budget, because this budget reflects what we hear in our communities.

[1710]

I sit beside the member for Peace River South. The member is the Chair of the Finance and Government Services Committee. That committee is one I have worked on in the past — I'm not doing it now. But it's a lot of work. We travel the province, and we listen to what people are saying to us about their priorities. We ask them simple questions: "Where do you want us to put the money? We spend roughly \$34 billion a year here. Where do you want us to put it?" Where they asked us to put it was in children and families. They wanted youth services. They wanted us to fight crystal meth. They wanted us to look after the poor and the mentally ill.

Those are the things this government is doing. There are many people in this province that think members on that side of the House own the compassion. They don't. Nobody owns it. We are somehow all gifted with it, and that gift is precious to me. It is a gift I use each and every day in this job to make sure I look after the needs of people in my community that are vulnerable, that look after kids that are on our streets, that look after the homeless, that make sure we're reaching out to those with mental health problems in a way that allows them to accept help but doesn't overwhelm them or scare them.

Compassion does not belong to one party in this House. Compassion belongs to each of the members that are here. I see it on that side of the fence just as I see it over on this side, and I'm proud of it. Compassion exists in this place, and we will make British Columbia better. I am proud to sit in this House with all of the members. Together we're making British Columbia stronger and better, and we can all go home at the end of the day and be proud of that.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

G. Robertson: I would like to begin with a heartfelt thanks to the people of Vancouver-Fairview for their incredible support. I'm most honoured to represent such a diverse and engaged riding and to serve here for the good of the whole province — the land, the waters and all the creatures, particularly the two-legged ones who tend to out-organize the rest and overconsume, despite being totally dependent on the whole living community being in a healthy balance.

As two-legged representatives, we've clearly got lots of work to do on that challenge, if our children and our grandchildren are to have a rosy future. I want to thank and acknowledge my family and my ancestors, too, and all of the people who came before us here who have taken care of this place, this province. We truly stand on their shoulders and owe them a big debt of gratitude for the good view we enjoy.

I stand here to respond to this government's proposed budget. The Campbell government dubbed it the children's budget, which no doubt sets a new standard for inappropriate titles. Across a wide range of children's issues, from child poverty to education, from investment in the future economy to the debt we'll hand off to our kids, this budget fails miserably. Most importantly to future generations of children, there is nothing in this budget to address climate change, the environment or sustainability — all critical issues this government pays lip service to, at best.

I stand here for my children and, I hope, for my grandchildren and their generation, the future generations that our decisions in this House must respect. They are the people who will spend the most time living with the consequences of our actions. It is the children of B.C. who are most vulnerable and without a political voice unless we stand up for them here.

[1715]

B.C.'s child poverty rate is now the highest in Canada, and the number of homeless people has doubled, compounding that problem. The 2003 B.C. rate was 23.9 percent — nearly one in every four children living in poverty. That's well above our national average, 17.6 percent. The estimated number of poor children in B.C. in 2003 was 201,000 kids. That's about the same as the population of Burnaby. That's about the same as the combined populations of Prince George, Kelowna and Cranbrook — all children living in poverty.

Affordable housing is at the root of child poverty, and this government fails to take meaningful action on housing, switching to a rent subsidy program that will

do little to help the families living in poverty to find safe and affordable housing. In my riding in Vancouver, where vacancy rates are at historic lows of around 1 percent and rents are at all-time highs, rent supplements are all but useless.

There is an incredible opportunity to do something significant in Vancouver in the redevelopment of southeast False Creek, the site of our Olympic village, where 20,000 people will live in 20 years' time. Unfortunately, earlier this year Vancouver city council took steps to reduce the community's visionary plan of one-third affordable housing, one-third modest market housing and one-third market housing, reducing it to only 20-percent affordable housing and 80-percent market housing.

Why would the city take this drastic action to undermine a plan that was assembled over a dozen years with extensive community process? No funding is on the table from this government or from the federal government. This budget could have included a potent piece of support for affordable housing in our densest urban centre, with huge benefit for children living in poverty. But this government apparently isn't referring to or representing those children with this budget.

Very importantly, there's nothing in this budget to address food and nutrition for the children living in poverty. Every month over 24,000 kids use the food banks in B.C., and there's no plan or resources to address that critical failing.

Child protection is a little different. There are some new dollars in the budget for the Children and Families Ministry after five years of devastating cuts and tragic consequences for many children. The opposition has worked tirelessly to bring attention to this crisis, and some damage control funding is finally promised. It's a clear acknowledgment of the government's negligence to date on this file. It doesn't make up for what was ruthlessly cut from that ministry's budget or in any way atone for the tragedies that resulted from underfunding this vital support for child protection, but it's a start.

On child care, there is no start. Again, we've seen years of brutal budget cuts and a dismantling of universal, publicly accessible quality child care. Many good child care centres in Vancouver have closed because of this.

The government has redirected federal funding that was for child care, and this budget continues to score federal dollars from the ELCC agreement last fall that our new Prime Minister now says he won't honour in full. Unless our Premier, along with other first ministers across Canada, goes to bat — which he hasn't to date — and fights for those federal dollars which are promised and signed for, we may never see that funding. Child care clearly isn't a priority of this Premier and his colleagues, despite its fundamental importance to our kids and our economy in supporting the working families of British Columbia.

On a local level, the Kitsilano area child care centre in my riding draws kids from both Fairview and the Premier's riding of Point Grey. They've been seeking

matching funding for a pilot project for a new toxin-free portable that meets LEED's green building standards. To date there is no support from this government to work on new solutions to creating healthy environments for our young children, even when the science is clear that some of the synthetic chemicals, the VOCs in the new construction portables, have significant health impacts for kids — not a priority of this government.

[1720]

Education — yet another children's issue. Many questions remain about this government's support for K-through-12 education. The talk of repurposing locally elected school boards persists, and the commitment and funding to address class size and composition is still in question. There are big concerns that the round table on education is going nowhere on class size and composition. Certainly, this budget doesn't invest in significant improvements.

My kids are all in B.C. public schools, so I hear firsthand about the challenges and the huge limitations in our school systems today — a very different picture from when I was a youngster. The funding was significantly higher. If we continue to underfund education in this province, we will have consequences we can't even envision at this point. That approach doesn't jibe with the so-called children's budget.

As the Advanced Education critic, I'm focused on support for students and our post-secondary education system, which the children of today will be moving into in the years to come. That includes skills training. In this budget nothing was done to improve affordability or to rebuild the grants program, which was chopped several years ago. It's stunning to see in the ministry service plan, under performance measures, that affordability, while being there as a goal, has no baseline, no performance measure developed and no commitment or goal — once again, lots of talk and no action on something that unquestionably discourages people from pursuing training and education.

The ministry states that it's in its mission to "provide leadership in delivering excellent, accessible post-secondary education." Strangely, there are no goals or objectives specifically related to that excellence — no strategy to assess it. Students I have met with around the province over the last six months have continually raised concerns about the quality of their education, for which they're now paying double the tuition from four years ago.

Why isn't this government focused on excellence? There is a performance measure for quality, but instead of excellence, it surveys what percentage of students are satisfied with studies. The word "satisfied," or "satisfactory," is closely associated with a "C" or maybe a "C plus" on report cards in our very schools, which doesn't quite meet the mark in terms of excellence. The results with skills development were well below the benchmark set. These are the responses from the students in our post-secondary system. They also included the language of mediocrity. Excellence must be a goal, and teaching and learning taken as seriously as research and innovation.

The throne speech asks, "How can we foster a culture of excellence in teaching...?" and that is a good question. There are no answers in the budget for it. There are hundreds of millions dedicated to research and its commercialization at B.C.'s post-secondary institutions, but precious little for teaching and learning.

Where is the support for new graduate spaces beyond the master's program in new media, which is a worthy investment? This budget misses the boat on creating more spaces in many professions like engineering and technology, where there will be gigantic shortages of skilled people. The skills shortage is hitting many professions hard, and there's nothing specific in the budget to respond to these broader needs. The skills shortage is now the worst in B.C. history.

Although new money is labelled for training in this budget, it doesn't make up for the deep budget cuts as this crisis emerged. These cuts and the radical restructuring of the whole system of skills training in 2002 have driven apprenticeship completion rates down by over 50 percent — fewer than half the number of apprentices completing.

The true cost of these mistakes is vast, both for the many British Columbians who are missing out on the opportunities to benefit in our boom economy and for our economy as a whole. It'll undoubtedly impact that economy for many years to come and negatively impact the children of today as they move into the workforce through education.

[1725]

Environment. Here's a skill-testing question. What kind of world will the children of today be living in as adults? How about their children? Although the throne speech was chock full of questions, somehow these all-encompassing questions about the future for our children didn't get asked. This budget does nothing to protect our children from the very real threats of climate change, pollution, traffic congestion, urban sprawl or the loss of wildlife or wilderness.

The fact that the throne speech and budget refer to so-called forces transforming our planet and that both leave out climate change is deplorable. Did this government decide to ignore over half of the Nobel laureates in the world who are crying out for action on climate change? These aren't radical minds. These aren't opposition minds. Does the Premier continue to disagree with taking action on climate change and to subvert the implementation of the Kyoto protocol? Judging from this budget, I'd say the answer is yes, which is bad news for children.

This budget again goes against the grain of common sense and the best science, further subsidizing the oil and gas industry with another \$129 million for roadbuilding and extending the winter drilling season. This budget invests in traffic congestion in the lower mainland and south Vancouver Island, prioritizing car commuting and truck transport over transit, bikes and trains.

What does that mean for kids? Asthma rates among children are up — four times higher than they were 20 years ago. About 20 percent of boys and 15 percent of

girls across our country between the ages of eight and 11 have now been diagnosed with asthma. Children are uniquely susceptible and vulnerable to environmental risks, and those risks don't respect boundaries. Lower-income people in cities, like many of my constituents, are at greater risk of developing asthma because of suboptimal levels of care and control and because they may have higher exposures to pollutants, so we're looking at a gateway to asthma.

As long as we count GDP growth as our measure of success, that's great. Traffic congestion and asthma mean more fuel and pharmaceuticals consumed, and that's progress, all right. The impact of ignoring climate change, which is now more accurately being called "climate chaos," is profound. We're already seeing unimaginable consequences with the mountain pine beetle and rapid changes in northern B.C. The rate of change is one that we can't begin to adapt to, and it's accelerating. Instead of reacting vigorously, this government is sticking its head in the oil sands.

How do we as a country compare? From a recent University of Victoria report, Canada's record on energy issues is abysmal in terms of energy use per capita. There are 29 countries in the OECD. Any guesses out there where Canada ranks — energy use per capita? Twenty-seventh. Energy efficiency, which is the amount of energy required to produce a fixed amount of GDP? Hey, we care about GDP — don't we? We're 28th in energy efficiency. More directly impacting climate change.... Canada fares very poorly on this important indicator, which is greenhouse gas emissions: 27th out of 29 nations.

Canadians pump out 48 percent more greenhouse gas emissions per capita than the OECD average, and keep in mind that this is our country's performance with a federal government that has taken action on Kyoto and a good number of climate change and environmental initiatives in recent years. B.C. is at the back of the pack within Canada on these indicators.

The Ministry of Environment doesn't even have an explicit budget to lead B.C.'s climate change activities. The government's own feeble climate change plan states: "By the end of the 21st century, average temperatures in British Columbia will likely be 1 degree to 4 degrees Celsius warmer, depending on the region, than they are now" — 4 degrees Celsius average. That means my grandchildren will be living in a California climate. Maybe they're lucky; maybe not.

The impacts of this on our ecosystems and our economy are profound. But apparently that's not worth addressing in this children's budget, which brings me to economic development. We know that once the mountain pine beetle has run its course, the economy of B.C.'s interior will be radically changed. We know that once the oil and gas reserves of the northeast are tapped, the economy there will be very different.

[1730]

These are the economies that today's children will inherit. The lack of ongoing investment in developing the necessary new economies around the province is socially and fiscally irresponsible. With windfall reve-

nues from exploitation of these resources, now is the time to invest in the transition and community economic development that's needed. Where is the commitment to a permanent fund channelling those royalties into education and economic diversification? B.C. is one of the only jurisdictions in the world to extract resources at this pace and not have a permanent fund. It's certainly not in this budget — so much for investing in our children's economic prosperity.

Debt. I'm very concerned with this budget to see the provincial debt continuing to rise rapidly. Despite a huge projected surplus in the order of \$1.6 billion, including the various fudge factors, vast sums are being invested in megaprojects that are now overheating our economy and job market, resulting in a 3.6-percent increase — that's \$928 million for those of you scoring at home — to our debt in the next 12 months. It calls into question the fiscal responsibility of this government. The budget also includes \$1.8 billion in discretionary funds, with no accountability for how that will be spent. On top of that, experts estimate that the government is understating the surplus by \$1.6 billion, driven by record-high commodity prices.

Managing growth is just as important as managing the challenges of a declining economy. In fact, most businesses consider them even more perilous. Managing growth is what drives economies; it's what drives businesses down if it's not done properly. As a businessperson myself, I'm astonished at the sloppy budgeting and fiscal mismanagement of this government. An example: the 2004 budget estimated this year's revenue, 2006 revenue, to be about \$28 billion. The latest report estimates the revenue to hit almost \$36 billion. The fiscal plan was off by only about \$8 billion. That's more than 27 percent off on the forecast.

These forecasting variations — well, they're not all the fault of this government. Commodity prices are well beyond the government's control. But the government needs to provide an explanation, an analysis of its forecasting challenges. The government can do something about the expense side of the ledger, which from the 2004 forecast to today has undergone similar extraordinary variations.

So what is the purpose of financial forecasting with a margin of error over 25 percent? It certainly can't be relied upon by investors. The people of B.C. should be skeptical of this government's ability to stick to its own financial plan. Our children will be saddled with whatever debt persists. It's part of our legacy, and it's one that the government has a great deal of control over. Rather than doing something to reduce this load, we're seeing the debt ramp up — both taxpayer-supported and that of Crown corporations. The interest we pay on this debt will increase significantly as our interest rates are on the rise, and that chews into the resources we have available for investing in our kids. Isn't it about time we had a structured plan to pay down that debt?

There were some positives in this budget — funding for Canada's first master's program in new media at the Great Northern Way campus just outside of my riding. There's more support for BladeRunners, an ex-

emplary program that's helping youth at risk enter the construction workforce. There are some improvements on the homeowner grant side, but those grants and that kind of benefit to homeowners does make life tougher for renters in my riding, who get no support and are seeing rents soar, along with their property values. That's a big inequity in terms of benefits.

[1735]

The tax break to the film industry is a good investment. The targeted tax break for software, well, that's about the only new measure in this budget that could spark some growth, along with boosting computer literacy. The money for public sector bargaining is necessary, and it must be accompanied by meaningful negotiations to make up for years of severe treatment and atrocious cutbacks to the working people of this province.

With so little good news in this budget, though, apparently the Finance Minister decided that the advertising budget should be more than doubled to keep appearances up. After blowing the lid off the advertising budget last year, spending \$19 million instead of the \$12 million budgeted, the decision this year is to crank it on up to over \$28 million.

How does that serve the children of B.C.? To call this a children's budget is audacious and deceitful. This is a budget without vision and leadership, which are fundamental to good government. The government had a fantastic opportunity to make significant investments in our children — their education, their future economy and the environment and the debt that they will inherit from us. Instead, we get status quo, which, frankly, doesn't cut it in our rapidly changing world.

R. Cantelon: I appreciate the opportunity to address this assembly on the budget. The previous speaker for Vancouver-Fairview commented that our budget's overheating. Things are perhaps going too well. Madam Speaker, let me tell you: we're just getting started. You haven't seen anything yet.

The Premier's laid out a broad vision for a golden decade. We're going to fulfil that promise, the promise that B.C.'s opportunity — its climate; its people, its greatest resource — offers to all of us who are so fortunate to live here.

I have to admit that yes, the previous speaker is correct. We did exceed our expectations. We had surpluses beyond our expectations, and it wasn't so many years ago this was not considered an evil thing. In fact, it was often considered a good thing to exceed your revenue targets. I think that on the street, in the land of common sense, it's still a good idea to budget conservatively and to exceed your revenue targets and balance the books.

We've come a long way. The previous speaker has also mentioned, of course, that the debt is increasing, but I think one of the most important considerations in debt is: is our debt affordable? Certainly, interest rates help that, but we've moved a long way from previous times, such as around, say, 2001 or 2002, when this government first came into office, when our ratio of taxpayer-supported debt to GDP was around 21 percent — 21.3 percent, actually. Now we've projected that

by the end of this fiscal budget, we will be down to 15.4 percent, the lowest ratio ever in the history of the modern B.C. economy. It is a balanced budget, and it is going to continue to be a balanced budget.

We're not talking about trickle-down economics here. As one of the main goals, we're talking about creating more jobs than any other jurisdiction, than any other place in Canada. This is no trickle-down theory of economics. We're creating more employment for our young people and more opportunity. That creates an atmosphere of hope, expectation and opportunity, which is attracting investment like never before in British Columbia — particularly, for example, in the mining industry, which languished for many, many years.

I believe it wasn't long ago that it was around \$20 million, and now this year it will exceed over \$200 million — the mining production in British Columbia. That's not just a factor of commodity prices, because throughout the world, people are developing new mines and doing new explorations. It's essential that we must compete in this very competitive natural resource commodity world with new production and new developments, and we're doing that.

It is, indeed, a climate of opportunity. I'm very happy to say in the riding that I represent, Nanaimo, that the employment rates are at their highest levels ever. The unemployment rates are down, and there's a real spirit of enthusiasm and can-do in our community.

[1740]

The city of Nanaimo was one of the first communities to take part and jump in on the Olympic vision that was presented by the Premier. I'd like to say that that was a lesson, I think, learned from the great success of Expo '86. We recognized that our proximity to Vancouver presents unique opportunities for Nanaimoites, and we decided that, well, it's time to get going. It's time to make something out of our downtown. It's time to spruce it up and move forward, because if you don't move forward, you're going backwards. Everybody else is passing you, and that's a fact.

That's certainly a fact for our economy and a factor for British Columbia, but indeed, we're not going backwards. We're going forward like never before. B.C. is now recognized as one of the most prominent and emerging regions economically in Canada. We're becoming a powerhouse. We're the gateway to the Asia-Pacific, but beyond that, we're becoming an industry and an economy, bar none, in Canada.

In Nanaimo they've very enthusiastically embraced the concept of the Olympics, and they're going ahead to build a new conference centre. This will be the inclusion of a new Marriott hotel and a brand-new museum for the citizens of the area and a tourist attraction too. We hope to offer some competition to the Royal B.C. Museum down here.

Interjection.

R. Cantelon: No, it's indeed not from bingo money. I thank the member from Vancouver for pointing that out to me.

This would be an investment of many millions of dollars in Nanaimo. We're happy to have the provincial government supporting this. One of the components of this development will be two new ice surfaces, which the provincial government has very generously committed \$8.3 million to. This is necessitated because we're tearing the old one down to make way for new developments.

New developments are attracted by this new climate of opportunity and investment that is broad throughout British Columbia but very specific to Nanaimo. We've seen the development of — many of you may remember — the old Malaspina Hotel. It sat in poor downtown Nanaimo as sort of a derelict representation of the hopelessness of the previous administration in the dismal decade of the '90s. It just sat there and languished — a bare skeleton, empty. Now investors have bought it. Not only have they bought it, they're doing a condominium waterfront development with 155 units that is indeed so successful that they want to now build another two storeys.

Insight Developments, another well-known developer, has invested some \$60 million in our wonderful city and is doing another tower beside it — \$84 million. There are concerns about high-rises, and so the council, in its wisdom, certainly has looked ahead and developed a vision whereby they'll maintain a lower level in the downtown core and put the highrises on the outside so as not to create a complete blockage of the waterfront.

These are the things that are happening, and they're exciting. A previous speaker of ours from...

An Hon. Member: Burrard.

R. Cantelon: ...Burrard — thank you — spoke about the importance of the arts. This is one of the major focuses of the downtown revitalization that's been happening in our city. Arts and culture are considered a major driver. It's well recognized that if you are able to attract people who enjoy arts and culture, the money comes with them — not following. Indeed, it's a culture of imagination and creativity that inspires business development and growth. That's what's happening in downtown Nanaimo.

I'm happy to report that there are 58 net new businesses in the downtown. I have to say "net new" because, of course, sometimes it's two steps forward and then one back. But overall, it's 58 new businesses in the downtown area, and it is alive and well. I invite you all to see it. You won't believe it. We have more coffee houses than Seattle and better coffee, too, and they're brewing it and grinding it and serving it right on the premises. "Cappuccino" is not a foreign word. They have more variety of lattes than you can imagine, and they're all being sold and lapped up furiously.

One other thing that this economy presents — and again, I think it is one of the outstanding achievements of Nanaimo — is the skills and training emphasis that is put on the new budget. Certainly, with all the employment opportunities that we're creating in Nanaimo, tradespeople are becoming increasingly short. It is very, very vital that we support our youth with training and skills programs. That's why I was very pleased — and I think it's extremely appropriate and timely — that in this budget we see a \$90 million incentive program for industry to develop apprenticeship programs and an added \$39 million for the Industry Training Authority to provide apprenticeship programs.

[1745]

In the future we're going to run out of trained people if we don't start dealing with it very soon. The other aspect of this one, of course, was a \$50 million scholarship program for innovation and research in technology. We need to find new ways, new engineering. It was not long ago that engineering wasn't very well regarded as a profession, but now engineers are in short demand, and we need new research. We need to encourage and inspire engineers to look for innovative ways to adapt technology to our economy.

One of the most successful programs in Nanaimo is BladeRunners. I was asked by my colleague next to me from Kelowna: what's that all about?

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

I'd be very, very happy to tell you more about that, but I take note of the hour, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure you'd like to hear more of it in its entirety and its contextual fullness.

Interjections.

R. Cantelon: I think so. I'd like to carry on. Noting the hour, may I suggest adjournment so that I could be more specific about this program — adjourn the debate.

R. Cantelon moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. C. Richmond moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 5:47 p.m.

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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.

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