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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS
(HANSARD)

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
**FINANCE AND
GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

Williams Lake

Tuesday, September 26, 2006

Issue No. 29

BLAIR LEKSTROM, MLA, CHAIR

ISSN 1499-416X

**SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

Williams Lake
Tuesday, September 26, 2006

- Chair:* * Blair Lekstrom (Peace River South L)
- Deputy Chair:* * Bruce Ralston (Surrey-Whalley NDP)
- Members:*
- * Iain Black (Port Moody-Westwood L)
 - * Harry Bloy (Burquitlam L)
 - Randy Hawes (Maple Ridge-Mission L)
 - * Dave S. Hayer (Surrey-Tynehead L)
 - * Richard T. Lee (Burnaby North L)
 - * John Horgan (Malahat-Juan de Fuca NDP)
 - * Jenny Wai Ching Kwan (Vancouver-Mount Pleasant NDP)
 - * Bob Simpson (Cariboo North NDP)

**denotes member present*

- Other MLAs:* Charlie Wyse (Cariboo South NDP)
- Clerk:* Kate Ryan-Lloyd
- Committee Staff:* Dorothy Jones (Committees Assistant)

-
- Witnesses:*
- Doug Belsher
 - Walt Cobb
 - John Dressler
 - Rob Fraser (Tolko Industries Ltd.)
 - Winnifred Gooding (Old Age Pensioners Organization, Branch 93)
 - Beverley Gutray (Executive Director, Canadian Mental Health Association, British Columbia Division)
 - Tom Hoffman (Tolko Industries Ltd.)
 - Andrew Hopkins
 - Brenda Humphre (Tsilhqot'in Justice Program; B.C. Schizophrenia Society)
 - Wayne Lucier
 - Floris Martineau (Old Age Pensioners Organization, Branch 93)
 - Cindy Parsons (Tsilhqot'in Justice Program; B.C. Schizophrenia Society)
 - Surinderpal Rathor
 - Constance Sauter (Lawyers of South Cariboo)
 - Roger Solly (President, Williams Lake and District Chamber of Commerce)
 - Sepp Tschierschwitz (President, Canadian Mental Health Association, British Columbia Division)
 - Sheila Wyse (President, Cariboo-Chilcotin Teachers Association)

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| D. Belsher | |
| J. Dressler | |
| W. Cobb | |
| A. Hopkins | |

MINUTES

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES



Tuesday, September 26, 2006
5:00 p.m.
Banquet Room, Williams Inn
55 South 6th Avenue, Williams Lake

Present: Blair Lekstrom, MLA (Chair); Bruce Ralston, MLA (Deputy Chair); Iain Black, MLA; Harry Bloy, MLA; Dave S. Hayer, MLA; John Horgan, MLA; Jenny Wai Ching Kwan, MLA; Richard T. Lee, MLA; Bob Simpson, MLA

Unavoidably Absent: Randy Hawes, MLA

1. The Chair called the Committee to order at 5:00 p.m.
2. Opening statements by Mr. Blair Lekstrom, MLA, Chair.
3. The following witnesses appeared before the Committee and answered questions:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) Canadian Mental Health Association, British Columbia Division | Sepp Tschierschwitz Beverly Gutray |
| 2) Tolko Industries Ltd. | Rob Fraser Tom Hoffman |
| 3) Old Age Pensioners Organization, Branch # 93 | Winnifred Gooding Floris Martineau |
| 4) Wayne Lucier | |
| 5) BC Schizophrenia Society Tsilhqot'in Justice Program | Cindy Parsons Brenda Humphre Roger Solly |
| 6) Williams Lake and District Chamber of Commerce | |
| 7) Surinderpal Rathor | |
| 8) Lawyers of South Cariboo | Constance Sauter Sheila Wyse |
| 9) Cariboo-Chilcotin Teachers' Association | |
| 10) Doug Belsher | |
| 11) John Dressler | |
| 12) Walt Cobb | |

4. The Committee recessed from 7:20 p.m. to 7:36 p.m.
 - 13) Andrew Hopkins
5. The Committee adjourned at 7:43 p.m. to the call of the Chair.

Blair Lekstrom, MLA
Chair

Kate Ryan-Lloyd
Clerk Assistant and
Committee Clerk

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2006

The committee met at 5 p.m.

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Good evening, everyone. If everyone could take their seats, we will begin the public hearings.

I'd like to start off. My name is Blair Lekstrom. I'm the MLA for Peace River South, and I have the honour of being the Chair of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

We are here this evening to hear from British Columbians. The way it is set up is that the Hon. Carole Taylor, our Minister of Finance, is mandated by legislation to present a prebudget consultation paper no later than the 15th of September, at which time we as a committee, which is an all-party committee of the Legislative Assembly, will then go out and seek input from British Columbians from around the province.

We are presently in the middle of our tour, in which we will visit and meet with people in 14 communities around British Columbia. We will cover every region of the province.

As well, there are a number of ways that you can submit to our committee — certainly, through the public and oral presentations that we will have this evening. For many people that are unable to attend some of the public sessions, you can also go on line. You can submit a written submission via e-mail or via the old way of writing a letter or go on line and answer the questionnaire that is part of the prebudget consultation paper. This year the Minister of Finance has mailed the prebudget paper to every household in British Columbia, allowing them to read it, and if they wish to respond, they can do so via the electronic means.

The format for this evening's meeting is that our presenters have 15 minutes. We have roughly ten minutes for the presentation, which leaves five minutes for committee members to dialogue with the presenter and ask questions for clarification regarding what was said.

Before we start, what I would like to do is ask each of the members to introduce themselves, and then we will begin with our first presentation.

I. Black: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Iain Black. I'm the MLA for Port Moody-Westwood.

J. Horgan: My name is John Horgan. I'm the MLA for Malahat-Juan de Fuca, which is just outside Victoria.

D. Hayer: Good afternoon. I'm Dave Hayer, MLA for Surrey-Tynehead. I visited this area a few weeks ago and met with some of the council members of Williams Lake.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Bruce Ralston, Surrey-Whalley. I'm vice-Chair of the committee.

R. Lee: Richard Lee, MLA for Burnaby North.

B. Simpson: Bob Simpson, MLA for Cariboo North, which of course is part of this town.

H. Bloy: Harry Bloy, MLA for Burquitlam, which is the home of Simon Fraser University.

J. Kwan: Jenny Kwan, MLA for Vancouver-Mount Pleasant. I'm compelled to say that Vancouver-Mount Pleasant is home to the poorest neighbourhood in all of Canada.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Also joining us at our public hearings are Kate Ryan-Lloyd, our Committee Clerk, to my left, as well as Dorothy Jones, who is at the table at the back with the information.

Also, each of our hearings is recorded and transcribed by Hansard staff, as well as being live on the Internet via webstreaming. Joining us are Wendy Collisson and Rob Froese. Again, thank you for the work that you do.

Just prior to calling our first presenter, I'd also like to welcome Charlie Wyse, who is the MLA for Cariboo South.

C. Wyse: Welcome to the Cariboo.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): We will begin our presentations this evening with the Canadian Mental Health Association, British Columbia division. Joining us are Sepp Tschierschwitz and Beverley Gutray.

I've stumbled on a few names today. And let me tell you, Sepp, yours was a challenge.

S. Tschierschwitz: I was going to change it to John Tschierschwitz, but then....

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): I think he's done that joke before.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): I just want to recognize Walt Cobb, a former colleague and a former MLA for the area as well.

Walt, I talked to you earlier. I didn't see you there behind Sepp.

Now we're ready, Sepp, and I'll duly note that the time has not been taken off your presentation. Welcome to the committee.

Presentations

S. Tschierschwitz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. It is indeed a pleasure to present before this committee. You have all received our handout, and I will just make a summary of my presentation. I'm not going to go into details. I'd be running out of time.

In February 2005 the Premier announced five goals for the coming decade. One of the goals was to build the best system of support in Canada for people with

disabilities. We know that one in five develops mental illness at some point of their life. The World Health Organization concluded that mental disorders account for more than 50 percent of the burden of illness.

[1705]

Within 15 years depression alone is projected to be the leading cause of workday loss. In 2002 and 2003 hospital stays associated with mental disorders accounted for one-third of all hospital stays. In B.C. alone that total exceeded 740,000 hospital days. Mental illness has a significant impact on our citizens, our communities, our workplaces, our health care systems and, ultimately, our economy.

In May of this year the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, also known as the Kirby committee, was released. It was called *Out of the Shadows at Last: Transforming Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addiction Services in Canada*. We urge the committee members, if they don't read the whole report, to read at least three chapters of that report. Chapter 1 talks about the voices of people living with mental illness, chapter 2 is the voices of family caregivers, and chapter 16 is the national mental health initiative.

The focus of this evening's submission is on the initiatives to help our Premier to achieve his goals. We know that in the area of mental health and addiction people are marginalized, which results in an overreliance on expensive services and support. This has an economic impact, requiring increased investments in policing, the criminal justice system, emergency departments, acute hospital care, homelessness shelters and related supports, just to name a few.

The Kirby report clearly articulates the need for mental health systems to further shift treatment to communities. Furthermore, the report recognizes that the savings that will eventually occur from downsizing the institutional sector do not materialize at once. It will take some time. It also suggests that two systems must probably work in parallel for a considerable period of time.

In September of this year the Finance Minister asked to answer two basic questions. First, where would you like the province to spend more? And second, where would you spend less? We feel that the answer to the first question is to spend more, and more wisely, in the area of community-based mental health and addictions services and supports, housing, and income assistance.

The answer to the second question is: if we developed a comprehensive and effective community-based system of supports, we would need to spend less in more costly and more crisis-oriented services. It is our understanding that over the next four years economic forecasts are sound, which would suggest an increase in additional revenues. It is imperative that we begin to make some critical investments in both mental health and addictions services. In the long term mental health will be better supported in our communities, less reliant on more costly crisis-oriented services.

While the 2005 budget focused on low-income seniors, the 2006 budget focused on improving service for

children. We urge the government to focus the 2007 budget on people with mental illness and substance abuse problems. We have five major areas that we'd like to address and make some recommendations on.

The first is on accountability and provincial leadership. Despite the Premier's stated goal to build the best system of support for people with disabilities, we still do not have a provincial mental health plan. The Kirby report certainly reinforces the need for such a plan.

If we did have one, we would have been able to maximize the impact on those dollars that are spent into the system, particularly if we have an articulated, coherent and comprehensive provincial mental health and addictions plan. The CMHA recommends that funding be allocated to work with health authorities, related ministries, people with mental illness and their families, the not-for-profit sector and researchers to develop a provincial mental health plan.

Also, we recommend that funding be allocated to provide transparent annual reporting on mental health and addictions spending and outcomes. We also recommend a centralized transition fund, to be developed to support community-based mental health and addictions systems development, in the range of \$28 million in 2007. That was an estimate by the standing committee, the Kirby report. In addition, \$6.5 million should be targeted to develop outreach treatment and prevention programs and services for people with concurrent disorders. Again, that was identified in the Kirby report.

The second major heading is the consumer initiatives. We feel that consumer initiatives are run for and by people with mental health problems and those who have received mental health services. A study in Ontario concluded that the transitional support from hospital to community saved more than \$12 million over four years through shorter hospital stays. In other words, if we have peer support groups that would assist people who come out of hospital, we would save considerable money.

[1710]

People who were partnered with peer members used an average of \$20,000 less per person in hospital and emergency room services during that year of discharge. We therefore recommend that funding be allocated and designated specifically to support consumer initiatives with a focus on consumer-run businesses and peer support. We are looking at approximately \$2 million for the province.

Our third thing is child and youth mental health. We fully support the ongoing implementation of the Ministry of Children and Family Development's youth mental health plan. B.C. is a national leader in this area, and we recognize the plan and the significant work to date as an initial, important commitment in beginning to address the needs of more than 140,000 children in B.C. We strongly urge that we fund this particular initiative and that the requirements for full implementation of this plan be met for 2007 and 2008. I think that's \$16.8 million.

We also recommend that funding be allocated to develop an ongoing, rolling child and youth mental

health plan which strengthens its focus on prevention, family and youth peer support and mutual aid development. It's also recommended that funding be allocated to provide annual reporting on outcomes in child and youth mental health.

The fourth is income assistance. Although the people-with-disability rate increased in 2005, the increase, amounting to \$70, still places us 49 percent below the poverty line. In other words, it's not sufficient to keep people fully supported. We are still on the bottom of the list in terms of funding for people with disabilities. People receiving income assistance in this province are poorer than they have been throughout the past 20 years.

We know, however, that poverty has a real and measurable impact on mental health, regardless of whether a person has a mental illness or not. We would like to acknowledge that funding has been made available in a number of communities, including Williams Lake, to do an outreach for people on the homelessness issue and connect them with income support, housing and health services. So that's very positive in our opinion.

However, we recommend that funding be allocated in this budget to match income assistance rates received for people on disability in Ontario. I mentioned that last year in my presentation to this very same committee. Funding should be allocated in this budget to raise general welfare rates by 50 percent.

Last is the issue of housing. We continue to be cautiously optimistic in the area of housing, particularly with the Premier's Task Force on Homelessness, Mental Illness and Addictions and with 533 new supportive housing units promised. Even with this, the Kirby report indicated that we still need an additional 7,410 spaces in this province. Needless to say, that's a costly one but one that needs to be addressed.

We recommend that funding for housing for people with mental illness and addiction continues to be identified as a priority, with additional provincial funding allocated to this area, both to increase the availability of rent supplements to people with mental illness and addiction and to increase permanent housing stock. We also recommend that provincial benchmarks for housing of people with mental illness and addiction be developed with consistent and regular reporting on progress.

In summary, we fully support the Premier's goal of building the best system of support in Canada for people with disability. However, we as a province must make a commitment to developing a comprehensive mental health and addictions plan with targets, time lines and regular full and public reporting on progress.

We also recommend that the 2007-2008 budget be for people with mental illness and their families. We also recommend that the province lead by advocating to the federal government that the members of the mental health commission be named so that we can take advantage of the national mental health strategy.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Well, thank you very much, Sepp and Beverley, for taking the time out of your busy schedules, I'm sure, to come and present to our com-

mittee. I'm going to look to members of the committee, if they have any questions.

[1715]

B. Simpson: The presentation's great. It's along the lines of what we're looking for. It's got both the cost side as well as what you think some of the savings might be. That's helpful to us in terms of this budget process.

Just in terms of the phenomenon around mental health, it was raised to my attention that in Quesnel we're actually getting an in-migration to the community of people with mental health, employment barriers and so on, because the cost of living is lower there. They can move out of the lower mainland or the Okanagan.

Are we seeing a trend like that, where we're getting some migration patterns of people needing assistance and the impact on rural communities?

S. Tschierschwitz: Williams Lake is also involved in a homelessness study right now. I think that with the figures that we have so far, which I'm not familiar with — I'm officially retired, so I'm not really in the working area anymore — there is definitely an increase in our own communities as well. It's a good indication that there is some movement to move into the rural areas that we haven't addressed yet.

B. Gutray: I think there's not any basis that I know of in research that can actually say that that can be quantified. What we know for sure is that one of the advances in mental health care is that there are more services in the community. Now people actually do get served in the community, where 20 years ago if you had a mental illness, you went far away, and it took you a really long time to come back. In fact, lots of people have never come back. Now Vancouver is their home versus Quesnel, Williams Lake, etc.

B. Simpson: So there may be another factor involved in more of it being closer to home.

B. Gutray: Yeah. I think you'd need to look at it more.

B. Simpson: Okay, thank you.

D. Hayer: Very good presentation. Have you put together the total value or total cost of all the recommendations you have made and not just a few of them — I know there are quite a few different recommendations — or come close to it with a guesstimate?

S. Tschierschwitz: You asked me that last year, didn't you?

D. Hayer: The second part to that is: how will we fund all of it? I know you said that for some of them you could save on other parts. Any suggestions on that?

B. Gutray: I think what we're talking about — and I'm sorry; I should have done that in advance, and I didn't — is more than likely somewhere around \$75

million to \$80 million in total for all of the initiatives we've talked about. Some of the initiatives we've talked about would take full advantage of the national mental health strategy, and that's what Kirby has announced. I think that's the positioning B.C. needs to have in place.

B.C. needs to be ready to take advantage of federal dollars when they come. I think we should just insist that we need those federal dollars. It's a report that was well done.

B.C. is doing very well economically. We need to do something about the fact that there are way too many people living on the streets, way too many people who are calling a cardboard box a home. That's unacceptable. It's no longer a lower mainland, Vancouver problem. It's in Williams Lake. It's in Quesnel.

I don't know if that fully addresses what you're saying, but I think that's where the cost saving is.

The other place where the cost saving is, which is hard to realize, is in the overuse of police, for example. Oftentimes people with mental illness are coming into contact with police instead of the mental health system. For example, we know that for 37 percent of all people with mental illnesses, their first contact is with the police, not the mental health system. If we really have a good system, that wouldn't be what's going on. We know that approximately 7 percent to 15 percent of all police contacts are around mental illness.

I could go on and on, but I better stop.

J. Kwan: Wasn't there a peer-based provincial initiative in place with consumers? I thought that there was one.

B. Gutray: At one time there was, but for the most part a lot of that has fallen off the table with regionalization. We've lost a lot of the energy that went around provincial initiatives. I think the opportunity is now. Certainly, the savings are quite clear. There's research that backs up the savings. That's quite clear. But no, there's not one.

J. Kwan: No, there isn't one now. Do you remember when that was lost?

B. Gutray: I would say mid-'90s.

J. Kwan: The peer-based initiative.

[1720]

B. Gutray: Everything seemed to change quite radically when the health system changed. As soon as regionalization happened, we went through several years of reorganizing. In that reorganization some things were lost, like the peer-based initiatives.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): If I could conclude. Certainly, I'm duly watching the time for all the presenters.

One of your recommendations — and you've put a lot of work and effort into this; I'll say that — was that funding be allocated in this budget to match income assistance rates received by people with disabilities in

Ontario. I believe they're about a hundred dollars more than British Columbia right now.

B. Gutray: Yeah. What it would mean is approximately \$926. If you did the \$70 increase — what we're recommending — you'd bring it to around \$920.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): I think we're at \$876.54 now.

B. Gutray: We're \$856.70.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Okay.

Just a question: did you do any comparisons on the issue of how much money they could actually earn? It's now up to \$500.

B. Gutray: I realize that.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Was there a comparison done with Ontario on that? It certainly helped. I mean, it's not the end-all.

B. Gutray: It would be something we could do very easily, but I haven't got that information in front of me.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Okay. I was just curious.

Again, I want to thank you both for coming out and presenting. The time and effort you've put in certainly shows in the presentation you put forward.

Our next presentation this evening is from Tolko Industries, and joining us are Rob Fraser and Tom Hoffman. Good evening.

R. Fraser: Members of the committee, good afternoon and welcome to Williams Lake and the Cariboo. We're pleased that you've included our city on your tour, and we appreciate this opportunity to present our views to you.

My name is Rob Fraser, and I'm the regional manager for Tolko in the Cariboo. Joining me is Tom Hoffman, regional woodlands manager for Tolko.

Tolko Industries is celebrating its 50th year in business in 2006. It remains a private, Canadian, family-owned business based in Vernon. The decisions that are made about our operations and our future are made right here in B.C.

Tolko employs close to 5,000 people in B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Here in B.C. we operate eight sawmills, two reman plants, three plywood plants and one veneer mill. We're the third-largest lumber producer in Canada and are a very interested participant in the trade dispute with the United States.

The Cariboo is a key region for Tolko, with four sawmills — three in Williams Lake, one in Quesnel — and 958 people working directly for us. We have a broad economic message to leave with you today and a more specific forest industry message.

First, let's be clear that times have been pretty good for the B.C. interior forest industry in the last few years. Markets have generally been firm, and the forest policy changes made by government have helped our

competitiveness. Some of the other government moves in taxation and in generally improving the investment climate of the province have also helped.

Economic times are good in B.C., but the worst thing we believe the provincial government could do now is to become complacent or to sit back and expect things to hum along as we wait for 2010.

As I said a few minutes ago, Tolko operates in the three other western provinces. I can assure you that they are not complacent, that they continue to look for ways to build an advantage and to improve their investment and business climate. They may not have the high-quality forest resources available that B.C. has, so they are working hard on other factors where they can perhaps take an advantage over us. B.C. must work hard to ensure that its regulatory and taxation environments are competitive with other jurisdictions in which we operate.

The province must also continue to improve its transportation infrastructure so that our products can efficiently find their way to market. While we may be sitting here in the Cariboo, the Pacific gateway and other initiatives designed to reduce rail, port and road congestion in the lower mainland are an important issue for us.

We are pleased to see that the Competition Council and the advisory committee council reports have been released. We are fully supportive of the objectives of the B.C. Competition Council and encourage the Finance Committee to consider these reports and the need for the forest industry to have a tax-competitive environment as they gather information on the upcoming budget.

[1725]

That's the broad message. Let me talk more specifically about the Cariboo and the forest industry.

In a few days we will implement the softwood lumber agreement negotiated with the United States. Tolko supports the deal. It is a long way from perfect, but it's the best we could realistically hope for, and we were pleased to see government win some final changes that made the deal acceptable to us and others. With the agreement now coming into effect, it will remove a huge distraction for those of us in industry. We do expect that the implementation is not going to be easy as we all learn the intricacies of the agreement.

Just recently we have seen the key U.S. housing market slow down, and lumber prices have come off, so we are generally expecting the next year to be more challenging. We may have to adjust our operations in some locations to manage through what may be a temporary but challenging market downturn.

The Cariboo is at the heart of the mountain pine beetle crunch hitting our industry. Our mills have been processing beetle wood for 20 years now. We know these forests, and we know how to work with these dead trees to derive some value from them.

We recognize better than anyone that the colossal volume — and colossal really is the only word that comes remotely close to describing how much dead

timber is out there — of beetle wood will dry up one day, that we won't be able to run our mills at the same high level and that industry will get smaller. How much smaller and when that will happen we don't know.

We are pleased to see that government has a pine beetle action plan and that groups such as the Cariboo-Chilcotin Beetle Action Committee are engaged on the issue and its effect on the future of our communities. In the meantime we have a unique opportunity to take advantage of harvesting these beetle-killed stands and deriving value from them through manufacturing plants.

Right now the province's chief forester is reviewing the annual harvest in the Williams Lake timber supply area, on which we are dependent for 40 percent of our timber needs to supply our four Cariboo mills. We have made our view known to the chief forester that the beetle created a situation in which local harvest can surely be increased by a substantial number.

This is important to our long-term future, well past any temporary market downturn, which we will have to manage through. It is important in helping us adjust to the loss of harvest through the Bill 28 takeback, which provided an annual harvest to local first nations, a policy we strongly support. We look forward to the chief forester's decision later in the fall.

We're also hopeful that the province will see fit to continue our innovative forest practices agreement. The Cariboo IFPA was the first to be signed in B.C. in 1998. Since then we have signed similar IFPAs in the Okanagan and Merritt TSAs. These IFPAs have provided an incentive for us to undertake a higher level of forest management that not only results in higher timber volume growth but which also preserves high levels of wildlife habitat protection and protection of rangeland and other unique ecosystems.

We have recently completed an application to the Minister of Forests and Range for an increase in annual allowable cut that is derived from site productivity improvement and rehabilitating forests impacted by the mountain pine beetle within the IFPA.

The Cariboo IFPA is also significant for the role that first nations play with Tolko in the IFPA. We are planning for increased timber harvesting and silviculture work for several first nations whose traditional territories include the IFPA. First nations contractors and several joint venture partnerships have confirmed a support for our IFPA. We anticipate that if our application is approved, an increase in direct first nations employment of approximately 50 full-time-equivalents.

Thank you for your kind attention. I have copies of the presentation for each of you. I think you've received those. Both Tom and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you, Rob and Tom, for coming to present before us here this evening. I'm going to look to members of the committee, if they have any questions regarding what you've put forward to us.

B. Simpson: Hi, guys. Charlie's sitting in behind you there too.

The first question — if I could, with the Chair's permission, do a follow-up. Because this is the budget consultation process, are there budget implications to what you've put in front of us? Are there things that ought to be taken into consideration as we do the work around the projections for next year, both on the cost side and on the revenue side?

[1730]

R. Fraser: Well, probably if there are two that may have an impact, and you'd be infinitely more attune to that.... One is the transportation infrastructure and the Pacific gateway. We are not a public company. We don't put out quarterly results, but for any of the publics, if you've gone back and looked at them, transportation has significantly impacted. To the extent that this process takes into account the Pacific gateway and transportation infrastructure, yes.

Also, with respect to some of the recommendations out of the Competition Council, we understand that those would probably have some impact on the budget process. Those are two general ones, but that would be the....

B. Simpson: Just an explicit request, and I've asked this from some others, so you're not unique in that. As part of the quarterly report on the Ministry of Finance website, there is a section in there that takes a look at the potential budgetary impacts of the softwood lumber agreement. They've got some price indexing, Canadian dollar values, some productivity implications of the border tax.

I think it would be helpful for us if we had some people who were willing to take a look at that and give us a sense of the ministry's estimates, because that has to, again, inform what we think might be happening as well. They estimate the border tax at \$375 million, based on a certain volume across the border, and so on. That would be really helpful.

T. Hoffman: Where is that?

B. Simpson: Just go to the Ministry of Finance website, and you'll see the quarterly update. It's inside the quarterly update. It's a three-page special portion that analyzes the implications of the softwood lumber deal, and I think it would be very helpful to us to have other people look at that.

R. Lee: The pine beetle kill would also give some biomass, which you cannot use. Can you see any integrated plan near your facility to utilize that waste?

R. Fraser: With respect to the three operations in Williams Lake, very close to 100 percent of the fibre is used currently. The shavings are pulled out and used in pellets. The sawdust at this point is included with the bark, the biomass, and is converted at the EPCOR facility here.

We believe that in the future the ability for biomass and primary producers to work closely together is going to increase. Right now our invested stands are very high percentage sawlog, but we know that over time that's going to change. What we predict is that you're going to see more of a meshing together of those two components of our industry. In fact, it will probably include significantly more than just the primary and biomass. In between, there will be other uses, like pellets, particleboards.

R. Lee: If the AAC is increased, as you propose — I don't know how much you're proposing — would the increase in your allowable level have an impact on prices?

R. Fraser: The price of our lumber? I'm far from being an economist, but we play such a small part in the North American scene. What will drive the price of lumber is, for the most part, consumption in North America and, to some extent, consumption offshore. That'll be the driver in it.

R. Lee: Okay, thanks.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Final question.

D. Hayer: Mine is more of a comment. I want to say that it's a very fair and balanced presentation and looks at the whole province, not just this area. I especially want to thank you for talking about the Pacific gateway program, because that's going to help everywhere. When you talk about roads and bridges and ports and everything else, it's good to see that you're looking at the whole province, not just this area here, because we're all interconnected. Thank you.

[1735]

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Rob and Tom, I want to thank you for coming before us here this evening to present. As with all presentations, they'll be given full consideration by this committee.

Our next presentation this evening comes to us from the Old Age Pensioners Organization, Branch 93. Joining us are Winnifred Gooding and Floris Martineau.

Good evening, and welcome to the committee.

W. Gooding: It's a pleasure to be here.

Seniors in Williams Lake are suffering because of a lack of facilities. We believe government should put more money into alleviating this situation. The complex care Deni House is full. Seniors — a total of approximately 25 people — are waiting for beds in complex care in Cariboo Memorial Hospital; Glen Arbor, which is affordable housing; and Cariboo Sunset Manor, also affordable housing.

The expansion to the private, for-profit Retirement Concepts seniors village facility underway at the present time will only minimally help the situation. Interior Health says that when this facility is built, it will move the clients from Deni House to the new facility and close down Deni House.

Therefore, with 25 waiting in housing units and the hospital, plus 24 from Deni House, this equals 49 needing complex care. The new expansion will only house 33, so there will still be 16 waiting. These are today's figures. By the time the facility is completed, there will be many more. We urge you to keep Deni House open after this expansion.

Also, Heritage House was closed down just recently and should be reopened as a dementia unit, for which it was built.

There are many seniors living in their own homes or apartments who should be in seniors housing, but there is no availability. Therefore, we would ask that you expedite the promised expansion of Glen Arbor.

The seniors waiting in their own homes and apartments are in need of more home support for housekeeping — i.e., vacuuming, laundry, etc. We believe it would help greatly if home support and home care were restored to what they were before the government cutbacks, until senior housing is available for all.

There is much talk about not being able to get nursing staff if more facilities are built or opened. Nursing students are paying a large tuition for their university education. More students would be able to go into this field if the government subsidized the tuition as an incentive to them. If there is a shortage of instructors, a suggestion would be to allow them to work after age 65, if they are capable.

We urge you to take a good, long look at the priorities of your finances. Please put our seniors, who built this country for you, ahead of the Olympic Games. Sports, exercise, competition, participation and fun are all great, but not at the expense of the suffering our senior citizens are enduring.

I have a summary. I'll let you read the summary: (1) keep Deni House open after the expansion of senior village, (2) reopen Heritage House as soon as possible for dementia patients, (3) expedite the promised expansion of Glen Arbor, (4) restore home support and home care to before-cutback services, (5) subsidize tuition for university nursing courses, (6) allow instructors to teach after age 65, (7) look at the amount of money going into the Olympic Games, (8) look at what is needed for our seniors, (9) look at your priorities, and get them in the right order.

I thank you very much for listening to us.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you very much for presenting. I'm going to look to members of the committee to see if they have any questions.

J. Horgan: Thank you, Winnifred, very much for a very thoughtful presentation.

I particularly wanted to ask you a question about the notion of subsidizing tuition for nurses and your second recommendation that went with that, with respect to perhaps keeping retired nurses available for instruction. I know that we're always looking for more health care professionals, and that seems like a pretty good idea.

How do you think that would fit in with an overall plan for seniors — if we could increase the number of nurses that we got into our nursing schools with a subsidy?

[1740]

W. Gooding: We were told that Heritage House has closed down because they don't.... They won't open it because they don't have enough people to work there. The same thing happened at Deni House when they closed it down, so there is a great need for more qualified people to work in these places.

J. Horgan: If we can't encourage them to go there without the subsidy, then we should put a subsidy in place?

W. Gooding: Well, right now TRU, our college here, is looking for a person to teach this course so they can have more students trained. Right now they've only got one person that's qualified. There's another person that just retired. She just turned 65 years old, but she's not allowed to work after 65. I think if something was done about that, it would certainly help the problem.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): I know there are other questions. I think this may, hopefully, help.

One of the issues — and you've raised an important one — is: how do you help nurses, especially if they're going to go to school and practise in northern or rural and remote...?

There is a program in place now under a student forgivable loan. If a nurse goes into any one of the over 3,000 new spaces that have been created over the last few years, and they're willing to participate and practise their profession in northern or rural British Columbia, they will be forgiven their student loan, which I think is a great attempt to try and do exactly as you've said.

Your idea is wonderful, and I think that part has already been acted on.

F. Martineau: Is Williams Lake considered northern?

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Yes. I could go into that. I'm a northern guy myself.

R. Lee: You answered my question. Right now it's 20 percent a year, a forgivable loan — so every year, 20 percent of the tuition. If a nurse is going to school, they pay their tuition, and they are taking a loan. Then each year, when they are working in the remote area, 20 percent of the loan is forgiven. So that's part of that.

F. Martineau: Oh, I see. The 20 percent is forgiven. But they have to go to school first is the problem, and they're paying.... What was it?

Actually, we have a scholarship that went to a student that's taking nursing at the university here for her first two years. She pays \$5,000 and something, I think, for one semester. Then after she has two years here, she has to go to Kamloops for two years.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): I have other questions from other members.

B. Simpson: I want to clarify something, with due respect to the members that are offering the correction. What's being talked about here is the ability to offer local programming in Williams Lake for the students in Williams Lake. All the documentation shows that if you can train people locally, they tend to stay and practise locally. That's really the issue we're addressing. It's not a forgivable loan issue or anything. It's the ability to subsidize the programming offerings at the local college campus.

You have lots of great ideas here. I'm familiar with the sort of long history of what's going on here. One aspect of this is the ability to inform the decisions that Interior Health has been making about these things.

What's been your organization's experience with being able to make Interior Health pay attention to the issues that are here and to get that voice to them? Ultimately, they're the ones who have the budget and have to make these decisions. This process is at a higher level than that. Have you been making these presentations to Interior Health?

W. Gooding: Yes. I also sit on the Seniors Advisory Council, and we've made several presentations over the past two or three years to the Interior Health when they've had their meetings. Audrey MacLise has been our chairperson for that. She's done an excellent job, but it doesn't seem to do much good. We can keep giving these complaints, but that's about all we can do.

F. Martineau: I think the biggest problem is that every time they open a facility, they close the other one. So we don't gain any, you know, getting rid of waiting. It's not happening.

W. Gooding: And the seniors — there are more seniors coming up every day. They're not going to go away. There are lots of baby-boomers coming up, and it's going to be really a disaster in another ten years, so we've got to get cracking and do something right now about it.

F. Martineau: You don't build a facility or open a facility in a few days. You have to have staff.

[1745]

B. Lekstrom (Chair): All right. Well, both Floris and Winnifred, I thank you for your presentation here. It's certainly something that I think all British Columbians want to make sure can be accommodated in our great province. We have a wonderful place. We want to make sure that we improve it.

Thank you for taking the time to come and talk to us.

W. Gooding: Thank you very much for listening to our problems. We appreciate it.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Our next presentation this evening is from Wayne Lucier.

Good evening, Wayne.

W. Lucier: Hi. My name is Wayne Lucier. I just got hired in Williams Lake. I work with the homeless. I work with a lot of street youth, and I have been doing this for a number of years, working for the Boys and Girls Club. I work for the Cariboo Chilcotin Métis Association at times. All the jobs that I do or the different agencies that I work for in town — it's all more or less the same thing.

This last couple of months I've been hired as a new outreach worker for the new MEIA program that they're actually running in B.C. Because I've worked with a lot of homeless and youth for the last couple of years, I was given a job to actually try and find housing for a lot of people who were in town.

I want to give you some numbers that were done in a survey last year. They did a survey of homeless in Williams Lake. In Williams Lake what we found were 48 adults and 16 youth — when I say youth, that's from 17 to 21 years old — who were homeless here in town. When we say homeless, that's including the people who were couch surfing, staying with friends and stuff, and staying at the friendship centre and some of the other shelters in town.

Excuse me. It was 64 people who were counted as being homeless in town.

What I'm finding right now, too, in Williams Lake is our lack of housing for a lot of the people. Williams Lake Social Housing has a waiting list, as of last year, of 15 families and 25 single people who are waiting for housing. Urban aboriginal housing has a waiting list of 120 adults and the same for children.

The average rate that a lot of them get for rent, especially the youth, is \$450. I have a very hard time finding that price range in town. The average rent I've been finding is around \$550, and it goes up from there. What we need to look at, maybe, is some subsidized income for them to actually get into some of these places. Right now, for a lot of them, where they have to live is very unsafe. It's substandard housing.

One of the intake workers, one of my co-workers, was telling me that actually one of the places where they were living had a dirt floor in the bathroom, and they're getting charged the same rate as everybody else because most of the landlords in town know how much money they get through child services.

Twenty-eight people were without permanent housing at the time of the survey. Of those 28 people, 75 percent of them had not had a house or a place to live anywhere from one month up to a year. Two of the people had been homeless for over a year here in Williams Lake; 39 percent of the people they surveyed — and I think they surveyed 200 people in that time frame — had been homeless at some point in time.

[1750]

Of that, 52 percent of them had been homeless for up to a year. Also, of that 200 people, seven people had been homeless for more than a year in there. Eighteen percent of them, and this involves a lot of the youth,

had to pay rent through sexual activities or illegal activities, which is putting them even more at risk.

At present in Williams Lake we have no shelter for the youth at all. If they can get into the Cariboo Friendship centre, they have to be signed in either by their parents or a consenting adult; otherwise, there's no place in Williams Lake for the youth to go.

Forty-two percent of the people that we surveyed have also moved more than ten times in the last 12 months for different reasons. Either it's because it's poor-quality housing, or else that's how they're actually keeping a roof over their heads. They just move when they can't afford to pay the rent anymore.

Most of the people, especially the youth who are working here in town, are only making minimum wage, and they cannot afford to go on independent living on their own with what they're making on minimum wage. We need shelters in Williams Lake, specifically just for the youth. We need long-term housing for the youth.

We also need places where, if people are intoxicated or on drugs — those two different types of addictions.... They are refused shelter for the night. I know there are going to be people who say that they're allowed to go there, but most of the time if they show up when they're intoxicated or high, they are turned away. So we need some kind of housing in town that's going to take them in, because it's that or else they're living out on the streets.

Of the 200 youth that they surveyed in this, 60 of them are considered to be at risk of being homeless on any given day. When they did that survey with the youth, 28 were without permanent housing. Unfortunately, when we deal with different agencies in town, if they're couch surfing or they're in one of the shelters, they are not considered homeless, even though they are. So 75 percent of the youth that they talked to were considered homeless at different times. They had no place to live.

When they surveyed the 200 people here in Williams Lake, 14 percent of them were without permanent housing at the time. Seven of the 200 people have been homeless for more than a year in the last couple of years. I already said that sexual activities, illegal activities accounted for 18 percent of them having to pay their rent that way, and 56 percent of them shared rent with different people, but they had difficulties with the people they had to share rent with.

More than anything else, Williams Lake lacks affordable housing for the youth. Often the only available housing is very poor quality, with substandard security and privacy, and most people just will not rent to anybody who is under 20 years old. I'm having a very hard time finding places for young people who are going on independent living. Living in group homes — a lot of them just can't handle that anymore. That's all I have to say.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Well, thank you, Wayne, for speaking to us about the issues. Certainly, working first hand with them, you bring a good perspective to that. I'm going to look to members of the committee

if they have any questions regarding what you've brought here this evening.

[1755]

J. Kwan: With the homelessness count, the survey that was done last year, how does that compare to previous years in terms of the demographics, in terms of the numbers changing of the people that were showing up to be homeless? Do we have that information?

W. Lucier: I'm not sure on the exact numbers, but I know from doing food programs in the park and stuff that the number is increasing every year. But numbers-wise I really couldn't tell you.

J. Kwan: What about the question of demographics? Are you seeing different people showing up on the streets?

W. Lucier: Actually, yeah. In the last couple of years there are a lot of people now on the streets that I have never seen in Williams Lake before. I think a lot of them are actually in transit. When the fruit-picking season is on in the south, we're getting a lot of people who are coming down from up north or travelling through, and the same thing when the work is finished down there. They're passing through Williams Lake again.

Also, I'm finding that it's harder and harder for them to find work, so now a lot of them are actually in transit from moving up north and moving through Williams Lake, heading down south, because it's much easier to live down there in the wintertime than it is here.

R. Lee: Over the last few years the unemployment rate has been decreasing in this area. Right now it's probably around 6 percent. Do you see that the youth are getting more jobs?

W. Lucier: Yeah, there are more youths getting jobs, but there are also more of the employers who are taking advantage of that, where they do not have to pay them the minimum wage, where they do that training thing. That just adds to their problems. They can't afford to pay rent and buy groceries on that. It's just impossible.

Yeah, we do have more jobs, but most of the jobs that are coming about.... People can't survive on that. Most of it is minimum wage.

R. Lee: The homeless youth that you encounter or that you're dealing with, are they...?

W. Lucier: Some of them are working three jobs. The one girl that I was actually working with today is working three jobs right now, and I just found her a place today. The rent that she can afford is \$450, and I actually found one place in town that she could rent for \$400. But she's working at three jobs just to maintain that.

So her chances of going to school and upgrading to better herself are, right now, virtually nil, because she's working all the time just to pay that \$400 a month.

B. Simpson: Just some clarification, Wayne. You talked about this 64 that were actually homeless at the time of the study, and you've included couch surfing and so on in there, but then you gave us numbers for wait-lists for social housing.

W. Lucier: Yes.

B. Simpson: And those numbers are substantially higher. What's happening with those folks? If they're not out in the street, what are they doing?

W. Lucier: There are a lot of places in town where there's more than one family that's living together.

B. Simpson: Okay. So they're doing those kinds of things. They're hoping to get into social housing, but they're having to find other accommodation.

W. Lucier: Yes. Even right now for a lot of the apartment buildings in town, there's a waiting list to get into them.

D. Hayer: I was visiting Williams Lake two or three weeks ago and talking to some of the people here. They were saying that they were having a difficult time finding some of the workers even at \$8 an hour. Was that wrong information, then? Are there not enough jobs available?

W. Lucier: Well, I think there are a lot of jobs available. For instance, in the mills here in town, which would be a great place for a lot of these guys or girls to work, they'd need at least grade 12 or else be going to school at the time. A lot of people I work with cannot do that. They cannot function that way. They are out of school, and they have, maybe, a grade 9 level, so none of the mills are going to touch these guys.

Same thing with a lot of the places that are advertising for work. They won't hire these guys because their reading and writing skills are substandard, and they can't.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Wayne, again, I want to thank you on behalf of the committee for coming and taking time to present your views and issues and the challenges you see and issues we should be looking at.

[1800]

Our next presentation this evening is from the Tsilhqot'in justice program, B.C. Schizophrenia Society. Joining us are Cindy Parsons and Brenda Humphre.

Good evening. How are you?

C. Parsons: Good evening. I am fine, thank you, and thank you so much for inviting us.

I need to say, first of all, that I don't have a formal presentation for you on paper because I just found out about this meeting yesterday. So I'm here just with my passion, and hopefully being able to explain what my role is in the community and how important it is that we continue funding.

I did drop off a poster at the front desk of our most recent project with the B.C. Schizophrenia Society.

I'm going to start off with them. I wear two hats in this community. I work as justice coordinator for the Tsilhqot'in justice program under the Tsilhqot'in National Government office. I also work as regional coordinator eight hours a week for the B.C. Schizophrenia Society, supporting, educating and advocating for families.

I'm going to start off with the BCSS, and if I have time, I will talk about the Tsilhqot'in justice program. Mainly I'm here on behalf of the BCSS tonight.

I serve Williams Lake and area, which is Williams Lake, 100 Mile House and all the way to Anahim Lake, which is in total — including 15 bands — I believe a geographical area of about 60,000 square kilometres. So I do a little bit of travelling in my work, and eight hours a week — at which I've been hired for the last two years — is not sufficient time to do the work I need to do to support families. That is a fact.

I don't have a bunch of statistics for you. What I do have is that I was recently at a conference in Vancouver last week. We have our regional coordinators yearly conference. There was some updated information. The B.C. Schizophrenia Society has several projects on the go. Our most recent is police intervention and emergency psychiatric care: a blueprint for change. I believe this will be available on our website with the B.C. Schizophrenia Society, which is www.bcscs.org.

In doing a lot of consultation with communities across the province, including police officers from right across the province, some of the things that came out of this report are that they are saying that wait times in hospitals are far too long and that police are still being used as gateway people, which is unacceptable. Police officers themselves are saying that it's only by coming to the attention of the courts and eventually being sentenced to jail that some people suffering from severe mental illness get the medical treatment and other resources they need to recover and manage their illness.

Once in jail they finally receive proper assessments, diagnosis, medical treatment and comprehensive case management. In addition to their mental illness, patients are now doubly stigmatized by the fact that they've now been in prison. So they've got a double whammy. They're not only mentally ill; they're now criminals also. In fact, families and others are regularly encouraged to press charges with their mentally ill family members, hoping that the offender will at least obtain medical treatment within the forensic system.

During public consultations one correctional officer estimated that there has been an 80-percent increase of people with serious mental illness over the last ten years in our prison population. I find this very disturbing, as does our BCSS Williams Lake branch, as we discuss these issues every month in our support meetings — how we're going to support family members of people that have mental illness when there's not enough funding to do that.

B. Humphre: Perhaps I could just introduce myself at the moment to let you know that it is not just where the rubber hits the road that Cindy takes care of. We in

the Cariboo are very, very involved with our mentally ill loved ones and for families.

Personally, I sit on the provincial board of the B.C. Schizophrenia Society as well as chair the public policy committee. I also sit nationally on the Schizophrenia Society, and I sit on a subcommittee, which is the education committee. You need to know that we are working very, very hard, and we are very disturbed both at the grunt-work level and at the decision-making level as to what is happening to our people.

[1805]

I own a retail store, and even today I have people come into my store that have a mental illness. I don't mean somebody that has a severe and persistent mental illness of schizophrenia. I'm talking about depression. People know that I'm a little sympathetic to mental illness, and hence, I have a lot of people come to me to just express that they are frustrated.

We are working very hard, and we really need to have our voices heard. I am very grateful that we have a voice here, and we would like to make it strong, and we would like to make it loud.

C. Parsons: Thank you, Brenda. I was thinking: boy, don't I have a loud enough voice? I think I do, but okay.

What I wanted to say about that was.... Like I said, I work eight hours a week with the BCSS and that took advocating, on behalf of the Williams Lake branch and its members, with Interior Health for funding for our region. I think they advocated for about four years and sent in a proposal every year until it was accepted. They said: "Okay. You can have one day a week to support families."

It's not good enough. As long as we have people being put in jails and jails being used as our mental health resource, it's not good enough. As long as we have homeless, it's not good enough. We still have a long way to go.

Most recently we have had a case in Williams Lake. I've asked the mother's permission to talk about this case, and she's quite comfortable with bringing it to the forefront. Recently this year we had our Sikh temple burned down in Williams Lake by a young man who was mentally ill and who's suffering from schizophrenia. He went to the hospital to get help and did not receive the help he needed. He left the hospital because he was sitting too long in emergency, which is our gateway crisis stabilization unit — sitting in emergency for however long it takes. This young man chose to leave. It took too long. He was very anxious and ended up burning down the Sikh temple and is now in forensics. He has been found not criminally responsible due to a mental illness.

In the meantime our community suffered deeply. The Sikh community suffered deeply, their families suffered deeply, and this young man himself suffered deeply. He's still in forensics and will be there for approximately a year under supervision and assessment and stuff.

I believe that we could prevent these things from happening in our community if we could strengthen our education, our support and our advocacy for families. We need to have a voice.

That's all I'm going to say for now. Are there any questions?

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you, Cindy, and thank you, Brenda.

Are there questions of the presenters here this evening?

J. Kwan: You mentioned that people with mental illnesses are now finding themselves in jail for a variety of reasons. In the information you're receiving, does it indicate that there's now been a pattern of a revolving-door situation where people with mental illness are coming in and out of jails and presumably for petty crime-type things? To that end, what are you calling for the government to do to address the issue around mental illness — specific recommendations? Is it a mental health plan? Is it a mental health advocate?

I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I just want to get a better understanding of what it is that you want the committee to consider asking the Minister of Finance in the budget presentation.

C. Parsons: I appreciate those words. I think the words "mental health plan" would be a really good start — a national mental health plan. We have to put mental health at the forefront. If we look at the dollars that are given to other organizations and not to serve the mentally ill, I feel quite ashamed of that. I'm a taxpayer too. I work. If I had a choice where my tax dollars went, I would want to put more into the social services that are going to help build strong communities and help members of our community lead healthy lives, rather than having them in all these systems that are quite foreign to some people.

[1810]

I. Black: Your passion in the area is obvious. The expenditures in the area of mental illness are now over a billion dollars a year. My question has to do with the view that you have on the amount of money that's being spent. Clearly, you're seeing shortcomings in your area that you'd like to see addressed.

The question is: where, in your mind, is that money being spent today, from an allocation standpoint, that's inappropriate? If you had to prioritize some of the things you've touched on — because you've touched on some really important points here — can you give us a sense of some of the...? I'm using the phrase silver bullet — forgive me — because I can't think of a more respectful one. Are there one or two areas, in the five or six that you've mentioned, where you would put additional money if it were made available or reallocate it from the over \$1 billion that's spent in this area?

C. Parsons: When you say \$1 billion, are you talking about a Canadian figure?

I. Black: No — B.C. That's in B.C.

C. Parsons: In B.C. — okay. What I have here from a recent document that the BCSS has put out is the eco-

conomic burden of schizophrenia. We're just talking schizophrenia right now. We're not talking about the other major mental illnesses.

Estimated number of Canadians with schizophrenia: 234,305. These are 2004 statistics. Estimated direct health care and non-health care costs: \$2.2 billion. Total estimated cost for the year 2004: \$6.85 billion, including productivity loss estimate....

I. Black: Just for context, are those federal numbers or B.C.?

C. Parsons: These are federal — for Canada.

If you're saying \$1 billion for B.C., what I'm saying is that the Cariboo-Chilcotin.... I'd like to know how much of that funding we're getting here, because we're constantly fighting for funding. Like I said, I have an eight-hour-a-week position. That's not good enough.

We have mental health services being cut back here constantly. I sat on a committee a couple of years ago. We were talking about getting a ten-bed tertiary unit here called the Heritage House, for the mentally ill. We sat and negotiated all these months, and then all of a sudden, it was blown by the wayside. We didn't get anything. It was changed back to something else and not to serve the mentally ill.

Right now in this region, we have about 30,000 people, I think, in Williams Lake and surrounding area, and we have five beds at the crisis unit and five beds in a residential home here in Williams Lake. Ten beds? That's not good enough.

What I'm saying is that families are owning the burden. Families are forced to take time off work and take care of their mentally ill loved ones, because who else is going to do it? I think it's the government's responsibility to help take care of these issues also.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Cindy and Brenda, I want to thank you. To come before us and say that you weren't prepared or whatever.... I thought you did an incredible job.

If you do want to follow through with a full written submission, we accept those until October 20. The information is on the back table on how to get it to us as well.

B. Humphre: Okay — great. Thank you so much.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Just before we call our next presenter this evening, I'd like to recognize, from the city of Williams Lake, Councillor Surinderpal Rathor.

Welcome. It's nice being in your community.

Our next presentation this evening is from the Williams Lake and District Chamber of Commerce. Joining us is Roger Solly.

Good evening, Roger.

R. Solly: Good evening. Mr. Chairman, committee members and guests, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening.

Firstly, I'd like to congratulate the government on its recently announced increase in the estimated surplus for 2006-2007. This reflects positively on the government's fiscal policies and practices over the past year. However, a surplus such as is now anticipated will bring pressure to increase spending. It is our position that prudent fiscal management be maintained and the expected surplus be applied to debt reduction.

The benefit of this debt reduction is that future interest savings will free up moneys for future reinvestment in the economy. For example, a \$1.2 billion debt reduction at, say, 5-percent interest reduces future interest costs by \$60 million per year. This approximates the annual operating budget of our local school district, just to put it in perspective.

[1815]

All communities in the Cariboo are resource-dependent. Consequently, to maintain the long-term viability of the forest industry is of paramount importance to us. While the new softwood agreement leaves some uncertainty for the near future, there are ongoing concerns, such as stumpage bingo, that could be addressed.

We encourage the government to recognize the specialized difficulties faced by the value-added sector of the forestry industry. These businesses were faced with duties well above the cost of lumber in their products.

We also encourage the provincial government to work with the federal government to achieve a favourable outcome of the Taseko Mines proposal west of Williams Lake. This mine has the potential to enhance direct and indirect employment in the Chilcotin and Williams Lake areas.

The reality of a resource-based economy is that to produce and transport our commodities to market, we need a strong infrastructure in place. Continuing investment in infrastructure, such as highway improvements, is necessary. It will aid the transportation of our products to market, and it will enhance and encourage tourism throughout the province.

On another issue, the chamber encourages the use of P3s — public-private partnerships — to provide better value for money for the taxpayers. We also recommend that the government be more open with capital project planning by publishing ministry capital project proposals prior to approval.

One item of ongoing concern to business is the shortage of skilled trades and professionals. We encourage the government to work with various trades and professional organizations to address the impediments to accreditation of foreign-trained professionals and trades personnel. Consideration should be given to implementing a co-op or training tax credit to assist and encourage the training of apprentices in the workplace. Such practical experience speeds the development of these students and assists the affected employers to provide the necessary training.

There are a few taxation issues I'd like to address. B.C. has one of the higher rates of capital taxation in the world. I could rephrase that and say a tax on capital as opposed to the capital tax, as we would typically know it. Some examples of these taxes include the capi-

tal tax on large financial institutions, the property transfer tax and probate duties. These taxes on capital create a disincentive to large businesses to locate in B.C. The PST, as currently charged on legal fees, is a tax on all businesses — the users of the legal services — not just the lawyers.

Finally, we request that the government announce as soon as possible whether or not they will match the change to the dividend tax credit rules announced last spring by the federal government. Such an announcement would eliminate the current uncertainty in tax planning. If that announcement were to go along with the federal government's rules, it would simplify taxation reporting for our B.C. citizens.

Thank you very much for allowing me this opportunity. Now it's your turn.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you, Roger. I'll look to members of the committee.

D. Hayer: A very good presentation. I have two questions. One is: how is the economy in Williams Lake doing compared to, say, 2001? The second thing is: are there many employers paying the \$6 training wage in Williams Lake?

R. Solly: My feeling is that the economy is relatively static. There is a lot of capital expenditure that's happened this year. One hopes that that will continue into the future. Our population growth has not been phenomenal. It's been upward, but just marginally.

I don't think I can specifically answer your question regarding the number of \$6-per-hour employees that we have. I don't have that information at my fingertips.

[1820]

B. Simpson: Thanks, Roger, for the presentation. I appreciate some of the explicit comments that you brought for this general area because the chamber has been making presentations on the general themes, so that was helpful.

The one that I'm interested in is your comments around the value-added sector. If you could be a little bit more explicit, if you've got some more information about how that sector could be assisted....

R. Solly: No. It's a difficult one. I think, as you are well aware, that the situation with the softwood is that their duties were based on a finished product that in effect took the lumber and finished it. So their duties were at a higher base than the mills, and I don't have a suggestion. Obviously, they've been hurt by it, because it really puts them at a disadvantage to compete outside of the country.

B. Simpson: Okay. So it's an area that you'd like us to examine.

R. Solly: It's an area that I think some thought should be given to. I'm sure that members from that

industry have done a lot of thought. Perhaps they should be contacted.

J. Horgan: I want to echo Bob's comments that you're the first representative from the chamber that narrowed in specifically on concrete issues rather than talking in general terms. I certainly appreciate that, and all the other members do as well.

You did raise a new issue, and that is that you talked about publishing capital project inventories. Have some fun with that. Talk for a couple of minutes about that.

R. Solly: I think I borrowed that one from the B.C. chamber as well.

J. Horgan: That's the first I've heard of it, so I must have missed them.

R. Solly: I think the idea behind it is: in capital projects there is a procedure involved. A project is approved. Dollars are then set aside by Treasury Board. I think a lot of that probably stays within the ministry.

It would create a more open and — to use the jargon of the day — transparent reporting of what's ongoing from a provincial point of view. They're all capital dollars that we're talking about here. But it would create more transparency with respect to major capital expenditures undertaken by the province. That's all.

J. Horgan: It speaks to the point that Roger made. I know — certainly with education capital — for example, there's a planning phase, there's a land acquisition phase, and then there's a construction phase. That is, to the best of my knowledge, internal information.

I know that if you're at a school board meeting in an area where there's growth in the school board, they want to know when that school is going to get built. It's a land issue for the trustees. They can't talk about it. If there are people from the ministry there, they won't talk about it. Certainly, in the area of school capital, I agree with you that a more transparent view of just what stage you're at in the process....

R. Solly: Yeah, depending on the stage. Obviously, if you're in a negotiating situation to acquire land, you don't want to give away the pot of gold before you actually have the deal consummated.

I. Black: I want to pick up on one of your remarks about P3s. Further to the notion of the inventory of capital projects, there's about a hundred billion dollars' worth of capital projects ongoing right now to restore the things like the transportation infrastructure deficit, etc., going back several years. During the mid- to late '90s there were a lot of cabinet ministers of the day who made very positive and almost necessity-type comments relative to using P3s.

Of course, in recent weeks and months it's become a political football once again as this government has actually taken up the use of P3s. It's now an interesting seesaw argument back and forth. As one who's arm's length from the political system, I want to explore your comment about why you are encouraging the use of P3s and why the chamber does view them as beneficial to the community, etc.

R. Solly: I think to me one of the main benefits of the P3 is where you have an operation such as a health care facility, maybe even a hospital.... I think Abbotsford has the hospital that's under a P3.

[1825]

You have the opportunity to.... Maybe I'm going to shoot my mouth off a little bit. Private operators seem to have the ability to be a little more flexible, quite often, in their operations. That flexibility can often result in efficiencies and lower operating costs. I think that's one of the areas that our society can benefit from.

It certainly has a significant involvement in these kinds of projects, but from the operational point of view, you turn it over to the free enterprise people who do that very well. It's a win-win.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Roger, I want to thank you for taking the time to present to our committee here this evening. I'm sure, like everyone else, your schedule is busy. Again, we appreciate it very much.

For our next presentation this evening, I will call on Surinderpal Rathor. Good evening.

S. Rathor: Good evening, Chair. As you mentioned, my name is Surinderpal Rathor — even though today is a bad day for us because of having a council meeting. I tried to leave my twin brother, who is a councillor, at home. The son of a gun reaches before me wherever I go.

Welcome, each and every one of you, to the city of Williams Lake — some very familiar faces. This is my fifth term on city council. Certainly, I'm not representing the council, but some thoughts I'm going to bring to the committee and some of the issues — not some, but the majority of the issues — I'm going to raise are being raised with the Premier by both our local MLAs and different ministers from time to time.

The idea for me is to represent those issues to this committee. Hopefully, then the committee goes back and makes their recommendation. It will not come from one particular minister or MLA. It will come from Victoria, and that would be really good.

Let me begin by thanking the Minister of Finance and the committee for coming out and listening to the grassroots of British Columbia. Equally, I'd like to thank, besides our local MLAs, Mr. Hayer, who was here two or three weekends back. Sometimes we think: why doesn't this guy get sick and tired of visiting us from time to time?

I really sincerely hope more MLAs from the lower mainland can visit central and northern British Columbia. Then they will realize what our needs are. Definitely, the needs are a lot different compared to what

they are in Victoria and the lower mainland — the way of our geographical situations.

I want to begin by thanking the government for some of the policies. I really can't complain much, regardless if it's NDI funding or pine beetle action plan or awarding the university to Williams Lake or awarding the memorial complex or live site and giving 100 percent ticketing money to the city of Williams Lake. I'm really delighted with those policies.

I wanted to go on record recommending and suggesting to the committee and to the Finance Minister to pay off the debt. I believe very strongly that you cannot spend the money you don't have. We have to pay the debt. But at the same time, when we have so much surplus money — either through our resources, or whatever the means — I believe we have to find a balance to provide services to British Columbians as well as paying off our debt.

Most of the issues have been covered by different speakers before me. I'm going to reiterate that in no shape or form they're in any priority order. A couple of items I'll bring to the committee at the end, which are priorities for the council. Like I said earlier, I'm not representing the council, but I'm knowledgeable about the issues I'm going to raise.

Four-laning of the highway is very important for us, from Cache Creek to Prince George. As we're all aware, the infrastructure for B.C. Rail, the safety of the rail and the availability of the cars to the resource-based community.... I'm a sawmill worker. Half of the time we can't find enough cars for our industry to ship out material that we want to send to the market, and we have to use more trucks. When we use more trucks, there's more traffic on the highway and more pressure on the highway. If we have four-laning on the highway done, it would be fantastic. The government announced it a short while back. Sometimes I feel the process is very slow. I would appreciate it if those processes on the highway could be speeded up.

[1830]

For us, the multi-event centre.... We are talking and working, and the issue has been raised again to the Premier and other concerned people. I would appreciate support on the multi-event centre. It's something exactly similar to what Penticton has gone through recently — if you people are aware or not? It is a plus-or-minus \$45 million project, and we are hoping, with equal three-partner funding with the federal and provincial and city.... Everybody would appreciate it, because it's much needed. The way our economy in the city of Williams Lake is going, we would definitely need it.

Our ambulance service is in jeopardy from time to time. Being in the sawmill, I know that if you don't have an ambulance when somebody gets hurt in industry, we will definitely do everything we need to do to get the injured person to the hospital. But definitely an ambulance is needed. When our ambulance is up in Anahim Lake or the surrounding area, we have no service, and we are depending on either Quesnel or Prince George. It's an hour away.

I would certainly appreciate it if this committee can make some recommendation. The people on the call-in list are waiting to be called. Some extra funding could be made available for those people.

Also, I have a request to the government — and especially to Interior Health, through the government: if better studies could be done before they close the facilities. It doesn't make sense to me. "Today we're going to shut down the Cariboo Lodge; tomorrow we're going to open more beds." It's a perception in the community that somebody is playing games. So it would be much appreciated if, before we shut down any facilities, some study is done in a better manner. Seniors spoke very highly about their issues.

Another issue I had, of which I was informed recently in the last couple of weeks — about \$6 million worth. We are building a new fire hall, and our fire people have worked out with the city of Williams Lake ambulance station to have the site next to the fire hall, like Langley has done.

It's over half a million dollars we would be spending for the ambulance people, but my problem is that I am told the ambulance people cannot sign a contract before we build. My concern is why we have to spend half a million dollars when we don't know if tomorrow they will move in or not, because this has happened three or four times in the past.

Therefore, I would request that this committee put some pressure on the ambulance people or whoever is concerned. Hopefully, they can give the specs, and they can move in, and we will build the facility they want, which is partnership. We would like to have all our protective services together, but unfortunately we cannot move the RCMP because of the contract they have at the present building.

My next issue is that our policing cost is skyrocketing. The government has come up with the formula or the new plan called regional policing. As you are aware, Mr. Chairman, anybody under 15,000 population.... We pay 70 percent. We the city of Williams Lake write the biggest single cheque for the policing cost. Now the province will be charging extra money from the regional districts where the population is less than 5,000.

My problem is: how are we going to provide the service? When they are going to pay for the service, they are going to demand — not ask; they're going to demand — the services. But we are not given anything.

The police officers I have.... If they have to go out of the city of Williams Lake, how are we going to serve the city of Williams Lake? Crime is skyrocketing. We can't control those issues, so we need some help.

Last but not least, my request is.... In the past few years, government shut down the counsellors' position, the trade colleges, the nursing colleges. It's very hard for the resource-based communities to have the tradespeople.... I'm in the trades, being a certified journeyman electrician.

[1835]

I'm a Tolko employee, by the way — and I want to go on record saying that — for 32 years. My bosses spoke to you a little earlier. We've been advertising for

over a year. We cannot find electricians, believe it or not. We are running four or five shifts in production, and we don't have enough people to look after it and do the work. So the stress is on the other people who are working, and they had a life.

We are committed to doing what we need to do. We need the other provinces.... Either it's Alberta, or it's the States. Basically, if I can use loose terminology, they're bribing those people to come and work for them. Some incentive for the nurses and some incentive for the tradespeople to stay in the northern communities would be much appreciated.

Those are some of my requests. I will be looking forward to seeing some of your members at the UBCM next month in Victoria and from time to time.

I would appreciate it if I could seek your support on the multi-event centre, the ambulance contract and the policing costs. These are the three main priorities that councillors ask for on record.

If there are any questions, I would be more than delighted to answer, Mr. Chairman.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you very much for taking time to come and speak with our committee here this evening. I'll look to members of the committee, if they have any questions.

B. Simpson: Thank you, Councillor Rathor, for skipping your council meeting and coming out.

S. Rathor: No, I'm not, actually. The council meeting is at 7:30. I can afford it.

B. Simpson: You're okay for time.

Mayor Scott Nelson, I know, said that he's very busy today. There are a lot of activities on the go for him.

You've listed the issues you've got. I have had discussions with council as well. You have a wildland interface fire plan. You're one of the first areas to have a comprehensive plan. I know that council has raised some issues around how you now move into the next phase of that.

Could you maybe talk a little bit about that in terms of budget implications of the next phase of actually doing the work?

S. Rathor: You know, Bob, it's very burdensome. Since this, for council, is not our area, we are trying our best. When we adopted the FireSmart plan, we were encouraging the community to reduce the fuel and to use other areas. But some of the provincial funding is being made available to us, and we are doing the best we can and having a city of Williams Lake emergency plan adopted, with the surrounding area. As you're aware, it comes under your jurisdiction as well as MLA Wyse's.

Our area is way, way bigger than what people in the lower mainland would expect or than they would know. It's in the thousands and thousands of square feet. When we have to provide service hundreds and hundreds of miles outside of Williams Lake, we are left with the minimum resources in town. All we can do is

either pray to almighty God or keep not our fingers but our toes crossed that nothing goes haywire in the city of Williams Lake.

We are working on it the best we can with the resources we have. That's all I can say.

J. Kwan: The requests you've made to the committee here — the three items that you've talked about.... Have you brought them to the attention of the ministers responsible? And if you have, what has their response been so far?

S. Rathor: Yes, we have made everybody aware. We are working on those, like I said.

The multi-event centre. We just finished the study. The study's been done, and it's very favourable. My understanding is that within a week to two weeks, a recommendation will be coming to council on a piece of paper. We will send it out to the community. The response has been very favourable.

The ambulance request. I made it to you. It's brand-new. The staff is working on the staff level. It has definitely come to the politicians' level, and we put it on our priority list, on the radar, to speak to the minister responsible when we come to the UBCM.

Like I said earlier, most of the issues I raised, Ms. Kwan, have been raised with our local MLAs, especially Mr. Hayer. Don't quit coming here. Don't take me wrong; I welcome — keep coming, Dave — speaking to them from time to time.

The answer is positive, but equally, I wanted the recommendation to go from this committee also.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Surinderpal, I want to thank you for taking time. I know that the life of a councillor is a busy one.

S. Rathor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You've been in those shoes, I'm fully aware.

Some of the faces I know; some of them I don't know. Welcome to the city of Williams Lake. I hope your trip was pleasant. Keep up the good work, all of you.

[1840]

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Our next presentation this evening is from the Lawyers of South Cariboo. Presenting is Constance Sauter.

Welcome to the committee, Constance.

C. Sauter: Good evening. The issue that I understand I should be addressing tonight is the question of legal aid in the Cariboo. I'm just going to begin by making the observation that a high proportion of the people in the Cariboo fall in a gap between people who qualify for the legal aid criteria and are able to get legal aid and others who simply don't have an income sufficient to hire a lawyer privately. So there is quite a large gap in a number of people in the Cariboo.

They become unrepresented litigants in court. That means a number of things. When they get into court, they take up more time within the court process be-

cause the process has to be explained to them by the judge. That drags things on. They often end up in court disputing issues that probably could have been resolved had they had legal advice and been properly advised of their rights and responsibilities, and things might have been settled otherwise.

[B. Ralston in the chair.]

Finally, the court registry staff is called upon to help them draft documents and also draft up resulting court orders once they finally complete things. Normally, a lawyer would do that.

The net result is that an excessive amount of court time is taken up because of people appearing without the assistance of a lawyer. That means, basically, an increase in the court budget. Or the alternative, if that isn't provided, is that things get backed up. People wait around all day.

The normal process is for a number of matters to be called for 9:30 or ten o'clock, depending on which level of court, in the morning. People show up — a whole bunch of them — and they sit around. They wait until their matter is called. In some cases they're there until the end of the day, and sometimes they don't get on because the court just runs out of time. Then they're put over to another day, and it's not the next day. It's the next available court day, which could be weeks and even months down the road.

This obviously has some implications for access to justice. From the point of view of the lawyers in the community, greater access to legal aid would be of great benefit to keep the process moving and to get people access to justice in a more timely manner.

One of the other issues we have here in the Cariboo is that we simply don't have enough lawyers. We are having some recruitment problems within the community. Much like doctors, a lot of people don't want to come out of the lower mainland. So we don't get as many lawyers. Right now we are about to lose yet another lawyer, just because he's moving out of the community.

We're especially low on lawyers who accept legal aid. What that means is that local clients are often given out-of-town legal aid. In terms of family law, just about all of the legal aid lawyers come from Kamloops. We have a couple here in town or in 100 Mile House.

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

That means that people don't communicate very efficiently with their lawyers. They see them on court days. They maybe speak to them on the telephone, or they see them if the lawyer happens to be in town for other matters and is maybe able to fit in an interview with a particular client.

One of the problems with that is that legal aid doesn't pay very well. The amount that it pays is \$83 to \$90 per hour, depending on the lawyer's year of call. Obviously, those more experienced get more. Most of the local lawyers are at least five years call — most of them, considerably more than that. They would nor-

mally charge at least \$175 an hour. So the legal aid rate is maybe half of what they can get from a paying client.

[1845]

Another issue is that legal aid bills are simply difficult to complete. They're time-consuming, and it's just troublesome. Speaking for myself, that's why I stopped doing legal aid. It was just too time-consuming and troublesome to be wrestling with these forms and getting them rejected because I hadn't dotted the right "i." That can't be addressed with money, but it might make it a little more economical, or it make a little more sense for lawyers. We might be a little more willing to deal with that, provided we were being more generously remunerated.

There are a couple of issues I wish to address that basically relate to the 100 Mile courthouse. The 100 Mile court is a circuit court, which means that judges, clerks, sheriffs — the staff — travel from Williams Lake on court days, open up the courthouse, and court happens. The court was promised 100 court days per year in 100 Mile House, but they've never received them. Then when more are requested, the answer is that statistics show we don't use 100 days. Of course we don't use 100 days, because we're never given them. It's just an endless circle.

What that means is that a lot of people who are poor may or may not have a legal aid lawyer and that if they can't be heard in 100 Mile, they have to go to the expense of travelling to Williams Lake. Their alternative is to stay in 100 Mile House but then have to wait that much longer to get a court date. They also suffer from the same thing. The court list is overburdened. The judge can't get through everything that day, and now they're put over to another day. With less than 100 days per year, they're just not getting the matter dealt with, and they sometimes have to return again and again before some answer is dealt with.

Another problem with the 100 Mile circuit is that legal aid provides for duty counsel for criminal matters but not for family matters. The duty counsel appears on list days, on heavy days where people are making their first appearance or maybe their second appearance. The duty counsel program is excellent because it gives clients a little bit of assistance. It tells them what their rights are and gives them some suggestions as to whether they should proceed with their court matter or, in the case of criminal law, whether they should maybe just throw in the towel, plead guilty and take their lumps. In the case of family matters, it's whether there really is a dispute here, or maybe they should just pay the child support that the other side is suggesting or concede on the custody matter — something like that.

Because there isn't duty counsel in 100 Mile, people never get the advantage of hearing duty counsel. The alternative, again, is to put their matter on the list in Williams Lake and maybe see duty counsel then.

As I say, it's a great program. It fills a gap, but it doesn't solve all of the problems. It certainly does assist unrepresented litigants. The duty counsel can sometimes make some sort of negotiations for an agreement, but it's not a long-term solution.

Those were basically the issues that we're finding here. There isn't enough legal aid. It's not stretching far enough in terms of serving enough people, in my submission. The fact the complications of that are just causing some difficulties really is stressing the court and court system.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Constance, thank you very much for coming to our committee and certainly bringing ideas on how we could improve things. I note there are a couple of questions.

[1850]

D. Hayer: Thank you very much. It was a good presentation.

I've got a few short questions. One is: how much is a five-year call lawyer paid? Is the legal aid form filled electronically? Also, is video conferencing used at all? I know in some areas they're using video conferencing to make it easy. Is that being used at all?

C. Sauter: Yes, we do have legal video conferencing — just to start with the last first. That causes some problems, because some of it has to be scheduled at certain times, particularly with criminal accused who are in custody. The link with Prince George Regional Correctional Centre is.... They have limited time to hook up with our courthouse, so certain things have to be done at certain times, and that sometimes does push other things back.

There hasn't been much use of video conferencing in family matters that I'm aware of. Occasionally it can be used. I haven't actually made use of it, so I can't speak much to it. My understanding is that it is fairly expensive, but it certainly would help with the distances that have to be covered in the Cariboo.

I remember the first question, which was what a five-year call would charge.

D. Hayer: Yes, and the other one was: could you file billing electronically to make it easier so there would be fewer problems?

C. Sauter: It is filed electronically now. I don't know whether that increases or lessens the problems. I know there are some problems with electronic filing. You still don't fill in the right box, or you miss a box or something like that. I think the problems could still exist.

As for the hourly rate that most lawyers charge, I can't speak to exactly what a five-year call would charge. I know that as a general principle lawyers start low and then, with their experience, work up. I think a five-year call might be very close to \$175. I think the highest rate lawyers are charging in this town is something like \$225. That would be for a very experienced lawyer with maybe 20 or 30 years call.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Has your organization spoken to the Legal Services Society and asked that family duty counsel be provided in 100 Mile for all the obvious reasons? If so, what's been their response?

C. Sauter: I don't know the answer to that. I haven't been participating in that. We've left some of that to the Canadian Bar Association, B.C. branch. They've done some talk. Locally we have not, as far as I know.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Constance, I want to thank you for taking time out of your schedule. Like all presenters, people have put some time and effort into what they would like to say, and we appreciate that very much.

Our next presentation this evening is from the Cariboo-Chilcotin Teachers Association. Joining us is Sheila Wyse. I work with a gentleman who has that last name down in Victoria.

S. Wyse: Yes, you do.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Welcome, Sheila.

S. Wyse: It's very nice to be here, and it's very nice to welcome all of you, who I always think of as movie stars because I only see you on TV.

I'm presenting tonight on behalf of the Cariboo-Chilcotin Teachers Association, and I represent over 400 teachers in this district. We are proud teachers in a public school system that we know can serve our students well.

The public school system has a history of new mandates from government that are not fully funded. An example is the teachers' salary increase in the last round of bargaining, when only the first year was funded, and boards were then forced to find the next two years of increases from their existing budgets.

Consequently, when the new policies are followed as they must be, then some other part of the system pays a price. The resources required for the new mandate end up reducing other services. Because of underfunding over an extended period, there is no longer a cushion of public education services that are nice to have but are not essential — field trips, band, swimming lessons.

[1855]

A principal once told me that I had to use one day a month for fundraising. "Why?" I asked. "So your class can have swimming lessons. The board no longer has a joint-use agreement with the city, so you'll need to raise the money so the kids can continue the lessons."

Well, I didn't fundraise — I'm a teacher — but I did inform the parents that their children would no longer have the swimming lessons paid for by the board. I'm not faulting the board of the day. They had choices to make, but this example illustrates how underfunding education forces boards to eliminate some programs to provide others.

This example leads us to the current situation. Bill 33 introduced class-size limits and limits to the number of students with special needs in a class. We think that's a good move for students. The limits are still higher than we believe are best for education, but at least most classes will be kept under the limit.

While it is true that classes can go over the limit if agreed to by elementary teachers or after consulta-

tion with secondary teachers, exceeding these limits shouldn't happen. The legislation requires that the principal and superintendent give assurances publicly that there are adequate learning conditions for the students in a class larger than 30. Administrators who really look in classrooms will not honestly be able to say to parents and the public that large classes provide adequate learning conditions, particularly in the diverse classrooms that characterize our school system today.

In our district we have some elementary classrooms with three-grade splits. Consider the range of student abilities in a single grade. In a typical grade 3 classroom there will be students who are not yet reading and students who are reading at a grade 6 level or higher. Now add in two more grades. Let's say grades 4 and 5. Now we will likely have children who are not reading in the same class as children who are reading at a grade 8 level or beyond. So the teacher will need to address the needs of students ranging from non-readers to confident adult readers. This goal can be more easily addressed when the class size is smaller. The larger the class, the more difficult it is to meet every child's needs. But will the smaller classes be funded?

The Ministry of Education assures us that there is adequate funding in the system to cover the provisions of Bill 33. We're skeptical. While there has been an overall decline in enrolment this year, a decline in itself does not produce an equivalent reduction in expenditures. Even when there are fewer students, the cost of running the schools is not reduced in proportion. A student or two from every class does not reduce the number of administrators, the cost of running a bus, the heating of the same number of classrooms and so on.

School district 27 has thousands of miles of bus runs requiring drivers, vehicle maintenance, fuel and insurance. The cost is the same whether 20 children ride the bus or 40 children ride the bus. The Cariboo-Chilcotin is known for severe winter weather conditions, which affect buses and also create huge heating and maintenance costs for buildings.

Our schools are spread out over an area the size of New Brunswick. As union president, I travel almost four hours to visit Anahim Lake. Support services, maintenance staff and senior management all have to travel the same distance. Consider that cost compared to other districts where travel from one end of the district to the other is probably 40 minutes, tops.

The ministry talks about \$20 million added to the budgets from last year. That's very little when the base is a \$4 billion budget. Further, that \$20 million is not more money than in the previous budget. It was the amount that was added to the budgets last year as part of the settlement of the teachers' strike. That additional funding was specified to reduce class sizes and improve class composition. All of it was spent on teachers, bringing 547 full-time-equivalent teachers into the system for a five-month period.

This year many districts, including ours, did not sit down and negotiate with teachers where those resources should go. Some of the \$20 million was as-

signed to more teacher assistants or increased cost of fuel or administrative support for the new computerized information system, ECESIS, for example. Even if all \$20 million were spent on teachers, it would produce only half as many teaching positions, because this year the \$20 million is for the full year rather than a half-year, as in the previous budget. It is, in effect, a budget reduction.

Overall, the \$20 million would at most cover the cost of only about 300 teachers this year. This means there will be over 200 teaching positions fewer in the province compared to last year — not more teachers to cover the class-size and class-composition limits. If more teachers are required to meet the class-size and class-composition requirements, then where will those teachers be found? Unfortunately, they will have to come out of other programs in the schools.

[1900]

Our expectation, and indeed our fear, is that the specialist teachers, already reduced in number by the budget restrictions of past years, will be used in regular classes, cutting out the services they should be providing. These are the counsellors, the teacher-librarians, the special education support teachers and the ESL teachers. Even if they don't entirely disappear, the time they can devote to support work will be diminished.

This district, like others in the province, is busy this week as they determine the actual numbers of students by the September 30 funding cut-off date. The official numbers will be available in a couple of months to see exactly what has happened to staffing this year. From anecdotal reports, we believe that losses will have occurred, losses that will have an impact on the quality of education that we can offer our students.

When setting the budget for the next school year, we urge government to provide the full funding needed to meet the terms and intent of Bill 33 without the need to eliminate the range of other teacher supports that make the classroom most effective for our students.

In closing, I'd just like to tell you my plan for the three p's, because I think it fits here quite well. First of all, I think this budget committee needs to develop a philosophy. Where do you think the province should be going? What should it look like? How will the citizens best be served by this coming budget? I think a philosophy is very important.

The second "p" is prevention. We've heard tonight from other people who've talked about the need for prevention in mental health. We certainly see it in schools. When children are in smaller classes, they get more attention. Teachers can then isolate and determine what the problems are and get help for students.

The third "p" in my three-"p" plan is to ask that you be proactive, not reactive. Thank you for your time.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Well, thank you very much, Sheila, for coming out here this evening to present to our committee. There will probably be a couple of questions.

B. Simpson: Thanks for the presentation. The question of funding for Bill 33 was part of the debate for Bill

33, and I'm wondering: is it possible, or will the BCTF be actually trying to quantify that? Because that was part of the problem, I think, in understanding what the implications are. So (1) will the BCTF be trying to quantify that, and (2) is that actually a doable exercise? Can you actually do that?

S. Wyse: Well, first of all, I think that we're going to see what funding is in place and what funding isn't in place once we have our numbers throughout the province.

B. Simpson: At the end of September.

S. Wyse: Today was the deadline for superintendents to get reports from schools, so it's just starting to settle down now. I think once there's a broad provincial picture of what's needed, then we'll see how much money is there. I've heard locally that there will be some concern about whether or not there's going to be enough funding, so I think that's all going to take a little while so that we can see it.

I. Black: I'm a bit of a numbers guy, so I start squirrelling away through a lot of this stuff, and this is a wonderful area in which to do it. I need you to reconcile something for me if you could. In the last five years the student population in this school district has gone down almost 19 percent, and over ten years it's gone down almost 30 percent. In the last five years the funding has gone up almost 20 percent on a per-student basis from about \$6,900 per student to \$8,320, where it is today.

I appreciate the fact that costs of transportation and things are really a pertinent part in this area, but that's an awfully big gap between some of the messages that you shared with us in your presentation. Can you help me reconcile that and help me understand how when a population goes down by 30 percent in ten years and funding on a per-student basis goes up 20 percent that we shouldn't be putting more pressure on the school board as to how they're spending that money locally?

S. Wyse: Well, I appreciate the fact that you're a numbers person. You'll have to appreciate the fact that I'm not. I'm not the school board representative here; I'm the teachers' representative. What I do see is that the increased costs are exactly what you said. They are continuing to increase, and despite the fact that we have declining enrolment, we still have a school. Whether the school is half full, completely full or three-quarters full, you still have a number of services that have to be provided.

[1905]

My concern is that when government brings in a new initiative, if it's not funded, it's not a gift to anybody. So my caution and my advice to this group is to please look very carefully when you're looking at the budget to see that what you have promised you are able to fulfil and that you don't jump in and promise more things that can't be funded.

J. Horgan: I'm loath to get into this too deeply because when we were debating Bill 33 in the Legislature, it was this very issue that created an enormous chasm between myself and the Chair that we've reconciled only now in the last couple of days.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): So for God's sake, be good.

[Laughter.]

J. Horgan: He's still in a position of authority on this question, but it does have to do with funding the implications of Bill 33. Certainly, in my school districts.... I have two in my constituency: 62 and 79. One is increasing in enrolment; one is declining in enrolment. In both situations, talking to the superintendents and the trustees in those areas....

I appreciate that you're a teacher, Sheila, but from your perspective, looking at another district — just to take you out of Williams Lake for a moment — how do you reconcile the notion that you've got two districts going in opposite directions with respect to the numbers that Iain has just outlined for us, yet their concerns are exactly the same? That is, how do we address the needs in the classroom with the compressed time line that's been given for meeting the class size and class composition requirements of the new act, having been approved by the principal, the superintendent, the PACs and various other people — and then getting to the school board all in three weeks?

It's not so much a fiscal issue at this point. It's a matter of: how do you operationalize, as you said, yet another process laid down on top of the school district? Take yourself out of Williams Lake, and tell me how that happens.

S. Wyse: Well, the whole process of Bill 33 and these deadlines that have to be in place.... They're needed for Bill 33, but we've always had the problem — this would be school districts throughout the province have the problem — that funding is based on student enrolment on September 30. Everything is geared towards: how many students do we have on September 30? And everybody is desperate to get students registered in their classes.

In the lower mainland what happens now is that you've got districts trying to recruit from other districts in order to get that funding. That's not a new problem. We have traditionally always had the problem of September 30 being a deadline by which you then know what you're going to be able to spend for the coming year. You know what you've got, and it's hard to put resources in place, whether it's here or any district.

D. Hayer: Thank you very much for your presentation. I have three cousins who are teachers, and my daughter is studying to be a teacher, so I can relate to some of these things you're saying.

Surrey has a different problem. That's the area I represent. Our population is going up, so we need more and more teachers. On the other hand, some of the areas with populations going down have different issues.

My question to you: if the population goes down, do you think they should still keep the same number of teachers if the numbers of students are going down? Or if the numbers of students go down, should they maybe adjust the number of teachers to lower numbers?

S. Wyse: Well, I think you are not going to have an empty school full of teachers. That doesn't make sense. There's going to have to be a situation where when a school is in such declining enrolment, that it's lost so many students, it's going to have to lose some teachers. Conversely, in places like Surrey where they're increasing, they need to bring those teachers in. I'm not saying that we need to keep teachers for the sake of keeping the building full, but I am saying that it's really important for students to be in smaller classes, and for that we need more teachers.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Well, Sheila, I'm sure we could spend all evening and probably the better part of the week talking about this issue, but I want to thank you for coming forward to present to our committee. As I've indicated to all the others, certainly every presentation is given full consideration by our committee, so I thank you for taking the time.

Our next presentation this evening. I will call the 100 Mile House and District Women's Centre Society. Terri Lewis is.... Terri isn't with us yet?

[1910]

Okay, Terri was our last registered presenter. We could at this time move to the open-mike session, and if Terri comes, we would go back and entertain her presentation.

I'll call on our first open-mike presenter, Mr. Doug Belsher.

Under this process on the open mike session, we run a five-minute. It varies from the 15-minute presentation. The presenter presents to the committee, and there are no questions or dialogue under that.

Good evening, Doug, and welcome to the committee.

D. Belsher: Good evening, and thank you for hearing me. I'm sorry I haven't got a more formal presentation, but I only learned of your visit midday today. I'm a resident of Williams Lake, a senior citizen and also a member of the Canadian Snowbird Association, which is a national not-for-profit advocacy organization dedicated to actively defending and improving the rights and privileges of travelling Canadians.

In 2002 the Canadian Snowbird Association undertook a national evaluation of federal, provincial and territorial government policies of importance to travelling Canadians. In order to gauge the levels of improvement from our initial recommendation, the CSA undertook a follow-up study during the summer and fall of 2005. What was examined was the following: the preservation of health coverage for regular travellers, access to emergency health coverage when travelling, access to prescription drugs for use during travel, access to voting rights for travellers and availability of government information.

I'm sorry to report that B.C. did not rate very high on the scorecard, and I do have a scorecard here. In fact, in the area of access to emergency health coverage when travelling, British Columbia was the lowest in all of Canada. In the area of access to prescription drugs for use during travel, British Columbia was again the lowest in all of Canada.

Canadians who embark on long-term travel nonetheless pay a full year of taxes to the federal government and to their provincial or territorial governments. They must pay for infrastructure and other government services that they do not use for a full year, but one thing they expect and deserve is to have full, equal access to the health care and drug coverage for which they pay taxes. Unfortunately, in many cases these taxpayers are denied the same benefits as those who remain at home. Canadians should not have to choose between exercising their right to travel and having access to the health care they may need.

British Columbia's practice for reimbursing Canadians for health services required while abroad contravenes subparagraph 11(1)(b)(ii) of the Canada Health Act. B.C. reimburses only \$75 for emergency in-patient hospital care for adults and children. This is the lowest rate of out-of-country reimbursement in all of Canada. While B.C. would not disclose its day rate provided for emergency service required while within B.C., \$75 is well below the average rates paid for in-province services in all other Canadian jurisdictions. B.C. is also one of the few jurisdictions that does not reimburse emergency out-patient hospital services at all.

Our recommendation is to reimburse emergency in-patient and out-patient services required by travellers at the same rate per day as that paid for similar services within the province and continue to update these rates to match changes in real costs.

I could comment, too, on the prescription drugs if I have time. If not, we'll leave it at that.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Couple minutes left, Doug.

D. Belsher: Access to prescription drugs for use during travel. British Columbia's Pharmacare program only covers 30-day supply for short-term prescription drugs and first-time prescriptions of maintenance drugs, the smallest permissible supplies in Canada. This is well below the six-month period that B.C.'s own rules allow residents to be out of the country without jeopardizing their eligibility for health coverage. Repeat prescriptions of maintenance drugs are covered up to a 100-day supply, which again is well below the six month permitted travel period.

[1915]

Unlike many other jurisdictions, B.C. does not cover prescription drugs obtained outside the province. The government tells us that it is examining options that may allow vacationing British Columbia residents to continue receiving Pharmacare drug benefits, but nothing has been confirmed.

Our recommendation is to amend the Pharmacare program to permit — at the discretion of physicians

and pharmacists — travellers to be covered for a supply of prescription medication equal to the permitted travel time out of the province. Reimburse the cost of medication prescribed by appropriately accredited physicians and dispensed outside of the province at the same rate as if purchased in the province.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you, Doug. As I indicated, on the open mike there is no question-and-answer period. But your presentation that you've just given.... If you had a copy that you could leave with us, I will ensure that all members get a printed copy. Certainly, the information you've provided is of interest to all of us to have a look at.

D. Belsher: The entire report by the Canadian Snowbird Association — which incidentally has 80,000 members — is on the website, which I'll give to you as well. It's more complete than what I have here. Thank you for hearing me.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Our next presenter under the open-mike session.... I will call John Dressler.

Good evening, John. How are you?

J. Dressler: I'm fine, thank you.

You are considering the economic challenges to the province. One is an inadequate minimum wage in this province. We have an ostensible minimum wage of \$8 an hour. The neighbouring territory of the Yukon has a minimum wage of \$8.25 an hour. Surely, British Columbia can do better than that. We have too many working poor. Many organizations have spelled out the extent of that problem. You're very well aware of it.

We have, in addition, a training wage of \$6 an hour for 500 hours. When a person — a man, a woman, a young person — goes to work at a \$6 training wage, they are the lowest-paid working person in Canada. In this province, at this moment, in this particular set of circumstances, that is unacceptable.

There are employers who abuse that training wage. How many people need 500 hours to acquire the skills of an entry-level job? They don't. It is abused, unfortunately, by perhaps a few employers, but a province that allows that kind of abuse is perpetuating a wrong. So I would ask that you as legislators consider that carefully.

You wouldn't work for \$6 an hour. You wouldn't want one of your children to work for \$6 an hour. You wouldn't want one of your grandchildren to work for \$6 an hour. Why is it presently acceptable? As legislators, it is incumbent on you to look carefully at that.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you very much, John, for taking the time to come and speak to our committee here this evening. I appreciate that.

Our next presenter under the open mike.... I will call on Walt Cobb.

W. Cobb: Welcome to the Cariboo. Jenny, I didn't get to shake your hand earlier as you were talking when I went around the table, but welcome back to the Cariboo.

I guess as a private entrepreneur now, a small business man, what I heard here tonight — it didn't seem to matter whether it was the seniors, whether it was the city council members or whatever.... A lot of the projects, or what was being talked about, were capital projects. One of the projects that I think the government needs to carry on with, of course — it was talked about through the industry people — is the connector. There's the fire hall and whatnot.

What I think the Finance Committee needs to be cognizant of is that right now, thanks to some of the policies in place, we have a very buoyant economy. That could or could not last for a long period of time.

I think that when you're looking at capital projects, that's fine, because they are one-shot deals. But when you're putting new programs in place, the Finance Committee and the treasurer and the Finance Minister need to be aware that those programs should be sustainable over a long period of time.

We can't guarantee what the economy is, but as the Finance Committee and as the Finance Minister, you can be aware of the future incomes and the possibilities that we may not have this windfall for a long period of time. If the programs were in place, they should be sustainable so that it would not be necessary to go through what we had to go through when we took over government in 2001.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you, Walt, for taking the time. It's always good to see you again. We appreciate all the people that have taken time out of their schedule to come and give us their views and ideas.

At this time I'm going to call for Terri Lewis again. I'm not sure if Terri has made it yet.

It presently stands at 7:20. Our open-mike session was slated for 7:35. We have no further presenters at this time. I'm going to call a recess until 7:35 in case somebody within the public had planned on coming at that time to address our committee.

The committee will stand recessed for roughly 15 minutes until 7:35.

The committee recessed from 7:20 p.m. to 7:36 p.m.

[B. Ralston in the chair.]

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): We have one further presenter at open mike, and that's Andrew Hopkins.

Andrew, if you could come forward, please.

A. Hopkins: I will clarify. I'm a member of the media here, and I might be talking to some of you guys after, but I thought I may as well take the opportunity to speak as a taxpayer and as a citizen.

An issue that I've been concerned about for quite awhile is youth involvement in politics and in the daily business of the province, of the city, of any level. I think if you look at a meeting like this, we've had some very strong presenters and they're passionate about a lot of things, but we haven't had many presenters under the age of — I think we can say fairly — 30, 35,

something like that. I am 23 as of today, but I wouldn't consider myself a typical 23-year-old because I am here and I am in a job that maybe is not typically for 23-year-olds. But I think that there are some things that can be done to get young people involved. It's important, because I think that a lot of this whole young-person demographic has been left out of the system currently because they just don't show up to vote.

Now, I know that you guys have some committees looking at electoral reform and this sort of thing. I was talking to Bob. I'm not exactly clear what it is that's going on, but I do know, also, that you have a Health Committee that's going out to look at youth and overweight issues — this sort of thing. Maybe some spending might go toward getting a committee out there and finding out how we can get young people directly involved in the system.

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

One of the things that I think would make a difference is if you people actually made yourselves real to that high school age group and actually came and talked to people about it, because you guys do an awfully good job of making yourselves look pretty boring when we watch you in the Legislature there. I know that, dealing with Bob and Charlie and some of the others who have come through here, you aren't as boring and dull as that makes you out to be. I really think that there is an opportunity here if you guys make yourselves real. I mean, if it's just volunteer time for you guys to go.... I don't know. You already have very busy schedules, obviously, so maybe it needs — in terms of connecting it to financing — some money in terms of having more support for yourselves, the constituency office, staffing, this sort of thing, in order to allow you to do more community stuff and get out to the schools.

[1940]

This committee right here. Why is there no meeting scheduled at a high school? Obviously, they're not coming to you, so maybe you have to go to them. Who knows? Maybe they'd have the same issues — homelessness, we've heard lots about. There are all kinds of issues. You've heard them all so I won't list them. But essentially, to get youth involved, I think steps have to be taken, and there does have to be some spending. I don't see, obviously, huge spending. There are other large priorities that you have, but I think there are opportunities to spend, again, to just get youth involved.

I don't have all the answers. I'm paying you, hopefully, to come up with some of these answers for me. Again, I think that — totally non-financially related — you need to bring the voting age down to make it more real. You tell kids, "We want you involved," and then you say: "Take your hands out of the cookie jar. You can't be involved." I really think that lowering that age....

There are all kinds of things that can be done. I think that maybe it starts with some sort of committee

like this that would travel around the province and would come up with some targets and suggestions.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Andrew, I want to thank you.

A couple of points, and you raised some good ones. For the youth, I can tell you that the Health Committee is touring. The Health Committee is scheduled to go to Williams Lake Secondary on October 18. Again, a great opportunity.

I can't speak for all MLAs, but it's certainly my experience since 2001 that the colleagues I've worked with from both sides of the House make every effort to get out. I attend schools. I speak to the classrooms. It's not an area as an elected official that you can push your way into. It's most times at the invitation of a classroom or a group of teachers that have asked you to come and talk about the system.

I, too, agree it's important that we educate our young people about our electoral system — the job and how they can be involved.

A. Hopkins: Maybe some money could go towards funding programs for the schools that would allow you to access without an invitation. I'm not sure how that would work.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Again, we're in a dialogue here that I've tried to avoid with my members. MLA offices are funded, and they have the ability to get out there, so I don't think it's a funding issue. I think most will do everything they can to make themselves available to the youth.

I thank you for your presentation.

That concludes our hearing here this evening. We have gone through all of the presenters that have wished to speak to the committee. I want to thank the residents of Williams Lake and surrounding area for their participation and, with that, wish everyone a good night.

We stand adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 7:43 p.m.

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