



6th Session, 37th Parliament

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(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

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

6TH SESSION, 37TH PARLIAMENT

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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2005

The House met at 2:05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. members, we have many guests with us in the chamber today, and it is my pleasure, on your behalf, to welcome everyone to the precincts of the parliament of British Columbia.

**Statements
(Standing Order 25B)**

PACIFIC SALMON FORUM

R. Visser: You don't really have to grow up on the coast of British Columbia or spend your summers fishing commercially or for sport to understand the historical significance of the Pacific salmon to the people of this province, but it helps. It helps in celebrating another milestone that I believe is an important shift in the way this province and our government looks at how fisheries are managed.

On December 14 the Premier and the Minister of Fisheries announced the creation of the Pacific Salmon Forum to provide advice on three important objectives: to protect and enhance the viability of wild salmon stocks; to increase public confidence in fisheries management generally and specifically around aquaculture; and to enhance the economic, social and environmental sustainability of aquaculture for all coastal communities. These are challenging and impressive goals but ones I know the members of the forum are eager to tackle.

Certainly, the chair, the former federal Fisheries minister John Fraser, brings great experience. Yet so do Teresa Ryan, director of fisheries and aquatic resources for the Tsimshian nation; Christina Burridge of the Seafood Alliance; Harry Nyce Sr. of the Nisga'a fisheries program; Jim Lornie, a former mayor, fisher and food fish processor; John Woodward, vice-chair of the Pacific Salmon Foundation; and Jeremy Maynard, a friend, a fishing guide, a writer, a thinker of, about and for fish and the chair of the sports fish advisory board. Each of these people was chosen for one reason and one reason only. They have spent their careers putting fish first, and they each have a constituency that believes in them and their work.

It's a huge task, but they have a three-year and \$5 million commitment from this Premier to get the work started and underway. "Started" is the key word, for in my humble opinion, we're at the beginning of a decade where our salmon and our relationship to them will begin to make some real progress.

GUIDE-SCOUT WEEK

H. Bloy: Thank you for the opportunity of allowing me to wear my scout uniform into the House. I would like to read a proclamation for guiding and scouting in Canada.

"To all to whom these presents shall come, greeting.

"Whereas the mission of scouting is to contribute to the education of young people, through a value system based on the scout promise and law, to help build a better world where people are self-fulfilled as individuals and play a constructive role in society;

"Whereas Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada is a movement of girls and women that challenges members in their personal development and empowers them to be responsible citizens;

"Whereas the 40,000 members in the province share a common bond with over 290,000 other guides and scouts in Canada and over 38 million throughout the world, exemplifying the ideals of friendship and service manifested by the founder of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, Lord Robert Baden-Powell;

"Whereas the youth of the province are our most precious heritage;

"Whereas, as a tribute to the high esteem in which scouts and guides and their leaders are held, it is deemed appropriate to issue a proclamation appointing the week of February 20 to 27, 2005, inclusive, as Scout-Guide Week in the province of British Columbia;

"Whereas our Lieutenant-Governor, by and with the advice and consent of the executive council, has been pleased to enact the order-in-council 903 on October 11, 2002.

"Now know ye that we do by these presents proclaim and declare that the week of February 20 to 27, 2005, inclusive, shall be known as Scout-Guide Week in the province of British Columbia;

"In the testimony whereof we have caused these letters to be made patent and the great seal of our province to be hereunto affixed."

[1410]

MULTICULTURALISM IN B.C.

R. Lee: The third week of February has been proclaimed as Multicultural Week in British Columbia since 2003 by the government. The celebration of multiculturalism is a direct recognition of the contributions of the diverse cultural heritage to our society. It affirms the value and dignity of all British Columbians, regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language or their religious affiliation.

In 1971 Canada became the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy. Multiculturalism helps solve problems of prejudice and discrimination, strengthens our sense of Canadian identity and promotes the sharing of common values. It also ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging.

Multiculturalism is not just about acceptance but is also a celebration of differences, which are fundamental characteristics of our Canadian identity and national heritage. The benefits of multiculturalism are endless. They provide a harmonious cultural society where people can interact with one another's traditions and have plenty of opportunities to learn from one another.

In a globally competitive economy, we in B.C. need to do everything we can to attract investments,

increase exports and retain the best-skilled workers. Our diverse heritage is an asset, because British Columbians who speak many languages and understand diverse cultures make it easier for B.C. to participate in the global economy. Our diverse heritage has helped us to bring companies like eBay and HSBC to Burnaby. It helped us win the bid for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games. It will help us to build a stronger identity and a stronger gateway to the Asia-Pacific.

I encourage all British Columbians to participate in this week and to share their own culture with friends, neighbours and colleagues.

Oral Questions

B.C. LIBERAL PARTY 2001 CAMPAIGN STATEMENTS

J. MacPhail: Let me quote the Premier from 2001. "You're not going to hear Gordon Campbell or any B.C. Liberal following the election say: 'Boy, things are a lot worse than we expected, and we're not doing what we told you we were going to do.' We expect people to hold us to account for that."

To the Minister of Health: does she expect seniors to hold her to account for breaking her long-term care bed promise, offering the lame excuse that things were a lot worse than she expected?

Hon. S. Bond: We care about the seniors of British Columbia. In fact, we're creating a system that allows seniors to be placed in the level of care bed that they require. We are looking across the province, and we are matching the needs of seniors to the level of care they require, because we care about seniors. We are going to reach the commitment by 2008.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of the Opposition has a supplementary question.

J. MacPhail: Well then, I can only say that here is another whopper from the Premier: "We're opposed to the massive expansion of gambling. The only way government makes money on gambling is because you lose it." British Columbians are now losing an extra \$500 million straight into the government's surplus.

To the Premier: why should British Columbians trust him now, when they couldn't trust him to keep his promise about gambling?

Hon. R. Coleman: There were 22 casinos allowed when we became government. There are 18 today. There are fewer bingo halls today than there were. We redid the Gaming Control Act and depoliticized gaming. We haven't had a Bingogate. We haven't had a Casinogate. We have more money going to charities than at any time in the history of the province.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of the Opposition has a further question.

[1415]

J. MacPhail: Well, we know that there are 75 people out of touch with reality. We just heard every single one of them.

Okay, another whopper, another election promise — and they're the same thing with this government. Here is another from the Premier: "We will have the dollars for children in need in this province. We will have the resources to provide front-line social workers that are essential to make sure that children are cared for." End of whopper. Oh no, I'm sorry. The whopper goes on: "We will stop bureaucratic restructuring." That's the end of the whopper.

Can the minister responsible tell us how we can trust the Premier after he said that and then delivered four years of cuts, massive restructuring and the Doug Walls scandal that drained hundreds of thousands of dollars away from children in need? Try to stay in touch with reality, people.

Hon. S. Hagen: Let me say categorically that in my ministry we have some of the most dedicated public servants in government. You know, I have stood in this House on a number of occasions, but I find it incredible that a person who was in the government in the nineties would have the audacity to stand up and say the things she has said.

Under her government, the vacancy rate for social workers rose to a high of 44 percent. Under the NDP, the ministry went through seven ministers during the time they were in office. Now, I can tell you that my workers care very deeply about children in care, and they will continue to do a good job.

STATEMENTS BY PREMIER ON PUBLIC SERVICE ISSUES

J. Brar: One of the things I hear from the people of British Columbia every day is that the trust level of people in this government is very, very low.

Hon. R. Neufeld: Selective listening.

J. Brar: That's your choice.

I'm going to ask the first question to the Premier of this province, and I hope that since it is my first question on behalf of the people of Surrey-Panorama Ridge, the Premier will rise and answer my question. The question is this. In 2001 the Premier of this province said: "I have never said I would tear up agreements. I'm not tearing up agreements."

Can the Premier tell us: how can we trust today's election promises when we couldn't trust him to keep that simple promise he made three years ago before the last election?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

Hon. G. Bruce: As a party running for election in the 2001 election, we put together the most compre-

hensive plan in the history of this province of anybody ever running for government. Two hundred and two promises and commitments were in there, and to date, this government under our leader has absolutely approved and kept 97 percent of those agreements.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Surrey–Panorama Ridge has a supplementary question.

J. Brar: The people of British Columbia are watching us. They're watching up in the gallery, and they're watching in front of cameras. People want accurate answers. People want the real answers. Here is the new-era commitment I'm talking about. Here is the new-era commitment on the merits in the public service: "We will restore a professional, non-partisan public service based on merit, not patronage."

[1420]

Mr. Speaker: Let's get to the question, please.

J. Brar: Mr. Speaker, I will continue.

Interjection.

J. Brar: I will do that whenever I want to do it.

If the Premier means to keep that promise, can he explain to the people of British Columbia how a Liberal insider and failed impostor got a job in his office?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister has the floor.

Hon. G. Bruce: One thing I think we can say about all our public servants in British Columbia is that they are of the highest calibre. They do an excellent, excellent job for all the people of the province. Once again, we have installed a merit system for the hiring of people in British Columbia to make sure we have a public service that can do the job for people.

STATEMENTS BY PREMIER AND
ADVANCED EDUCATION MINISTER
ON TUITION FEES

J. Kwan: It's clear from today's demonstration that the government benchers are still eating Whoppers. They've been doing that for the last three and a half years — not fruits and vegetables, let me tell you. A quote....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please, hon. members. Order, please. The member for Vancouver–Mount Pleasant has the floor.

J. Kwan: A quote: "The last place we would go to raise resources for education would be tuition. We

would not be seeing skyrocketing tuition increases." Sound familiar? Well, that's the Premier in 2000.

Can the Premier tell us if he expected parents and students to believe him then? Given that tuition fees have gone up as high as 320 percent under his administration, why should they believe him now?

Hon. I. Chong: Let me tell you what's happening in our post-secondary education system in this province. We have the best post-secondary education system, and we're building on that framework. We have 25,000 new spaces, the largest expansion in four decades — in 40 years. Students want access to spaces, and under the NDP...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. I. Chong: ...enrolment growth fell behind the rest of Canada. That's not happening today. Students will be able to be educated and trained in their communities, and that's good for all of British Columbia.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Vancouver–Mount Pleasant has a supplementary question.

J. Kwan: It's not good enough for the government bench MLAs and cabinet ministers to eat Whoppers. They continue to dish them out. Here's what the Minister of Advanced Education said as recently as November: "It's not government who should be deciding about tuition. In fact, it is institutions."

She also complained that government shouldn't use students as political leverage. To the Deputy Premier: isn't it just a bit insulting to make the same promise to hold tuition down three months before the election when the Premier broke that promise four years ago, a bit insulting for her to promise 5,000 new long-term and community care beds by 2008? Just how gullible does she think students and seniors are?

Hon. I. Chong: Let me again share with the members opposite, because they don't want to be proud of our post-secondary education system, that we have invested \$800 million in capital projects...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. I. Chong: ...all around the province. We are meeting the needs of British Columbians. We are ensuring that training opportunities exist.

[1425]

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. I. Chong: We're ensuring that the access to spaces is there. The best post-secondary education system in this province — that's something to be proud of.

UPGRADE TO POWER LINES
IN TSAWWASSEN

V. Roddick: My question is to the Minister of Energy and Mines. Recently, Tsawwassen residents became concerned when they learned about a plan to upgrade power lines that run through their backyards. While residents understand that the power lines are nearing the end of their service life, these new lines would carry nearly double the voltage, which is a concern to many of them. To the minister: what solutions are under consideration to address my constituents' concerns?

Hon. R. Neufeld: Yes, the member has brought to my attention on a number of occasions that there is great concern in her constituency about planned new hydro lines to serve Vancouver Island. I had the opportunity to meet with her and some of her constituents at her office a couple of weeks ago and committed to those folks who have those concerns that we will look seriously at the six other options that were brought forward so that we actually impact people the least when we increase those cables and put them in place.

LONG-TERM CARE BEDS

J. MacPhail: We asked this question last week, and we didn't get an answer. The former Minister of Health, now the Minister of Finance, told this House in March 2005 that he was well on his way to building 5,000 new long-term care beds by 2006. How can we believe anything he says when that turned out to be anything but the truth? How can we believe a thing he says?

Hon. S. Bond: We have a plan in this province. We are excited....

J. MacPhail: Are you excited about it? Are you excited about it?

Hon. S. Bond: Yes, we are excited about health care in the province. In just moments, in fact, we're going to hear...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. S. Bond: ...from the Finance minister an absolutely wonderful news story for British Columbia.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. S. Bond: In fact, we're going to deliver great news for British Columbia. We're going to continue to

work on our plan, and we will deliver those beds by 2008.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

[End of question period.]

Orders of the Day

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

Motion approved.

ESTIMATES OF SUMS REQUIRED
FOR THE SERVICE OF THE PROVINCE

Hon. C. Hansen presented a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: Estimates of Sums Required for the Service of the Province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, and a supplement to the estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, recommending the same to the Legislative Assembly.

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

Motion approved.

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

[1430]

Budget Debate

Hon. C. Hansen: Mr. Speaker, it is truly a pleasure to stand before this House today and deliver the government's budget for the next three fiscal years.

It is, of course, a balanced budget in every sense of the word. That is a result of sound planning, discipline and, most importantly, the countless contributions of our citizens. This budget is all about the people of British Columbia, from Dease Lake to Fort Nelson to Port Renfrew to Sparwood. It shows what we can accomplish as a province and as a people. It points the way to a future of growth, confidence and prosperity.

During the 1990s we were facing a very different future. We were at the back of the pack in economic growth. Government spending was outpacing revenues. Communities were struggling; families were struggling. Young people were leaving the province to build their futures somewhere else. When this government came to office, the province was in nothing

short of an economic and fiscal mess, so we got right to work on a plan to balance the budget and to build the future our children deserve.

The promise we made was to restore hope and prosperity. Our workplan included two very key measures: (1) to get our fiscal house in order while protecting funding for health care and education and (2) to get the economy growing. That was the plan. We followed it through. We will continue to follow it through. Today's budget demonstrates beyond a doubt that the plan is working.

We have tabled a balanced budget two years in a row, and we have put in place a law to make sure that it stays balanced in the years to come. Funding for health and education has not only been protected; it has been increased by more than \$1.8 billion in the last three years alone. B.C.'s economy is not only growing but diversifying and strengthening across a whole range of sectors. We are once again leading the country in job creation. That job creation amounts to almost 200,000 additional jobs created since December of 2001. Clearly, the decade of decline is behind us.

We are on the brink of a new decade, a golden decade. To guide our progress, we have five great goals: (1) to make B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent; (2) to lead the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness; (3) to build the best support system in Canada for persons with disabilities, those with special needs, children at risk and seniors; (4) to lead the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality and the best fisheries management, bar none; and (5) to create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada.

These are ambitious goals, but when we work together, there are no limits to what we can achieve. Let's look at how far we've come in terms of our economic and fiscal performance. Four years ago British Columbia faced a structural deficit of \$4 billion. Today, in complete contrast, we are on track to end the current fiscal year more than \$1.3 billion ahead of the \$100 million target surplus set in Budget 2004. That does not include the \$300 million forecast allowance for the year just ended, which is there to protect against unforeseen events. If we are not required to use it by April 1, the surplus will also go towards a record high of \$1.74 billion.

[1435]

Either way, we have a very significant fiscal dividend, resulting from a strong economy, prudent fiscal management and a combination of ongoing and one-time federal transfers. I want to emphasize the words "one time," because a large portion of the year-end dividend comes from one-time sources. This means we have to invest these dollars carefully. They are not dollars that we can count on for long-term programs.

We don't have to look far to see the truth of those statements, because four short years ago, another administration saw a dramatic rise in revenues in one year and did not manage it wisely. Even though their own projections showed that it was a fiscal anomaly,

they built a budget that committed the province to spending more than the taxpayers could actually afford. They left British Columbians with a structural deficit. We've done the opposite, creating a sustainable surplus which supports an affordable course of long-term investment.

Today we are announcing a measure to keep our plan affordable. We are committing a minimum of \$1.7 billion in 2004-05 to paying down the provincial debt. That is the largest single annual debt reduction in B.C. history. It will help ensure that we're able to afford the investments in infrastructure that B.C. needs — including schools, health care facilities and highways. While we will see debt from government operations continue to decline, these infrastructure investments will increase total debt.

This must be considered in the context of a growing economy. This is why the standard measure of debt affordability is the ratio of taxpayer-supported debt to GDP. That ratio is forecast to fall from 18.5 percent in the year just ended to 17.3 percent by the end of March 2008. We are forecasting real economic growth of 3.1 percent in 2005 and 3 percent in each of the two following years. We will, as promised, continue to balance the budget. In fact, we are forecasting surpluses in each of the next three years, supported by forecast allowances and contingency reserves.

These prudent cushions protect our plan, recognizing that budgets are projections. They're vulnerable to shifts in everything from borrowing rates to weather patterns. In the year ahead we are projecting a surplus of \$220 million, protected by a cushion of \$670 million. In each of the two following years, we are projecting surpluses of \$200 million, with cushions of \$720 million and \$860 million respectively.

If, as in past years, we continue to do better than forecast, we can use those cushions to reduce future borrowing needs or to pay down debt. That will give the people of British Columbia even more choices.

During the fall, we went to the people and asked for their advice about which choices we should make in Budget 2005. A legislative committee held extensive consultations, and we mailed a questionnaire directly to households across the province. We asked British Columbians: "What are your priorities?" They told us very clearly to stick to our plan. They said: "Maintain your commitment to sound fiscal management." They said, "Continue working to support a strong economy," and they said: "Maintain your commitment to health care and education and to supporting those in need."

We're doing all those things with Budget 2005. Consistent with our plan and with people's priorities, we are moving forward with our five great goals through a series of initiatives to help ensure, first, that B.C. continues to live within its means; second, that steady economic growth continues; and third, that its benefits are shared by British Columbians in every region and corner of this province.

[1440]

As a member of this government, I have had the opportunity to travel around the province extensively

and speak with people year after year. A year ago it was obvious that B.C. was starting to turn the corner. People in general were much more optimistic, but it wasn't universal. That sense of economic recovery had not yet reached every single part of the province. That has changed profoundly. We are now seeing gains in every geographic region. Compared to December of 2001, employment levels have increased by 3.4 percent in the North Coast and Nechako regions, by more than 4 percent in the northeast and the Kootenays, by 5.9 percent in the Cariboo and by 15.4 percent in the Thompson-Okanagan.

We are seeing strong growth in other important areas too. Retail sales are up 6.4 percent in 2004 compared to the previous year. Exports are up 11 percent. Manufacturing is up 12.7 percent. Housing starts are up by 26 percent, and that's more than four times the national average in Canada.

B.C. now has the second-strongest economic growth rate in Canada. That's a huge improvement from the 1990s, but we can do better, and we will. We will achieve our great goal of creating more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada. Budget 2005 supports that goal in a number of ways.

First, it includes a series of measures to help keep forestry, our single largest resource industry, sustainable. After the economic downturn of the nineties, thanks to the work done by industry, communities and government, forestry is thriving again, and B.C. has regained its leadership position in the North American economy.

However, our land base, the industry's foundation, has been devastated by wildfires and even more dramatically by the mountain pine beetle infestation, which has already damaged almost half the province's lodgepole pine forest. Given time and managed well, our forests will recover, but the impact on communities could be dramatic. We have developed a long-term plan to speed that recovery and minimize the impact of these natural disasters on British Columbia families. We are investing more than \$100 million by the end of our three-year plan to facilitate new, creative ways of using beetle-damaged timber, to support planning for affected communities and to increase reforestation in areas damaged by beetles and fire.

As the Premier announced last month, we will also introduce legislation shortly to increase the forest revitalization trust fund from \$75 million to \$125 million. We are allocating a further \$50 million in one-time funding for compensation for tenure reform as a part of forest revitalization. Combined, these measures will help keep our number one industry strong, sustainable and competitive.

We are also taking steps today to help make our mining industry stronger and more competitive. Like forestry, mining has rebounded since the 1990s, and today it's poised for even more dramatic growth fuelled by demand from fast-developing countries like India and China and supported by a comprehensive ten-year mining plan.

For B.C. mining, 2004 was the best year in over a decade. We saw exploration spending top \$130 million. That's up 400 percent in just three years. That was due in part to the mining exploration tax credit, which had been set to expire in 2006. Today we are extending it for another ten years to 2016 to provide greater... [Applause.] This measure will provide greater certainty, and it's a signal to investors that B.C. is not only back; we're here to stay.

[1445]

We are reinforcing that message with a one-time grant of \$25 million to establish the new B.C. centre for geoscience. Geoscience informs exploration and represents the first step in new mine development. This new initiative will help make B.C. a global centre for excellence in geoscience, consistent with our broader plan to encourage new investment and usher in a golden decade of mining in British Columbia. Twenty million dollars from that grant will directly support mineral exploration, and the balance will be used in partnership with the oil and gas industry to expand opportunities in central British Columbia.

Budget 2005 also builds on our highly successful oil and gas development strategy, with a \$50 million increase for roadbuilding and upgrading to lengthen the winter drilling season and \$17 million for additional initiatives, including engaging communities and stakeholders. As I'm sure my colleague would be glad to point out, the province takes in more than \$1.8 billion a year in oil and gas revenues, so we can expect a good return from these new investments which will help the sector grow and create new opportunities.

We are also taking action today to help make B.C.'s small business sector more competitive. Small business drives this province, accounting for 98 percent of all businesses and the majority of private sector jobs in British Columbia. When small business thrives, the whole province benefits, so we are announcing a measure today to strengthen small business.

Effective immediately, the B.C. small business corporate tax threshold will rise from \$300,000 to \$400,000. This means small businesses will pay a significantly lower small business tax rate on earnings up to \$400,000 each year. It also means that over the next three years, small business owners across B.C. will save a total of \$30 million, money that can be used to build their businesses, hire more people and support their communities and their local economies.

Recognizing that many small business owners and workers rely on vehicles to do their jobs, we are also raising the level at which the provincial vehicle surtax takes effect. This is of particular note to people in the north and in rural areas, where heavy-duty trucks are often a prerequisite to bringing home a paycheck. Effective tomorrow, the threshold will rise by \$2,000, to \$49,000, reflecting changes in vehicle prices since the threshold was last adjusted.

Whether you're going to work and back, getting goods to the market or taking kids to soccer practice, transportation is absolutely essential to our daily lives. It is vital to our economy too. Yet through the nineties

our transportation network was allowed to deteriorate. In Budget 2003 we introduced a long-term transportation plan to catch up with maintenance and to open up our province to renewed growth and investment. Today we are taking steps to advance that plan further and to ensure that it continues to be affordable. To that end, we are allocating \$550 million in 2004-05 to the Transportation Financing Authority. This will reduce its debt and increase its borrowing capacity for future years.

We are also planning for more than \$3 billion in capital investment over three years to continue with the B.C. transportation plan. Two billion dollars of that is in direct provincial funding, including allocations for airport and port improvements, including work at the Prince George Airport and the port of Prince Rupert. There is additional funding in that \$2 billion for highway rehabilitation, including projects near Grand Forks, Williams Lake and Atlin. We're continuing improvements on the Sea to Sky Highway. There are improvements to interior and rural side roads, including work in Nakusp, Lillooet and the Queen Charlotte Islands. Work on the Okanagan valley corridor and Okanagan Lake Bridge is provided for — also work on the Kicking Horse Canyon project, the cross-border initiative and provincial contributions to the RAV rapid transit project.

[1450]

The balance of the new capital funding, projected at \$1.3 billion, will come through private sector, local and federal government partnerships as part of our broader Asia-Pacific gateway initiative. That initiative will help us make the most of our unique position as Canada's gateway to the Asia-Pacific as we continue to open up our province to the world.

One of the ways that we're doing this is with new investments in tourism. Budget 2005 allocates a total of \$81 million to further our goal of doubling tourism revenues within a decade. We will do it with a strategy we announced in November to facilitate the expansion of development in new and existing all-season resorts. We'll do it with a trail system and with circle routes, encouraging more people to explore our regions. We will do it through a continued commitment to marketing in partnership with the private sector and with communities.

We are also working with industry partners to support and sustain the B.C. film sector. Over the last decade it's become an important part of not just our economy but our identity as a province. Now it's facing pressures on a variety of fronts. As I announced last month, the government is helping to keep the industry competitive by increasing tax credits for foreign and domestic productions. These are part of a broader industry-led effort to help the sector thrive in a highly competitive market.

One of our enduring competitive edges as a province is our natural environmental heritage. We are committed to increasing that advantage by making B.C. a leader in sustainable environmental management with the best air and water quality and the best

fisheries management, bar none. We have made significant progress over the last three years, creating 37 new world-class parks and expanding 34 others; enhancing our ability to protect species at risk; introducing an action plan for safe, clean drinking water; and investing over \$4 million in research promoting clean energy and fuel cells.

Budget 2005 accelerates our progress by, first of all, providing more than \$58 million in one-time funding from the current fiscal year. This includes \$25 million to expedite the cleanup of contaminated sites like the old Britannia mine site. There is \$6.5 million to strengthen the habitat conservation trust fund, a \$5 million contribution to the living rivers trust fund and \$8 million to establish a new B.C. trust for public lands to engage the private sector and not-for-profit sectors in acquiring private land where it is significant for conservation purposes.

Along with those one-time investments, we are increasing the budget for the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection by \$9 million over three years. This will support the new B.C. conservation corps, with up to 150 members, and the addition of up to 50 new conservation officers and park rangers. Combined, these initiatives will double the ministry's presence in the field and move us closer to our goal of global leadership in environmental management.

But we are not stopping there. The province is developing a comprehensive strategy to invest in, expand and, increasingly, export B.C.'s alternative energy expertise. As part of that strategy, we are making a series of targeted tax cuts encouraging the development and use of cleaner alternative energy sources.

[1455]

First, we are providing property tax exemptions for environmentally friendly hydro projects, and we are exploring similar exemptions for other alternative energy sources such as wind and geothermal. Second, we are exempting the PST for two years on a range of energy-efficient furnaces, boilers and heat pumps. That exemption takes effect at midnight tonight and will continue to March 31, 2007. Third, we are doubling the existing PST benefit for clean-running hybrid passenger vehicles, those with both an electric motor and an internal combustion engine. As of midnight tonight, buyers will save up to \$2,000 in PST, twice the tax savings previously available. The full benefit will stay in place until March 31, 2008.

In total, these tax measures represent an investment of \$14 million over three years — dollars that will help protect our environment, meet our growing energy needs and stimulate further economic diversification.

B.C.'s economy is more diverse than ever before. Today we hear increasingly not about people looking for jobs but about jobs looking for people. A significant part of our workforce growth comes from outside of Canada. We are the Asia-Pacific gateway to Canada. More than 25,000 immigrants settle here each year, and these individuals contribute so much, but too many highly skilled, well-trained immigrants cannot contribute to their full potential because their credentials are

not recognized here. That affects their quality of life. It affects employers and communities, and it leaves a great source of potential untapped.

With that in mind, we are investing more than \$14 million over three years in a new B.C. skills connect for immigrants program to get skilled immigrants working in their fields of expertise more quickly. Through a combination of career assessment planning and employment bridging services, the program will support at least 5,000 people trained in a range of trades and professions. They will be able to build their careers and share in the dream of British Columbia. In the process, their achievements will strengthen the province for all of us.

I said at the outset that this budget was all about people. British Columbians have done the hard work to keep the cost of government down and to get our province back on track. They're the reason we balance the budget. It was never an end in itself. We did it because when you have sound fiscal management and a vibrant economy, you can afford to invest in the programs and services that help make B.C. the best place to live, work and raise a family.

We are committed to leading the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness. As part of that commitment, Budget 2005 includes the second-largest funding increase for health care in B.C.'s history. When this government came to office, the province was spending \$9.5 billion a year on health care. Today that figure is \$11.8 billion, and by the end of our three-year plan it will increase to \$13.3 billion, for a total increase in annual spending of \$3.8 billion.

Because we've made the system more efficient, more of those dollars than ever will go directly to patient care, building on the improvements we've made since we came to office. For example, in the first two years alone, the number of hip replacements performed in the province increased by 21 percent, knee replacements increased by 33 percent, cataract surgeries increased by 20 percent, and angioplasties increased by 40 percent. That was just in the first two years.

Today we have much to be proud of in health care, including among the nation's best the childhood immunization program, access to routine medical tests and access to MRI and CT scans. We're training and recruiting more doctors and nurses, and wait times for surgery where lives are at stake are virtually nonexistent. We still face challenges, of course, but today we are better prepared to meet them than ever before.

Over the next three years the budget for the Ministry of Health Services will increase by \$1.5 billion. That includes a significant increase in federal contributions, every cent of which will be invested in measures to improve and enhance British Columbians' health.

For example, we are committing, over the next three years, \$465 million more for Pharmacare; over \$100 million more for ambulance services; \$77 million more for nurse recruitment, training and retention; over \$200 million more to improve access to home care, residential care and palliative care, as well as mental health and addiction services; and an additional \$200

million more for critical care services for cancer, cardiac, kidney and transplant patients, and for better access to hip and knee replacements, diagnostics and other acute care services.

[1500]

Another critical part of the future of our health care system in this province is that we are examining ways to help keep intellectual property, such as patents, here in British Columbia through changes to our tax system. We are investing an additional \$100 million in public health promotion and prevention initiatives, including Act Now, a health and fitness program designed to make B.C., by 2010, the healthiest place ever to host the Olympics. Act Now will encourage choices that improve people's health and reduce their risk of illness. Over the long term that will take some of the pressure off our health care system so that we can meet patients' needs even more effectively.

These new commitments to health care are considerable. They will help ensure that patients receive faster access to medical services and that wait times will be reduced for many British Columbians. Health care improvements are just one example of the work we are doing to make B.C. the best place for everyone. That means listening and responding to people's needs. It also means looking out for those who may not have a voice — the most vulnerable members of our society. We've done that consistently for the last three years with targeted initiatives to protect and improve the quality of life for British Columbians most in need.

For example, we introduced a comprehensive program to help tens of thousands of people on income assistance find work. B.C.'s welfare caseloads are now at their lowest levels in more than 20 years. We put in place a program to encourage more families to adopt children that are in government's care. The number of these adoptions has doubled since 2001.

We've delivered on a range of other improvements for families and seniors. In 2003 we brought in the Fair Pharmacare program, which shrank prescription drug costs for about 280,000 low- and middle-income families and seniors. We've increased by 50 percent the refundable sales tax credit, and when we reduced personal income tax, we made sure that British Columbians in the lowest two tax brackets paid the lowest rates in the country.

Today we are building on that record of achievement. We are committing nearly half a billion dollars over three years in tax relief for lower-income British Columbians. We are dedicating \$120 million over three years to further reduce Medical Services Plan premiums for lower-income individuals, families and seniors. Effective August 1, 2005, the net threshold for premium assistance will rise in all categories by \$4,000, and that will make a real difference to the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

For example, a senior couple whose annual income is \$30,000 will save more than \$460 a year from this measure alone. A family of four earning \$35,000 will save over \$500 a year from this measure. In total, the

change will reduce or eliminate MSP premiums for about 215,000 people.

[1505]

We are also taking action today to ensure that British Columbians with low and modest incomes have the lowest income taxes in Canada. Effective this tax year a new, non-refundable income tax credit called the B.C. tax reduction will reduce or eliminate B.C. income tax for nearly three-quarters of a million British Columbians.

Most people earning less than \$16,000 a year will pay zero B.C. income tax. On top of the 330,000 individuals who will see their income taxes reduced to zero, the tax will be reduced for an additional 400,000 individuals in the province. Combined, these MSP and income tax changes will save lower-income earners \$480 million over the next three years.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the total taxes paid by British Columbians, a senior couple with a net annual income of \$30,000 will now pay over \$900 a year less in total provincial taxes than they would have paid four years ago. A family of four with the same annual income will pay almost \$1,300 less. You know, those are just two examples of how we are making B.C. the best place on Earth to live.

With Budget 2005 we're also moving forward with our great goal of building the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, those with special needs, children at risk and seniors. We are increasing the budget of the Ministry of Human Resources by \$113 million over three years.

As more and more employable people move into jobs, an increasing proportion of the income assistance caseload is made up of people who have disabilities or other persistent barriers to employment. These individuals need stable, long-term income support. In December persons with disabilities saw their monthly assistance cheques rise by \$70 — the largest one-time dollar increase of its kind in B.C. history and the first significant increase in over ten years.

You know, the previous government did not raise these rates in any meaningful way for one simple reason: they could not afford it. They destroyed the provincial economy and did not have the capacity to help those most in need. We can afford the increase, because we have turned the B.C. economy around and have managed government prudently. Now we are building on the enhanced income assistance with new investment of \$91 million over three years to strengthen community living supports for adults with developmental disabilities.

As we announced earlier, we are also increasing the support for women and children fleeing domestic abuse. Over the next three years, funding for women's transition houses, counselling and related services will increase by \$37 million — the largest increase in more than a decade. To further support families in crisis, we are adding \$15 million over three years for family law initiatives.

We are also moving forward with the homelessness initiative that the Premier announced in October. It's a

comprehensive strategy, working with other levels of government to address persistent housing needs and find new solutions to longstanding issues around addictions and mental health.

Budget 2005 supports that strategy, dedicating \$48 million to emergency shelters and supportive housing for people who are homeless. That is in addition to the \$36 million allocated over the next three years to social housing for seniors, families and people with disabilities. This is about sharing the benefits of a stronger economy and a stronger province.

[1510]

When you look at our performance, our levels of achievement and our return to our traditional role as a leader in this country, you see that we have every reason to feel optimistic. Nowhere is that optimism stronger or more evident than in the dramatic growth in value of our housing sector. In 2004 home sales averaged more than \$2 billion a month. Thousands of people are moving here and putting down roots because they feel a sense of incredible confidence about our future.

That's great news for British Columbia, but it also creates challenges for first-time homebuyers and for those on fixed incomes whose property values are soaring, so we are taking action to keep housing affordable. Last month we increased the threshold for the homeowner grant. Today we are raising the thresholds for the first-time homebuyer's property transfer exemption. Effective tomorrow the thresholds will increase by 18 percent, helping thousands of families to buy their first home.

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

It has always been part of the government's plan to make B.C. the best place for everyone to live, work and raise a family. It has always been part of our plan to generate and reinvest fiscal dividends in key priority areas, including community safety. For example, we have introduced initiatives such as AMBER alert to help find missing children. There's ISPO, a team that monitors sex offenders released from jail, and the integrated homicide team which, since its inception in 2003, has greatly increased the proportion of homicide cases where the Crown is able to lay charges. These are great improvements not just in safety but in our communities and quality of life.

Last month the Premier announced the single largest funding increase in more than 20 years for policing in our province. Budget 2005 supports that increase, allocating \$122 million over three years to enhance policing and support for the courts and Corrections. In total we have committed nearly a quarter of a billion dollars to public safety and crime fighting over the next three years.

A further \$120 million is flowing to communities by 2008 from traffic fine revenues, and Budget 2005 allocates more than \$200 million in new funding by 2008 for regional and municipal infrastructure. Communities will receive additional funding through the federal

gas tax-sharing initiative. Details have yet to be negotiated; however, we can confirm that B.C.'s share is \$635 million over the next five years. Year-to-year allocations are not final, so those dollars are not included in Budget 2005. We will work with the Union of B.C. Municipalities and the federal government to help ensure that these dollars meet the diverse needs of B.C. communities as they grow and build for the future.

When we talk about the future, we are, in a very real sense, talking about our children. The work we do today, the actions we take and the decisions we make will affect our children in the years ahead. I expect that every member of this House shares the government's commitment of ensuring that our children get the best possible start in life. Of course, it's parents and family members who make the most important contributions to children's healthy development, but government also has a role to play in making sure that B.C. continues to be the best place to raise a family.

Today we are moving forward with a series of initiatives for B.C.'s children, starting from the time they are born. First, we are investing \$76 million in early childhood screening initiatives. Children will be screened for dental, hearing and vision impairment before grade 1. Those who need treatment or specialized assistance will receive it through a network of nurses, dentists, doctors, audiologists, optometrists and other professional service providers.

[1515]

Second, we are investing over \$130 million over three years to enhance services to children and youth with special needs and their families. This new investment will mean shorter wait times for everything from therapies to specialized equipment to respite care for families. Like the early screening program, this new strategy is comprehensive and coordinated across government. It includes \$14 million to the Ministry of Health Services for enhanced diagnostic and assessment services for children with developmental behavioral conditions, over \$40 million to the Ministry of Children and Family Development for direct intervention and key family support services, and close to \$80 million to the Ministry of Education to enhance services to children and youth with special needs in the school system.

We know these are wise investments. Research has clearly shown that early assessment, treatment and support can make a world of difference in children's lives, in families' lives and in the lives of our communities. Every one of us benefits when children — all children — have the opportunities they need to reach their full potential. That same philosophy underlies the government's commitment to early learning and child care as part of a broader national plan that includes substantial federal funding.

We expect the province to receive up to \$650 million over five years for this initiative, starting in '05-06. Annual and provincial allocations are not yet finalized, so these dollars are not included in Budget 2005. As with health care dollars, we are committed to reinvesting every cent of that new funding to provide for more

accessible, affordable, inclusive care that emphasizes early learning.

Parents will have more choices. Children will have more support. Funding will be targeted to those in need, and we will see the dividends for many years to come. We know from countless studies as well as from experience that early learning gives kids a head start in life. When they start school ready to learn, they're more likely to finish high school, more likely to find a good job as adults and more likely to raise their own families successfully. These are incredible investments in our future, as are the investments we continue to make in the province's education system.

One of the government's great goals for the golden decade ahead is to see this province become North America's most educated, most literate jurisdiction. That is why we are focusing on literacy for all ages, with \$12 million over three years for libraries and \$5 million for new school-based literacy innovation programs. It is also why we continue to make targeted investments in the school system to support student achievement.

We have invested funding in the Ministry of Education every year since taking office, and this year is no exception. The budget for K-to-12 education for the coming year will, for the first time in B.C. history, surpass \$5 billion. We will increase that by a further \$114 million by the end of our current three-year plan.

As we announced earlier, we are providing schools with an additional \$150 million for the coming school year, the single largest increase in a decade. Per-pupil funding will increase to \$7,079, up more than \$860 per student compared to 2001-02. We are dedicating \$1.5 billion over 15 years to our ongoing long-term plan to complete seismic upgrading for our schools at risk. We are moving ahead with this as quickly as industry capacity will allow.

We now have the highest education budget and the highest per-pupil funding ever in British Columbia. We also have some of the highest levels of student achievement. More of our students than ever before are now completing high school, and they're getting the best marks ever in reading, writing and math. They're earning more provincial scholarships than ever, even though the total number of students is declining, and that's progress. It's not just for students. It's progress that points to a future of opportunity for all of us as these young people step up and take their places as leaders and innovators across our society.

[1520]

The first step in taking on those adult roles is, for a growing number of young people, higher education, and we are making significant new investments there as well. Over the next three years we will allocate approximately \$6 billion to the Ministry of Advanced Education. Three-quarters of that will go directly to colleges, universities and other post-secondary institutions.

We will fully fund the province's share of the 25,000 new seats announced a year ago. Those 25,000 seats will go towards meeting skill shortages, including

training more doctors, nurses and tradespeople throughout the province. We are also providing over \$450 million over three years for student financial assistance, including loan reductions for students in need, grants for students with disabilities, debt relief programs and a loan forgiveness program that encourages health professionals to practise in underserved regions of the province.

We will continue to work with post-secondary institutions to keep tuition costs affordable, and we are working directly with employers through the Industry Training Authority to give our young people more opportunities to learn on the job. In other words, work is well underway to meet skill shortages across our economy as we continue to implement the largest expansion of post-secondary training opportunities since the 1960s.

Think about what that means for our province, not just in terms of meeting skill shortages but as a measure of our level of achievement and progress as a people. Think about the impacts of all of the improvements we're making — from targeted economic measures to debt reduction to new supports for children and those in need.

These measures show the kind of province we are building — a province where the environment is clean and healthy, communities are safe and people feel safe; a province known for its culture of learning and innovation; a province where seniors and people in need have the best supports in Canada, our citizens are healthy and fit, our economy is strong and diverse and where all our children have the opportunity they need to reach their goals and achieve their full potential. That's the kind of future we envision, and I have every confidence that we can achieve it, because I have confidence in the people of British Columbia.

I'm amazed at what we've accomplished in the past three years, proving to the world that with imagination, talent, careful planning and hard work virtually nothing is beyond our grasp. In just three years we have turned this province around. We have rebuilt our economy, revitalized our industries and regained our role as a national leader. As a province we have brought back investment. We've created hundreds of thousands of jobs. We've strengthened our communities. We won the right to host, in 2010, the world's most prestigious cultural and sporting event.

The challenge now for all of us is to build on that momentum. Budget 2005 will help us do exactly that with long-term investment in our environment and our communities; new measures to strengthen our economy; new supports for children with special needs and people with disabilities; thousands of new post-secondary training spaces; the highest-ever budgets for health care and education; the largest-ever annual reduction in provincial debt; and income tax and MSP premium changes that, over three years, will leave over \$480 million in the pockets of those who need it most.

Let me just remind the House that these new investments are possible because of new economic growth and prudent fiscal management. For three

years running we have proven our ability to stick to our plan and to keep investments affordable. That's why the major credit rating agencies have upgraded their outlook for our borrowing position, and that's why we are able to make choices that British Columbians want for a province and a future that inspire pride and confidence.

[1525]

This budget is all about the people of our province. It's about the nurses and doctors and teachers and child care providers and all of the individuals who dedicate their professional lives to caring for others and helping them make the most of their potential.

It's about the loggers and miners and other individuals who literally turn our natural resources into products, and the truck drivers and the port workers and everyone else who helps to get those products to the marketplace.

It's about the small business owners working around the clock to realize their own dreams and, in the process, generating jobs and strengthening our economy. It's about the scientists and the researchers and the risk-takers pushing the very boundaries of what is possible.

It's about the moms and the dads juggling all of the daily demands of work and life and raising a family and knowing it's worth it every time they see their children smile.

These are the people who built our province, who keep it going day by day. These are the people who, one by one, are building the province's future as we move forward to a golden decade that years from now historians will point to as the decade that changed our destiny and solidly established this great province as a national and global leader in everything from health status to literacy to job creation, to measures to protect our environment.

British Columbians have done the hard work. The pieces are in place. We have a vision, and just as important, we have a proven plan to achieve it. Budget 2005 is a vital part of that plan for the future. Let's get to work in this House and across this province and show the world, decisively, that British Columbia is indeed the best place on Earth to live, to work and to raise a family.

Deputy Speaker: In response to the budget speech, the Leader of the Opposition.

J. MacPhail: It was very easy to find one single word, as we demonstrated in question period, about the Premier's promises before the last election: whopper. With this budget, it is very easy to find one word to describe it: cynical.

I suppose these kinds of election budgets are a time-honoured tradition that British Columbians have come to expect, but this budget is different. This budget goes beyond the pale. Four years ago the Premier sprung his agenda on British Columbians, an agenda he did not campaign on and for which he did not receive a mandate. Almost immediately after the

Premier was sworn in, average British Columbians found themselves on the receiving end of an aggressive downsizing of government, predicated on the need to give the wealthiest few a huge tax cut and the manufacturing of a completely phoney structural deficit.

I won't list what was sacrificed to pay for this foolishness except to say that the price was very high — record deficits, broken promises by the dozens, higher taxes and fees, longer wait-lists, failed privatization schemes and a more polarized and divided province than ever.

Now, 91 days before an election, the Premier is trying to change his story, change it so radically as to strain his credibility to the breaking point. Just like in 2001 the Premier wants to be all things to all people, but this time he has a record. This time British Columbians know what this man is about, and this time they won't put their trust in him or his government again.

[1530]

It is simply not credible to pour money back into the same programs and services that this government itself dismantled over the last few years — exactly the same programs that this government destroyed. It is simply not credible to demand a huge sacrifice from average families and then attempt to buy them off with their own money as the election nears. It is simply not credible to speak the language of the hard, conservative Right — that government-is-the-enemy language of deregulation, trickle-down tax cuts, restraint and pain — to speak the language with apparent sincerity for four years and then to abandon it so completely in only a few weeks. It is not believable. It is not responsible. It insults British Columbians.

Let me give one example. Last week the government finally admitted it had broken its long-term care promise to seniors and their families. They revised that promise, but now it's taken less than a week for them to break that revised promise again. Today's budget commits nothing to long-term care. Restoring some dollars to home care, palliative care, mental health and addiction services — programs that were cut by this government — doesn't even scratch the surface of the needs that seniors face. It means that once again this government has betrayed them.

British Columbians have had enough of this boom-and-bust budgeting. They've had enough of the cynical political ploys. They've had enough...

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Order.

J. MacPhail: ...of last-minute political extreme makeovers, and they've had enough of the politics of division and polarization that this Premier has raised to an art form.

After only four years this Premier has squandered his credibility, spent his political capital and now faces an angry and frustrated province — a province that is looking for change, a different kind of government

than we've come to expect. New Democrats are answering that call under the leadership of Carole James, who's reaching out to business...

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Order.

J. MacPhail: ...to working people, to communities — a moderate, responsible and steady approach to government that builds consensus and acts with understanding and support of British Columbians; a government that doesn't pick fights and doesn't divide but draws on the expertise and experience of all British Columbians to meet the challenges of this young century; a government that understands that to succeed in the global economy and to nurture our democracy, every citizen counts and that a strong, dynamic economy and a caring, compassionate society are not mutually exclusive goals but are necessarily joined; a government for the many, not just the privileged few.

For four years the Premier and his government violated those principles. They divided our province and made life harder every year for average families. By so completely turning tail with this budget this soon before an election, the Premier has only reminded us all of his broken promises, his extreme agenda and his broken trust.

I'll have much more to say about this budget tomorrow, and I will shortly move adjournment of the debate, but before I do, let me say this. I understand from media reports this morning that the Premier has decided that this House will not be debating the detailed estimates before the election. This House is scheduled to sit after the Easter break next month. There is plenty of time before the election campaign begins on April 19 to fully debate the government's promises and commitments in this budget. But this government, as it has so often after the past four years, is more interested in stifling debate and eliminating accountability than it is in defending its record.

[1535]

What is this government trying to hide from British Columbians? Why will it not defend its budget in this Legislature? It was a former Premier of this province, Bill Bennett, who coined the phrase: "Not a dime without debate." How ironic that the current Premier, who in so many ways is Mr. Bennett's political heir, is running away from the scrutiny of this Legislature. If the government is so proud of this budget, if the Liberals really want British Columbians to believe them, then let this House fully debate this budget line by line. If this government refuses to debate the estimates, the only possible conclusion is that the Liberals are trying to hide something from the voters. Well, you can run, but you can't hide.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Order.

J. MacPhail: However, given the record...

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Let's hear the Leader of the Opposition.

J. MacPhail: ...of this government, I can't say I'm surprised. Our caucus will hold this budget up to the closest scrutiny on behalf of British Columbians all over the province, in spite of this government's decision to run away from the Legislature.

With that, I move adjournment of debate.

J. MacPhail moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

Hon. C. Hansen presented a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: bills intitled Budget Measures Implementation Act, 2005; Income Tax Amendment Act, 2005; and Taxation Statutes Amendment Act, 2005.

Hon. C. Hansen: I move first reading of Bill 6, Budget Measures Implementation Act, 2005; Bill 7, Income Tax Amendment Act, 2005; and Bill 8, Taxation Statutes Amendment Act, 2005.

Motion approved.

Hon. C. Hansen: These three bills implement many of the key changes announced in Budget 2005. Bill 6, Budget Measures Implementation Act, 2005, amends several acts to improve financial management. The Financial Administration Act is amended to clarify the definition of public moneys and to streamline the authority for making and receiving contribution payments.

The Special Accounts Appropriation and Control Act is amended to provide for a new special account called the production insurance account effective April 1, 2005, and to eliminate the habitat conservation special fund account, which is no longer required. The fund continues, but under different auspices, as you'll see. The South Moresby Implementation Account Act is amended to support the federal-provincial government for the establishment of South Moresby Park. In addition, the Wildlife Act is amended to improve the governance of the habitat conservation trust fund.

Bill 7, Income Tax Amendment Act, 2005, is amended to introduce the B.C. tax reduction effective January 1, 2005. This new non-refundable tax credit will reduce or eliminate provincial income taxes for 730,000 taxpayers. It will extend the provincial mining exploration tax credit for ten years. It will increase the small business corporate income tax threshold to \$400,000 and introduce several measures to harmonize the act with the federal Income Tax Act.

Bill 8, Taxation Statutes Amendment Act, 2005, includes amendments to ten provincial statutes that increase the fairness of the tax system, encourage energy conservation, and improve the administration, compliance and clarity of the application of tax. These changes include amending the property transfer tax to enhance the first-time homebuyers exemption, increasing the threshold and introducing the homeowner grant phase-out rate under the Home Owner Grant Act, providing regulatory authority in the School Act to introduce exemptions for alternative power projects and amending the Social Service Tax Act to enhance the provincial sales tax benefit available for hybrid electrical vehicles and to introduce a new exemption for energy-efficient residential heating equipment.

I move that these bills be placed on the orders of the day for consideration at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bills 6 through 8 introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

[1540]

Tabling Documents

Hon. C. Hansen: It gives me pleasure to rise to table service plans pursuant to the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act. There are two bundles. One is for ministry service plans, and the other is for Crown agency service plans — all of which get posted on the website.

Hon. G. Bruce: It's been a glorious day in British Columbia. Democracy is such a wonderful thing. The Earl of Derby, the former British Prime Minister, once said: "The duty of an opposition is very simple: to oppose everything and propose nothing." Let us get on with the debate.

Hon. G. Bruce moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned until 2 o'clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 3:41 p.m.