

Open Cabinet

Open Cabinet Transcripts



TRANSCRIPT OF THE OPEN CABINET MEETING January 26, 2005

Province of British Columbia EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Premier and President of the Executive Council
Minister of State for Intergovernmental Relations
Minister of Children and Family Development
Minister of Advanced Education
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries
Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Treaty Negotiations
Minister of State for Early Childhood Development
Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services
Minister of State for Women's and Seniors' Services
Minister of State for Immigration and Multicultural Services
Minister of Education
Minister of Energy and Mines
Minister of Finance
Minister of Forests
Minister of State for Mining
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health Services
Minister of State for Mental Health and Addiction Services
Minister of Human Resources
Minister of Management Services
Minister of Provincial Revenue
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
Minister of Skills Development and Labour
Minister of Small Business and Economic Development
Minister of Sustainable Resource Management
Minister of Transportation
Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection

Hon. Gordon Campbell
Hon. Sindi Hawkins
Hon. Stan Hagen
Hon. Ida Chong
Hon. John van Dongen
Hon. Geoff Plant
Hon. Linda Reid
Hon. Murray Coell
Hon. Wendy McMahon
Hon. Patrick Wong
Hon. Tom Christensen
Hon. Richard Neufeld
Hon. Colin Hansen
Hon. Michael de Jong
Hon. Roger Harris
Hon. Shirley Bond
Hon. Brenda Locke
Hon. Susan Brice
Hon. Joyce Murray
Hon. Rick Thorpe
Hon. Rich Coleman
Hon. Graham Bruce
Hon. John Les
Hon. George Abbott
Hon. Kevin Falcon
Hon. Bill Barisoff

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2005

The cabinet met at 9:04 a.m.

Premier's Opening Remarks

Hon. G. Campbell: Good morning. We're going to start today with.... I'll say a couple of comments, and then we've got an agenda to pursue. First, it's January 26 today. It's actually one month since the tsunami hit India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand and Africa. We've all gone through.... I'm sure everyone has seen the incredible outpouring of generosity of the people of British Columbia and Canada, and actually around the world, to try and provide for the resources — both the spiritual and the physical resources — that people need to get through what was, I'm sure for all of them, an incredibly difficult and heart-wrenching event.

[9:05]

There are still lots of things that we have to learn from that, but the one thing that I think we did learn was how generous British Columbians were. As you know, from the taxpayers of British Columbia we have contributed \$8 million to the Canadian Red Cross for their relief efforts, but individual British Columbians continue to provide exceptional service and relief. You may know that Barry was over there, and he certainly comes back with some interesting stories about what people did to try and not just survive....

I know, Joyce, that your daughter was there. Boy, that's a series of stories of right decisions on her part or — what you would call it? — prophetic decisions on her part. We're all glad that they are all safe and secure.

Roger Barnsley was there — who is the president of the University College of the Cariboo, about to be Thompson Rivers University. We've all got, I'm sure, things that have touched back to that. It has also been a reminder to all of us.

Rich has provided an additional million dollars for coastal communities. Communities on the west coast of Vancouver Island are getting \$20,000 per community to do an upgrade and on the north coast to have a review of their potential, their dealing with these emergencies. We're also going to look at what we can do in the interior and the Georgia basin part of the province where there's \$10,000 per community.

One of the really important parts of this, though, is that people are now alert to some of the challenges and some of the ways that they can personally respond. Public education is going to be an important part of that outreach, as well, in terms of providing people with the tools they need to be safe and secure as we go through those sorts of situations.

As you know, we continue to face substantial weather challenges in the province. I can't believe it was just last week, but it was last week that we had the landslide in North Vancouver with the loss of life of one person. One person was seriously injured and is still in hospital. I should say that it's always a tragedy when those sorts of things happen, but one of the things that I thought was most difficult for all of us was that the person who lost her life, Ms. Kuttner, was a teacher at Capilano College — one of those teachers that touches the lives of literally hundreds of students over a period of years and years and years. I know that they all felt that loss particularly strongly as well. We all, I know, thank whoever it is that we thank — thank God — that we are lucky enough to be alive and able to pursue the goals and objectives that we have in the face of those sorts of incidents.

I should say that all the people who were affected by the landslide.... I think that our provincial emergency preparedness people, again, were just exceptional. They were on the ground at.... The slide hit, I think my recollection was, at 3:15. They were on the ground. Emergency centres were up and running. I know that Katherine, Richard and Dan Jarvis were there first thing in the morning — within literally hours of that taking place. Within minutes, really, of that taking place, our fire officials were there and out on the ground and trying to help people through that.

So today we face flooding. We've got flooding in Keremeos, potential flooding in Quesnel and Hixon, at Birch Island. Again, these are things that people have no true control over, and we're going to try and do the best that we can to help them through these difficult times. We know they're difficult, and they can be wrenching. There are an awful lot of human stories that go behind what happens when people lose their homes or lose special items.

I met with one of the couples who actually had been evacuated in North Vancouver. The hill had come down into their house. It's hard to imagine, but imagine sleeping in your bedroom and being roused out as a tree comes through your bedroom and knocks things out that you've had. They came back and said that one of the things they'd both lost were their wedding rings, which they took off and put on their night table the evening before when they went to bed. It was

something they did. So they're never going find those. The great part of that story was their daughter in her crib was pushed over to the edge of her room, and it was almost like she wasn't even touched. The land came right up to the side. Again, there's something that makes that happen, and we're grateful that has taken place.

But to the folks who are facing those floods... I know that Kevin has been up looking in some of the areas. I know that the MLAs are up in the areas, concerned about them. At the provincial council the mayor of Prince George, Colin Kinsley, was going back for the regional district to deal with the people in Hixon. So again, to the people in the province: we will be there for those people. To our emergency officers, to the people and the provincial staff that do this, to all the volunteers who make this work, we should just say a big thank you for the contribution they make.

[9:10]

One of the things, again... Rich and I visited the site in North Vancouver. The emergency search and rescue team was out on the site searching for the body of Ms. Kuttner. They were hoping that she would be alive, obviously. They were there literally minutes after they were called out. But just think of this. That search and rescue team had been practising, working, training for ten years on their own personal time. This was the first time they'd been called out to an emergency in British Columbia, and they did just a great job. But that's ten years of giving of themselves to the community so they're ready. That's the kind of citizenship you just can't say enough about and thank people enough for the contribution they make. I did want to say that today to all of them.

Later today Rich is going to take us through an update on where we are in terms of emergency preparedness in the province. I know that people are concerned about that. I'm looking forward to that, as I know you are.

On Monday we had the annual provincial congress. Again, I think it was very good. It's always interesting to me how positive people, who come out of those, feel those meetings are. The information that's shared is clearly something that's important. As you know, we have a number of critical issues as we move through the coming years. There are two significant ones that I think we should really focus on at the federal level with all of our MPs, as we move ahead.

The first one is a very positive one, which is the whole opportunity gateway that's taking place in British Columbia. We are Canada's only Pacific province. I was very pleased that when the Prime Minister was in Beijing, he pointed out that the two gateways to opportunity are the port of Prince Rupert on our north coast and the port of Vancouver on the south coast. He recognizes the province as a centre of Pacific opportunity.

Out of the Premier's office I will be initiating a major thrust over the next 90 days to bring those opportunities together and to lay out a plan for advisory councils from industry for new activity in China, in India, in Korea, in Taiwan and in Japan. We think we have to make sure that people understand that this is our province and our objective. Actually, it's a national objective, and Canada will benefit from what we're doing. I think there are huge gateway opportunities for us, but those will require substantial and significant investments that think of the country as well as the regions of the province as we move ahead. That will be one of the areas that we will pursue in the months ahead of us.

The second area that I think is really very important that we think about now is the whole issue of the pine beetle. The pine beetle epidemic is the largest epidemic of its kind, the largest infestation of its kind that we have record of in North America. If we don't have a comprehensive federal-provincial response to that, we know that in the long term there are going to be very substantial social problems. As we see some of the issues that we face in the short term... A catastrophe like a tsunami or something — that's something that's immediate and that you can see right in front of you. The pine beetle we actually can see. It's right in front of us. We just can't, in terms of visualizing it, imagine what it's like.

We have a very comprehensive program we put in place in the province. We are going to continue to do that. It will be a program not just of harvest but of marketing, of research and development, of developing engineered wood products, of looking to the future for those resource communities so they have a future over the next 25, 30 and 50 years — not just over the next ten or 15 years. It will challenge all of us in government — local, regional, provincial and federal — to make sure we manage that.

As we said to the MPs the other day, if in fact we don't do a good job of acting now, they should know that the pine

beetle doesn't rest at the province's borders in British Columbia. It will stretch across the border to Alberta. It can easily stretch across into the Canadian Shield. That is something we all have to be aware of as we move ahead.

I hope we can bring government resources together in an aggressive and positive way over the months ahead, and I'm talking months here, not years. There's a tendency to say: "Well, let's wait until we have everything in place." We won't have everything in place for some time, but we know there are things that we can do now, that we should do now, and we're working with the federal jurisdiction to hopefully get that put in place as quickly as possible.

[9:15]

On top of that, as you know, Rich and I made the announcement that there will be \$122 million in additional dollars over the next three years for police, for courts and for corrections, as we move to expand the role of not just our police force by 215 officers across the province, 89 more police officers to fight serious and major crime, 14 more police officers to fight cybercrime and Internet luring, 80 more police officers to help with rural communities and general policing, and 32 more officers for first nations communities across the province.

It's another step in what has been our public safety initiative, and we're going to keep pushing on that. We're going to hear more about that — not that particular part of it, but other things we're planning to do as we move ahead today in cabinet.

We have also established.... I was very pleased with the positive response we received from people at the provincial congress to the task force on public safety. We know there's a lot that we can do, and it's legislated as well as policy-oriented as well as delivering of services. We will have that task force.

We will examine the legislation that we have provincially. We'll examine legislation they have federally. We've asked our MPs to respond with their suggestions. Our local communities.... I can tell you that a number of mayors came up and said they wanted to be part of this. The whole question of sentencing.... What happens? What are minimum sentences for things like automobile theft? Those kinds of things are things that some of the MPs and the mayors said they wanted to talk about. We should.

I think, Rich, you were telling me the other day that a little while ago the police put out the ten most-wanted people for automobile theft. We now have, I think, found seven of them. Now the question is: how are those seven dealt with as they go through the court process? We want to be sure that we send the right message to people with regard to automobile theft and move ahead.

The bait car program has been exceptionally effective, I think, in terms of apprehending people. Now we have to be sure that we take the next step, and that's one of the things we'll talk about as we move towards the provincial congress on public safety that we'll be hosting in the fall.

I think it's also important for us to recognize that this is a comprehensive approach we're taking. It's not just 100 percent of the traffic fines that we were giving to urban communities, which can be used for crime prevention and policing. The safer streets and trespass acts; the new \$84 million federal, provincial and local partnership for innovative solutions on homelessness, mental health and addiction services; the new federal-provincial funding arrangement that we reached last fall, which allows us to expand mental health services particularly and addiction services across the province— those things are an important component of us moving ahead.

Later today on the agenda Shirley will be giving a presentation on worker and patient safety in the health sector. Wendy will be giving us a submission that builds on the plans that we've had for women's services, and it includes improvements to our safer community initiative. All of those things are important as we move ahead.

Finally, today we will hear from Colin with an update on what the finances of the province — the economy — are looking like. As you know, we will have a throne speech on February 8. We will have a budget speech on February 15.

I think we've seen over the last little while some significant improvements in the economy. There is clearly, from my

perspective.... I think I started mentioning this last spring as I travelled around the province. There was really a rising sense of optimism then, but you can really feel it in communities now. I know that the mining industry is almost buoyant, I would say, in terms of their sense of opportunity for the future. They recognize British Columbia as a place that they want not just to go to work and to explore but also to pursue the opportunity to create new investments and literally thousands of new jobs in the province in mining.

Dick, I want to say that it was very good news you presented to the congress on Monday, just to put it again so everyone knows. When we were elected in 2001.... In that year the mining exploration amounted to about \$29 million across the province. This year it's going to be \$130-plus million. That's more than four times the amount of exploration that we had in 2001, and that does mean jobs.

I think it's important to say this. It's not just the policies that we've put in place, but the policies put in place have allowed us to take advantage of the global commodity prices and the global demands that we see.

[9:20]

To go back to what I was mentioning earlier, the amount of coal that we've shipped to China over the last year was up 100 percent from the previous year. There are increasing demands there. When we look at the new mines, there are two new coalmines that are opening in Tumbler Ridge. There's one, I think, that's just been approved through the environmental assessment process — an additional one. Korea is looking at using those mines as one of the primary sources for their metallurgical coal as they move ahead.

Those are very positive signs for us. That's why the gateway strategy of opening infrastructure across the north, through the rail corridor that's been established with the new B.C. Rail investment partnership, through the investments in Prince Rupert's port, the shipments out of Ridley Island.... Those are all going to be very positive in the long term for British Columbia.

All of that has meant that we have, as we saw at the end of December of last year.... Between December 31, 2001, and December 31, 2004, there is no province in Canada that generated more jobs than British Columbia. That's great news for people across this province; 198,000, I think, is the number that they're up to.

Things, I think, are going in the right direction. The mining plan that Pat put out, again, has been well received. We appreciate the work that you've done, Pat.

As we move ahead today, I think that we're looking forward to 2005. We'll start off with Rich giving us the background on where we stand with our emergency preparedness. Any questions first, anybody?

Okay. Rich.

For Information: Emergency Preparedness

Hon. R. Coleman: Thanks, Premier.

As the Premier said, on January 19 in the early morning, as a result of heavy rains pounding North Vancouver.... The rains contributed to a mudslide in a residential area, which is something we haven't seen in British Columbia for a long time in a residential area. A woman was, unfortunately, killed when a house was destroyed by the slide, and her husband was hospitalized. The district of North Vancouver declared a local state of emergency. The Premier and I visited the site that day. Flooding was also reported in a number of areas across the province, causing further evacuations in areas like Keremeos, where the Similkameen breached its banks with ice, etc.

Our response, once again, in my opinion, showed that we have one of the best emergency systems in North America. The Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre was immediately activated when these incidents took place. We then moved to five provincial-regional emergency operation centres being open throughout southern B.C. They were supported by a group of people we call TEAMS. TEAMS is a temporary emergency assignment management system that we put in place in this province some time ago. TEAMS is a pool of employees within the civil service from

across government who are trained and have experience managing emergency situations and operations and communications during a disaster. They arrive in any community that needs assistance and help them set up their emergency operations and deal with it.

The evacuees in the situation we had, again, were provided with emergency social services by our community volunteers. Emergency social service traditionally, under our act, is that 72 hours after an event somebody has food, clothing and shelter. We've extended that continuously in other major events. We did that in this case, as well, where we are still paying for people to have hotels and meals who can't go back to their homes.

Evacuees in these events have been meeting with officials. We've always set up a system of communication with people locally. As of last Friday, the damage estimate for the events we've dealt with so far is between \$10 million and \$15 million. Disaster financial assistance will be available to people. Disaster financial assistance is a system where we provide people with assistance on their capital with regards to when they have an event that is not able to be covered by insurance. We provide that. We are on the ground doing those applications with people that are affected today.

Today I wanted to just sort of quickly give you an update on the four basic spots that are top of mind today with regard to incidents. In Barriere the Thompson-Nicola regional district amended a declaration yesterday at 4 o'clock to include Barriere and Louis Creek. If you remember, Barriere and Louis Creek have already been through this with the fires. It's unfortunate that the community is now having to deal with evacuation alerts again in the valley, which affects about 400 to 500 people.

Their concern is some trailer parks along the Barriere River, but there is no flooding today. The trailer courts are located — just so everybody knows — on the Barriere River, not the North Thompson, as has been reported. Overflights show that the three small ice jams on the Barriere River are a potential threat but the risk of the jams breaking free and causing flooding at this point in time is low. The ice jams are monitored through the night by our search and rescue teams and will continue to be monitored.

[9:25]

There was a town hall meeting in Barriere last night at 6:30 p.m. It went well. The residents were informed of the risk. They were told of the issues. We had people from all our agencies there — Water, Land and Air Protection; emergency social services; and emergency planning. We opened the Barriere reception centre, where no residents have registered to date for emergency social services, because they're still in their homes.

There have been a number of people that have voluntarily evacuated, but we don't know that number today. In the community of Hixon there was a town hall meeting held last night. People from 33 homes and two businesses in low-lying areas were informed of continuing potential for flooding.

The regional district of Fraser-Fort George ordered evacuation of low-lying properties last night at 8:30 — good compliance by the residents of the remaining four to five homes that were affected. People were offered accommodations, and the Prince George emergency social services.... RCMP will be providing security in the evacuated homes. Again, the ice jams will be monitored by search and rescue, and we'll do an overflight today with regard to that one.

Birch Island. Early this morning the ice jam at the bridge was moved from Birch Island, and the water level has dropped by three metres, which is good news for us. The water is two-thirds clear upstream of Birch Island Bridge.

Interjection.

Hon. R. Coleman: Three metres.

All it takes is for that little dam to break. It's an ice dam. That's what it is.

Hon. G. Campbell: Yeah. Three metres is nine feet.

Hon. R. Coleman: The water is clear upstream and 7/8 clear downstream. The Ministry of Transportation will reassess the bridge probably today, if they can get in there. It is unknown if the ice jam three kilometres upstream has broken free yet, and we will be overflying that today.

The ice passed Clearwater Bridge without causing damage. Ninety to 120 people remain evacuated.

Yesterday in North Vancouver the returning families had a meeting and were provided with engineering letters of assurance by the district of North Vancouver that their homes were safe to return to. There are still 20 evacuees on that site while we're doing geotechnical surveys to determine whether those homes will be safe and what work would need to be done to remediate this.

As you know, the provincial emergency program offers information and assistance in any area that is affected by disaster. You can contact the provincial emergency program in a number of ways. I have put some sites up on the screen here. If you wanted to have an update on any incident that's taking place in the province, the website is updated regularly. That's <http://www.pep.bc.ca/>. The phone numbers are there: 250-952-4913. The fax number is 250-952-4888. Our emergency response centres are up and running and manned 24 hours a day in the areas where there are potential emergencies at this time in B.C.

Something else we did. As you know, we had a pretty significant disaster in Asia in December, where we had the tsunami. Now, I want to tell people first of all, before I get into the discussion, what we have done as a province. We are the only coast that we know of — the North American coast, United States and Canada — where we actually have an early warning system for tsunamis. We track these things when there is an earthquake worldwide, so we are actually in a position to have a lot more notice than any other jurisdiction, like the people in Asia had.

I remember that about a year and a half ago there was an earthquake in the area of Japan, a significant one. I was receiving updates electronically on a regular basis as to the formation of waves from that earthquake, which was way over on the other side of the Pacific — with regard to it — because that's the type of technology we employ in North America.

But having said that, I think it is important that we take the opportunity that reminds us.... As we do whenever we have emergencies, we always try and do a risk assessment. We go back and see what worked and what could be improved on. When we have a significant event like this worldwide, we need to look at our own operations. So what we did is we said if we took some money for the 24 communities that were identified as high-risk communities — which are, basically, the west coast of Vancouver Island, the Charlottes and the west coast of B.C. — that are open and exposed and not protected by the island.... We should have some money that we would identify for those communities to do some emergency planning work, identify additional routes and have some plans in place. We said we would give those 24 communities \$20,000 in high-risk areas and \$10,000 to those that would be affected in a lower-risk area where the water may come through but not be as damaging.

It does remind us how vulnerable we are when it comes to nature. Nature certainly takes over. It doesn't matter whether it's a slide or the huge chunks of ice that Kevin and Bill saw when they were up in Keremeos or whether it's fires or whatever. There are certain things that are always going to happen that we have no control over. When we don't have control, the responsibility for us is to protect people first and property second and to make sure people are taken care of while they're out of their homes.

[9:30]

The Premier announced the \$1 million for tsunami preparedness. Funding is going to help protect those communities. Major earthquakes and tsunamis are low-probability but high-consequence events. In other words, they don't happen very often, where they come and affect us, but by George, when they do, they are pretty dramatic. They can create a ton of damage in a short period of time and put a huge amount of life at risk. We do live in an active earthquake zone, and while we already have excellent emergency planning in place with regard to that, we need to do all we can to make sure that it's improved.

Having said that, just so you know, we run scenarios. We have run a scenario of a major earthquake on the lower mainland and exactly how we would move everything from military personnel out of a base in Edmonton to how we would handle everything to deal with an earthquake. We do that as emergency planning — to be prepared for these types of things in the future.

We want to learn from these things too. As the communities use this to look at existing plans and discover problem areas to enhance them.... We also did a virtual seminar a week or so ago with communities across the whole area that could be affected by a tsunami, where we had everybody on line. Ironically, I believe it was the morning of the slide in North Vancouver that we had all of these communities on line for a full-day seminar with regard to the tsunami issues, their emergency preparedness, what they can do and the planning stages they can do. This funding we're giving is a step to enhance that preparedness. We're working together with other agencies and our partners to make sure communities have the tools they need to be prepared. We're constantly reviewing the potential risk, helping communities to identify gaps in emergency plans and looking at ways to update communications and warning systems.

Recent tsunami workshops that we did do were an opportunity for communities to get the latest information from events and to find out what actions could be taken to prepare for events and to improve their systems. Provincial emergency regional managers will now go out to each of these communities to ensure that emergency plans are developed and existing plans are adequate for every community.

The Asian tsunami raised public awareness about the nature and scope of such disasters and the ability we have to respond to a similar event on our shores. We've come a long way in a short time. The Premier announced \$8 million to Asian tsunami victims and \$1 million to coastal communities to enhance their preparedness. I think it was significant that we as a community — where we live, where we have such richness in our province — moved immediately to send money to the people that were affected by the tsunami. By sending money and not supplies that would have to go on ships and be difficult to handle.... To send the money to an agency that can deliver on the ground was absolutely the right decision on our part to make, and it's a decision that people in our province should be proud that we made.

We're pleased that the federal government, subsequent to our \$1 million commitment, has also announced \$850,000 to help set up a jointly funded program to allow coastal communities to set up training, telecommunications and tsunami warning capabilities as well. That funding will ensure that over 70 coastal first nation communities are also prepared, so even those that have the least communication will have some ability to deal with events.

In the short term, we've improved communications and opened up dialogues between governments and communities on the risks of tsunamis. In the long term, we will improve emergency plans and work closely with communities to make sure British Columbians are prepared to deal with any emergencies they may face.

Our experience in North Vancouver last week showed us that all emergencies can happen anywhere, anytime, and the preparation is important. As the Premier said, we have the urban search and rescue team, which has been training for ten years and who actually attended their first event on call-out at that event. That urban search and rescue team, just so you know, is the only United Nations–certified urban search and rescue team in Canada. At the time of 9/11 there was no other urban search and rescue team anticipated or being put together in this country. There is now one in two other cities across the country, but yours is the best in the country.

While I'm pleased at our response, we can always make improvements. I think that we always have the postmortems to these events to see how we can improve on communications or anything else. I think our experiences in the last few years have shown that we've improved our communications and improved our ability to work with people and deal with families that are affected by these events in such a way that they're kept whole, they're kept feeling that their families are safe and together and that government and communities are behind them.

[9:35]

As we look forward, we can be proud of our response for what we did for the tsunami victims, what we've sent them and what we've done on our own coast. We can also be proud of the work that's been done by the people on the

ground every time we have one of these events in British Columbia. As we move forward, we will certainly continue to improve our emergency programs as we can. I can tell you that at the first emergency planning FPT meeting, federal-provincial meeting, just a few days ago, it was our deputy minister for emergency planning giving them some assessments relative to how we respond to things like avian flu. They probably received the best response at the meetings because they were actually hearing from some people that knew what they were doing, how they could do it and how they could get it done.

So, Premier, I'm pretty comfortable with where we are in our communications with MLAs and with communities. I'm really proud, frankly, of the MLAs, whether it be Kevin Krueger in the North Thompson, or Dan Jarvis and Katherine Whitted in North Vancouver or Bill and the guys up in the interior. They move on these things. They talk to people in the communities. That's just one more thing that really helps our communication and relationship with communities to make sure they feel safe.

Hon. G. Campbell: Thanks, Rich.

Any questions? Bill, and then Rick.

Hon. B. Barisoff: Thank you, Premier.

I just want to commend the emergency teams that took place, particularly in the Similkameen. I just want to share an experience. Kevin and I had the opportunity to go over to Keremeos and witness what happened at Don & Anna's Greenhouses. I guess the concern, Premier, was when Don and Anna were watching the ice build up in the river. They saw it building. Within an hour, it came up over the banks and literally, within 20 minutes, engulfed their two acres of greenhouse. I think we've got to understand that the forces of Mother Nature were so great that it was about 15 feet of ice. When it went through, it was four feet of ice just walking through the greenhouses.

For Kevin and me, it was an unbelievable sight to see, just to see what had happened. But the emergency preparedness teams that were out there did an excellent job. They're looking after them and seeing what they can do. But when you see what happens.... I think my concern was just.... It was an unbelievable sight.

Hon. G. Campbell: Rick.

Hon. R. Thorpe: Thank you, Premier.

Rich, could you give us an update on what's happening at Fitzsimmons Creek, up Whistler way?

Hon. R. Coleman: Yes, I can, Rick.

The situation at Fitzsimmons Creek is not, at this point in time, an emergency event. The lead agency on Fitzsimmons Creek is Land and Water British Columbia with the district of Whistler.

What it is, is we have a slump up Fitzsimmons Creek, which is dirt moving into the creek. The concern would be if it dammed up or the bank let go and we ended up with a mud flow down, basically, at the foot of Whistler Mountain and into the community.

It's probably highly top of mind at this point because of what happened in North Vancouver. Obviously, our team, the PEP people, is working with those groups to monitor and find solutions, and there's some work being done on it today. I think it's a case, though, where we may have to go in and do some remediation work to deal with the issue, but I don't think we have enough information yet to know how we can handle it long term. But certainly, we're on it.

Hon. G. Campbell: I should just mention that both the Prime Minister and Anne McLellan, the minister responsible for public safety, were in touch with both Rich and me, saying that whatever they could do to help, they were glad to do.

I mentioned at the time that, for example, in situations like Barriere with the North Thompson.... I know we've had

this challenge with the Chilliwack River and other water systems. We did it with the Squamish River initially too. Government laid out requirements for diking at 100-year and 200- year incident levels. When those requirements were laid out, we didn't have the same policies with regard to the removal of gravel, etc., as we have today. That has at least raised some questions with regard to those 100-year and 200- year incident levels for that diking.

I did say that one of the things that is important for us and critical for us, and we can deal with this in emergencies.... I think that every time we deal with this we know the more we can do before the emergency happens, the better off we're going to be. We do have to work with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to try to allow for more gravel removal in critical areas, because if we don't, we're not learning the lessons that we should be learning from these events.

As Rich says, we can't predict everything that's going to happen, but we know that if some things take place, we'll be in trouble if we don't take some action. So that's an area we will be pursuing.

[9:40]

I think the other thing that's very important, and I should say in terms of the situation with the landslide in North Vancouver, is that we go after.... As Rich said, after an incident has taken place, we go and examine what took place. I know that in North Vancouver now there are people who are out trying to examine what took place. We're looking at the history, and all of those things will be done.

I think the way we handled the fire situation with Mr. Filmon makes a lot of sense. We look at these situations. We're not looking for blame; what we're looking for is what we can learn — what are the lessons we have? What can we do that will improve the sense of where we're going and give people a sense of confidence?

I know that in North Vancouver there were a lot of people that were concerned early. The most important thing they had to do was know that if they kept calm, we could handle those things in a far more effective way. They did, and that made a big difference. We are going to go through.... People should know we'll review these. We'll look at what.... In terms of the building, there are a lot of people that said: "Should we be building in these places?"

There are different requirements now than there were, say, 30 years ago. We upgrade building codes all the time. These things will be reviewed, will be examined. I was encouraged, frankly, by the response both of the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister — that they are ready to work with us with regard to looking at our river systems and looking at the challenges that flooding creates, as well as any other initiatives that we think make sense coming out of these events.

Again, thanks to the people on the emergency preparedness teams. I think we should all be proud of the fact that those public servants are doing an exceptional job for everybody.

If there are no other questions, we'll go on. The next item is the issue of improving safety for patients and health care workers. Shirley is going to report to us on that.

For Information: Improving Safety of Patients and Health Care Workers

Hon. S. Bond: Thank you, Premier.

Well, it's been an exciting and certainly challenging month as I've learned a lot about the new portfolio I have. Today is really the culmination of some work that was begun by my predecessor, Colin Hansen. It's very timely, considering some of the circumstances we faced over the last very short period of time. One of the things that certainly has been a priority for all of us around this table and our government has been the issue of patient safety and safety for those people who work within the health care system.

Health care is all about people. It's about the people who receive care and the people who are so dedicated — the professionals who actually care for people in British Columbia. Those professionals — whether they're nurses or doctors, laboratory technologists, respiratory technologists, and so many others.... All of them do their best work in

environments where they feel safe and supported. Every single British Columbian, no matter where they live, should feel that they are receiving absolutely the best and top-quality health care they deserve.

We want every health provider in B.C. to be confident that their own health and safety concerns are being addressed. Our health care workers every day provide care to people who are sick — some who are dying and some who are dealing with untold levels of stress. In some circumstances, stress can be elevated to the point of aggression. Numerous safeguards for our patients and health care workers exist at every level in the health system.

Despite those safeguards, there are at times incidents that place our health care workers at risk. As you know, one of our mental health workers was stabbed leaving work on Wednesday. I'm sure that none of us can find the appropriate words to express how we feel for that family, for the colleagues and so many people that were impacted by that circumstance. But across the health authorities, we have protocols and processes in place that assess and reduce risks, including emergency response teams that intervene in managing aggressive situations.

In the case of any critical incident, the relevant health authority must undertake a comprehensive review of policies, processes and procedures. What's most important is learning from these reviews. That helps us enhance the safety of the work environment and reduce potential risks to the best extent that we're absolutely able to make possible.

In addition, tracking every incident also allows us to understand patterns and trends in the area of staff safety. I have said, and we have made it clear, that we will do whatever is necessary to protect our staff and our patients. So today I want to talk a little bit about a pilot project that was started under Colin's leadership. It's an important system. We've had a pilot working in four health authorities for the last number of months. It's a pilot system that's looking at how we track across the province safety incidents in health facilities.

[9:45]

The pilot project has been underway, and it's been operated through the Occupational Health and Safety Agency for Healthcare in British Columbia. I should just mention that that particular agency is actually unique in Canada. It's a bilateral partnership where health employees and employers work together to try to find policies and procedures that are most appropriate to make sure we have safe and healthy workplaces.

So today I want to.... We are going to be investing a million dollars for the workplace incident tracking system, and I want to make it clear that the work has been ongoing. It has been piloted and tested in four health authorities. We want to use this investment to ensure that we can now cover the entire province with the workplace tracking system.

We know that what it will allow us to do, in fact, is gather data that's currently collected in individual health authorities. It will allow us to bring that information — things like workplace incidents, injury rates, follow-up activities, exposure to disease and risk factors — and we'll then be able to store it in one location.

In essence, it allows us to speak the same language to each other, and that information will then help us monitor and look across the province. We'll be able to look at geographic factors. We're going to be able to compare jurisdictions. We're going to be able to look at service levels across the province. What it'll do is give us outstanding information which will inform our practice and look at improving and enhancing workplace safety.

So in essence, the whole point of using this tool will be to allow us to determine where improvement is needed and how we can do that across the province. Through the process, we will continue to build on the best practices that will ensure that our health care workers can focus on what they do best, the important work they do every day: caring for the health of British Columbians. The process, the pilot and this investment of a million dollars will allow us to do that.

We certainly should know this, and I know that all of you know this and British Columbians know this: we have one of the best health care systems in the world. But even the best system has room for improvement. Just as we want to look at how we improve the workplace for our health care workers, we also want to make absolutely sure that we are looking at ways to ensure that patient safety is a number-one priority for our health care system.

Our health care workers do a fantastic job every single day. I've had the pleasure of meeting some of them in this new role, and they're an incredible group of people. And we know as a government that we have incredible outcomes in British Columbia. British Columbians are living longer; more babies are born at a healthy weight, giving them the best possible start to their lives; and more of our seniors, children and health providers are getting immunized to prevent the spread of disease.

Yet recent research has shown that one in 13 people that are hospitalized experience an adverse event. Thankfully, the majority of those are minor, but some can be far more serious than that. Patient safety is at the forefront of health care issues, not just in British Columbia but, in fact, across the country and around the world. I'm so pleased with the work, and Colin has done some great work in setting a platform for us to begin to continue to do that work.

We want to make sure that we're minimizing the risks that we have, and we in British Columbia have actually been a leader in this area, in the provision of safe and appropriate health care. In fact, the Premier was at the first ministers' meeting in 2003. The Premier actually was there when B.C. was one of the founding members of a National Patient Safety Institute. Last year Colin took that one step further in British Columbia by establishing a Patient Safety Task Force to help with the goal of emphasizing and working on patient safety issues in British Columbia.

One of B.C.'s National Patient Safety Institute members, Dr. Patricia Petryshen, is actually now on our own patient safety task force. What the task force does is bring leaders from across the province.... One of the things I'm most proud of, especially considering I live in a northern part of the province, is that the task force brings together regional representatives from all around the province so the entire province is represented on the patient safety task force. That's actually unique in British Columbia, and I think that speaks volumes about how we feel about the entire province.

[9:50]

But since Colin brought the task force to creation in May of last year, they have very quietly and very efficiently gone about their work. Some of the things they've done.... They have actually created patient safety goals for 2004. They've looked at patient safety policies. They have been supporting our health authorities in developing specific skill sets to help enhance patient safety in our institutions. They've also conducted a very thorough baseline survey on medication safety in 50 of our facilities across B.C. And that's only some of the work they've done.

No matter what the project and no matter what the work they've done, they have helped us in implementing best practices in every single hospital facility in British Columbia. In less than a year they have proven to be a very effective tool in British Columbia, so we wanted to make sure that this work continues and that we continue to address the ongoing short-term issues around patient safety. We will be investing \$6 million over the next three years to ensure that the work of the Patient Safety Task Force continues in British Columbia.

Probably more importantly and as important to patient safety initiatives underway will be the investment that we are making of \$3 million toward the establishment of a patient safety chair at the UBC faculty of medicine. Again, this is an incredible and unique opportunity in British Columbia. For the very first time in British Columbia and in fact in Canada, we are going to be leaders in the area of patient safety. We are going to establish a patient safety chair in an academic department. It couldn't be more timely, because at UBC they're taking an innovative and integrated approach, bringing together in one department for the very first time the disciplines of anaesthesia, clinical pharmacology and therapeutics. Those are areas where it's absolutely paramount that we consider patient safety issues, so the department will be an ideal location for a chair in patient safety.

The chair is going to demonstrate the importance of patient safety in British Columbia. In fact, it will set B.C. apart as a leader in this particular field. Our goal in setting up the chair is that we will create a systematic way and a scientific approach to basing and addressing new issues. It's so important that we have the information we need as the system evolves and patient care evolves over the next number of years.

Together the department and the chair will work very closely with the Patient Safety Task Force. In essence, the task force deals with the ongoing short-term issues around patient safety, but the chair gives us the opportunity to look to the future and how the system will need to evolve to deal with patient safety issues. It's an incredible opportunity for

partnership, which once again will place British Columbia at the forefront in the area of patient safety.

Finally, Premier, these initiatives are about giving us access to the most accurate and up-to-date information that we can possibly have. With that information, we can shape our policies, our practices and make sure that patient safety and workplace safety is a number one priority in British Columbia.

What I want to leave cabinet with today is the fact that we are doing everything we can in this province and in fact leading the country in the areas of patient and health care workers' health and safety. These strategies will continue, Premier, to make British Columbia the safest place to be a patient and certainly the safest place to care for patients.

Hon. G. Campbell: Thanks, Shirley.

Any questions?

This is all done within your existing budget?

Hon. S. Bond: It is, Premier.

Hon. G. Campbell: Great. Thank you.

The next item on the agenda is Wendy's report on women's services. Wendy.

For Decision: Enhanced Supports and Safety for Women Escaping Violence and Abuse

Hon. W. McMahon: Thank you, Premier, and good morning.

Today I'm going to speak about some of the specific things our government is doing to support women in British Columbia. Our government values the contributions of women to our communities, to our economy and to the bright future of our province. Women today are benefiting from a strong economy, and they're contributing with their skills and knowledge. Female labour force participation is at an all-time high at 60 percent. Of the 197,000 new jobs created since December 2001, a total of 37 percent are full-time jobs for women. That's good news for women, and that's good news for families.

Our province has the highest rate in Canada of small businesses run by women. That's 36 percent of our small businesses around B.C. More women are preparing to take leadership roles in our communities, in business, in education and in politics. More women are preparing for these roles right now. In B.C. over 57 percent of university students are women. More women are going to graduate school, and more women are registered in trade courses at our community colleges.

[9:55]

Across government we are supporting women to realize their full potential in a secure and healthy environment through a variety of programs and services. This year the provincial government is providing \$600 million for services for women or services used primarily by women. Funding is largely from five ministries: Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services; Ministry of Health Services; Ministry of Children and Family Development; Ministry of Human Resources; and Solicitor General. These services include the excellent work being done at the B.C. Women's Hospital and Health Centre, increased breast cancer detection, early childhood development programs and supports for women and children escaping violence and abuse within the home. These are significant commitments as part of our fiscal plan to build a strong economy and make sure that services are there for B.C.'s women and families.

In the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services we provide one million hours of services annually through our transition houses, counselling and outreach services for women and their children who are escaping violence. We have maintained spending of \$33 million a year for these direct essential services. Women know that transition houses and safe homes provide a safe place for those who are escaping violence and abuse.

Premier, like my predecessor Ida Chong, I am visiting with aff, counsellors and front-line workers. I have heard from front-line staff about the work they're doing and the challenges they face. Recently I visited a transition house in the Gulf Islands. Their dedicated staff not only provides service for women and children that make this transition house their temporary home. They also provide outreach for all of the Gulf Islands, and they're doing a great job.

What people may not realize is that transition houses are more than just a safe place for women who seek shelter. Murray Coell, who's right here beside me today.... I would like him to share some of his thoughts about prevention services.

Hon. M. Coell: Thanks, Wendy.

Premier, as you know, we're committed to working to prevent violence before it starts. We're doing that through the violence prevention initiatives in the ministry. One of the most important ways we're working to prevent violence is by reaching children at an early age in elementary and middle schools, where they spend most of their time.

Our government is supporting a pilot project, which Wendy mentioned, with the B.C.–Yukon Society of Transition Houses called Violence is Preventable, or VIP. Through VIP, counsellors are linked into schools to reach children where they're often feeling the most safe. The project is the first to deal significantly with domestic abuse, how it affects children and how teachers can help. If a student shows signs of having witnessed violence or abuse, teachers can work directly with the children-who-witness-abuse counsellor to get them the help they need as quickly as possible. VIP links together two groups that are focused on the well-being of children: our schools and children-who-witness-abuse counsellors. Both of these are made stronger by this project.

In addition to the project, we recognize British Columbia's diversity. Aboriginal and multicultural communities are also taking part in this, I think, very valuable pilot project — also in urban and rural schools. We're committed to supporting healthy, respectful relationships through this program, and its award-winning violence prevention program develops healthy and respectful relationships for adolescents 12 through 17.

Premier, from my perspective the request that Wendy is about to make to cabinet is the most significant and most needed request that my ministry has put forward since I became minister. I look forward to the conversation after the presentation.

Thanks, Wendy.

Hon. W. McMahon: Thanks, Murray.

We're also addressing the needs of very young children through the Roots of Empathy program recently announced by the Premier. It's a program that I'm familiar with. I know how successful it is. I saw it firsthand at Eileen Madson Primary School in Invermere.

I know that Linda Reid is also passionate about this program. I'm wondering if you would like to share some thoughts on it with us, Linda.

[10:00]

Hon. L. Reid: Thanks, Wendy.

In partnership with school districts and communities, the Ministry of Children and Family Development is supporting the expansion of Roots of Empathy into kindergarten classrooms in British Columbia. Many of you will know that Roots of Empathy was developed by Mary Gordon and was first introduced into the Toronto schools. Certainly, most notably, we have probably the largest number of Roots of Empathy classrooms anywhere in Canada now here in British Columbia.

The Premier asked that early childhood development only go forward from the base of the best possible science, which is why we have a partnership with the human early learning individuals at the University of British Columbia

and our consortium of universities. Dr. Kimberly Schonert- Reichl is leading the research.

The Roots of Empathy program is returning amazing results to us. The program enhances children's learning but teaches them about vulnerability. In fact, we have now found an accompanying reduction in incidences of bullying in British Columbia schools and certainly in those children who would typically have spectated in the past.

Since 2001 Roots of Empathy has been implemented in 319 classrooms throughout British Columbia. It is about teaching emotional awareness to children. We have babies who are typically born in the months of May or June who come to their first classroom in September at two or three months of age. They come once a month, and they in fact celebrate their first birthday in May or June of the following year with that classroom. In fact, those children basically believe that's their baby.

The opportunity to support teachers to teach children about the program, to enhance community supports and to strengthen the social fabric is a unique opportunity in British Columbia.

We also today are underway with the Seeds of Empathy. That's a program we will institute for three- and four-year-olds in British Columbia. Certainly, the focus of this administration has been around prevention. If we can reach children at younger and younger ages, we believe we can reduce the incidence of bullying as we go forward.

Children in the Roots and in the Seeds programs are guided to observe babies' responses and are taught about the different traits babies are born with. They learn to read the babies' gestures. They learn to pay attention to how a behaviour will manifest itself, and they gain some insight into their own individual temperaments and learn about understanding difficult behaviours. The overall message is one of acceptance and respect for individual differences. Learning about vulnerability does reduce bullying.

Wendy, thank you for the opportunity.

Hon.W. McMahon: Thanks, Linda.

I think we've heard about some very good prevention programs that we're offering in the province, and the provincial government is certainly committed to breaking the cycle of violence.

We also continue to make significant contributions to support the health and well-being of women and children. I know Shirley has some good information on some initiatives that we're moving forward with.

Shirley, can I get you speak about that?

Hon. S. Bond: Sure. I'm delighted to be able to speak about the issue of women's health. One of the things we've learned is that women, by and large, are the major caregivers in the health care system. I know I've certainly experienced that, being a mother and a daughter and then dealing with my own health care needs at the same time. It's very complex, and it's very unique for women. And it's important, as we move forward and deal with the issues around women's health, that we recognize that we have very complex and unique needs, and our system needs to respect that. Certainly, in British Columbia that's been the case.

It was great when we as a government — in the very first six months of our office, actually — placed B.C. Women's Hospital and Health Centre under the provincial health services authority. B.C. Women's is the only facility in Canada, in fact, that is devoted primarily to the health of women and their newborns and families. It's Canada's busiest and largest maternity hospital. Health care providers — think of this number — at B.C. Women's Hospital deliver 7,000 babies every year. Many of those are mums who are having a high-risk pregnancy.

Together with the University of British Columbia, B.C. Women's also provides scientific expertise as the B.C. Research Institute for Children and Women's Health. Scientists and medical professionals conduct world- class research spanning the entire range of women's health issues. And we certainly are going to have much more to say about that in the coming weeks. B.C. Women's also houses the B.C. Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, providing B.C. physicians with the absolute best practice guidelines for women's health.

Recently two of my colleagues also unveiled a provincial women's health strategy. Our goal is to improve the health of girls and women. You know, life expectancy — this is a good thing — among women has achieved an all-time high, but there are still a significant number of issues which impact the quality of life for women today.

[10:05]

In British Columbia we do recognize the role that women play in managing their families' health care. For example, immunizations are one of the best methods of protecting children's health, and this year we expanded our childhood immunization program by almost \$13 million. What we did was we added protection against chicken pox, flu, pneumonia and meningitis.

Because women also teach appropriate self-care, nutrition and lifestyle habits, women are health care's first line of defence. That's one of the reasons that our ministry has provided a range of supports for parents. There are some great... Linda is smiling because I know she knows these handbooks very well. There are some wonderful tools that we've provided for parents. We have *Baby's Best Chance*, which is a handbook that provides information on how to care for your infants up to six months of age. We then move into the toddler years where it's *Toddler's First Steps*. That helps parents with topics such as nutrition and behaviour during those important toddler years. We also have a child health passport, which gives parents a place to record their child's health and growth information. Both those handbooks and passports are available at public health units across British Columbia.

For other important tools that, in particular, assist women in their roles both as parents and caregivers, we have the B.C. HealthGuide, which provides information on important health topics, and the B.C. NurseLine. I'm not sure if any of you have ever used it, but it is staffed by registered nurses who provide answers to health care questions and concerns 24 hours a day, seven days a week. B.C. NurseLine nurses are trained to advise callers if they need a follow-up appointment with a doctor. I can tell you that many of the calls that go through B.C. NurseLine are from mothers who are actually really relieved when they can talk to a professional anytime they need them. In fact, last year when I looked at the numbers for B.C. NurseLine, there were actually more than 250,000 calls made to B.C. NurseLine, and over 60 percent of those were from women.

B.C. NurseLine is also connected to a number of other agencies. If you call and you need to be connected to someone else, B.C. NurseLine has the ability to do that. They can connect you with B.C. Ambulance Service, the B.C. NurseLine pharmacist network, the Drug and Poison Information Centre and Dial-a-Dietician. It's become incredibly useful to families and, in particular, women who are using the service at increasing rates.

We also have worked with the B.C. Medical Association to collaborate on strategies to help women in rural areas of our province deliver their babies closer to home. What's more important at a time like that in your life than to be able to be closer to where you live to deliver your baby? The maternity care network initiative provides financial incentives for physicians to work in group practices if they have maternity patients, and the family physician obstetrical care incentive encourages doctors who have small maternity practices to continue providing obstetrical care.

Midwives in small and large B.C. communities also have an important role to play in providing maternity and infant care. In 2005 — and I know Minister Chong will be proud of this as well — British Columbia will graduate its first two classes of nurse practitioners. These nurses will have advanced skills and training that will provide British Columbians with an additional choice of health care provision in the province.

Finally, B.C. is one of the leaders in cancer prevention. B.C. was the first province to implement a provincial breast screening program. Last year the screening mammography program of B.C. conducted more than 225,000 mammograms in over 100 communities throughout B.C. While that's significant, there's still work to be done, and there are very many geographic discrepancies in terms of how women respond to the need for a mammogram. When I looked at the stats... I live in northern British Columbia, and the numbers are significantly lower for women to participate in that program than they are, for example, on Vancouver Island. There's a large disparity there in terms of who goes for a mammogram.

The last good-news piece of information is that B.C.'s cervical cancer screening program is also incredibly successful.

The incidence of cervical cancer has declined significantly in British Columbia since physicians have been conducting regular tests for their patients. So we have much to be proud of in terms of women's health initiatives in British Columbia, but there is work to be done, and we're going to continue with an aggressive agenda in this area.

[10:10]

Hon. W. McMahon: Thank you, Shirley.

Premier, as you can see from the examples provided by my colleagues, we're working to meet the needs of women and children in British Columbia. But there is always more work to be done and new challenges to meet. Last year our government announced a base funding uplift to one-third of our transition houses. At that time, my predecessor Ida Chong said: "This is just the start." As we get our fiscal house in order, we are able to use our resources to better meet the needs of women and children in British Columbia in a sustainable way.

Premier and colleagues, we are ready to embark on the next stage of improvements to services for women at risk. Today I am bringing to cabinet a proposal for a 33 percent increase in funding for programs for women and their children escaping violence and abuse, increasing our current funding to \$45 million annually. This is the first significant funding increase in over a decade.

We have always been committed to strengthening the services we offer. We have maintained funding to direct essential services for women. We are now, with a strong financial foundation, able to deliver on our promise to build on our plan to make communities safer.

Ida Chong and I have talked to transition house operators, counsellors and other front-line staff. Minister Chong personally visited 22 transition houses this past year. We listened to what front-line staff have told us they need, and we are prepared to act.

We are proposing a \$12.5 million annual increase in funding that would include the following elements. We will provide an additional \$5.1 million to transition house providers to meet the needs they have identified in their communities to improve 24-7 accessibility. This new funding will increase safe shelter by adding beds to transition houses. It will fund new safe home programs. It will provide reliable, sustainable funding that will increase services to women and their children at vulnerable times.

We will also provide \$600,000 to ensure that transition houses have a staff person dedicated to working with children to help them cope with their trauma. Mothers can then focus on their own recovery while children deal with their trauma in a supported and positive way. Counselling is critical to helping women and children deal with trauma and rebuild their lives. That's why we will provide a total of \$2 million to expand counselling through existing programs and create new counselling services for women and children. There are some communities that have counselling services for women but not for children, and this isn't acceptable.

Outreach work is critical in helping to break the cycle of violence, especially for women in rural and remote communities. A total of \$1.6 million in new funding will be used to help expand outreach services around the province. Outreach workers bring violence prevention initiatives to local communities, helping to break the cycle of violence. Outreach workers will make sure that women know that services are available to them.

Front-line workers have told us that training is critical. We have heard them. We are allocating a total of \$700,000 for training initiatives. Training will also help staff to work more effectively with police, the justice system, social workers and human resource staff. We recognize there are opportunities to provide more supports for senior women, immigrant and visible minority women, aboriginal women and women with disabilities to help them meet their special needs. A total of \$2 million will be directed to new initiatives in these areas. We know that violence is more prevalent in aboriginal communities. We also know that cultural issues make it more difficult for women of some ethnic groups to speak out and get the help they need. Senior women and women with disabilities also face special challenges.

Finally, we are proposing \$500,000 annually for a new mentoring program. This will ensure that women who have never been in the workforce or who are entering it after a long absence have the kind of support they need to move

toward independence.

Premier, the benefits of these programs and services will be felt in communities around the province. This has always been part of our plan, and we're delivering on that plan. I want everybody to remember that over the last four years, we maintained funding for direct essential services to women. Last year we provided a funding increase. Now, with our fiscal house in order, we are in a position to take the next step.

[10:15]

This 33 percent increase in funding will be the first major funding increase in this area in over ten years — something that did not happen under the previous administration. I have heard from front-line workers, from the groups who represent them and from women who use these services. I am confident that these proposed initiatives will further meet the needs of at-risk women and children around the province.

Premier, colleagues and MLAs around this province, I know we all share a commitment to end violence against women and to ensure that supports are there for vulnerable women and their children. This package will do just that.

Right now I would just like to take a minute to thank Ida for her leadership this past year. She's done an incredible job as she visited the transition houses. It's been great for me to be able to follow in her footsteps. I would like to thank all of you for your consideration. I now submit this proposal for your decision.

Hon. G. Campbell: Thanks, Wendy.

Questions? Ida.

Hon. I. Chong: Thank you, Premier. I want to also thank Wendy for bringing this proposal forward. Of course, I'm absolutely supporting this submission, and I want to say I appreciate how comprehensive this new funding increase is in the amount of services that are being provided.

Premier, while I know that you were following closely my activities last year when I was the former minister — what I was doing around the province — I just want to take a moment to share with all other cabinet members what I was up to. As Wendy has indicated, I travelled around and had the opportunity to meet with and speak to a number of our front-line workers.

Hon. G. Campbell: Many have said: "What were you doing, Ida?"

Hon. I. Chong: Very important work. Today we see that.

I visited 22 transition houses. I met with our front-line workers, our outreach workers, our social workers, our counsellors. Each and every time I visited with them and met with them, they all wanted to talk. They had ideas on how to better serve the needs of women and children. It was really important that they had the opportunity to speak to an MLA and to a minister and had an opportunity to say: "We can do things better. We just need a little bit of extra help."

That's why today's submission is so wonderful. These are all exceptional people who work in this field, in caring for women and children who have witnessed abuse or are escaping violence.

As a result of all those meetings and all those talks... Premier, you've said it yourself many times. It's important that we look for ideas and solutions not just inside government but outside of government, and that's exactly what this is all about. I want to acknowledge all your support and encouragement last year for me. You suggested that I reach out, that I listen and that I bring back ideas and solutions that we can act upon and ensure that we can enhance services for women.

Today this is the result of that listening, and this is the result of that reaching out. More importantly, this shows that we're acting. I want to thank you, Wendy, and commend you for bringing forward this proposal. A 33 percent increase

is substantial. I'm very proud of the work and of all the people who provided information to us in our visits to have this submission today.

Hon. G. Campbell: Susan.

Hon. S. Brice: Thank you, Premier. I, too, want to go on record as enthusiastically supporting this proposal and to add an additional bit of information from the Ministry of Human Resources. This proposal — enhanced supports for women escaping violence and abuse — dovetails perfectly with the bridging employment programs in the Ministry of Human Resources.

Keeping women and children safe has to be the top priority. Then some of these women need assistance preparing themselves for employment, and they can receive this help through the bridging programs we have provided throughout the province since 2003. These programs are particularly structured to serve women who have suffered from violence and abuse, women who have suffered from abuse and have additional barriers such as language or culture, and former sex trade workers. These programs focus on pre-employment life skills and assist clients to overcome some of the barriers that prevent them from making successful transitions to sustainable employment.

We in the Ministry of Human Resources, and obviously as a government, are committed to assisting women who are able to work to find jobs and to become self-reliant so they can build brighter futures for themselves and their families. We have had very good results. Today 100,000 fewer British Columbians rely on income assistance. Within that number, 19,600 are single-parent families, and 6,500 are single women. That also includes 44,000 B.C. children.

[10:20]

Premier, I raised the Bridges program to emphasize that we're providing a continuum of services to ensure safety and, ultimately, independence for women and their families. Well done.

Hon. G. Campbell: Thanks, Susan.

Dick and then Sindi.

Hon. R. Neufeld: Wendy, the \$5.1 million, you say in some notes I have here, will be supporting 24-hour accessibility at transition houses. Is that all transition houses that are in operation in the province of British Columbia today? Because some don't have it and some do, I guess.

Hon. W. McMahon: That's right. Some transition houses are 24-7; some are on call. I can use an example of what 24-7 accessibility might mean to some transition houses. There are some transition houses in the province that don't have staff on after, let's say, 8 o'clock at night. They lock the doors, and the people that are there are inside. I've heard of an instance where a woman was working now and going to the transition house at night and, because her bus was late, was unable to get into the transition house without phoning somebody to come down. So this will alleviate some of those types of concerns.

Hon. R. Neufeld: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. G. Campbell: Sindi and then Joyce.

Hon. S. Hawkins: Thank you, Premier.

I'm in complete support of this submission. I think it's really important to recognize that this is going to help some of the most vulnerable in our society: the women and children who suffer abuse.

I'm really encouraged to see the new initiatives that look at helping, perhaps, the areas that we didn't address before, or as much before. We didn't have the resources, and we're able to add it to help aboriginal, immigrant and visible minority women. In the past in areas that I have worked, I know there are barriers to these women accessing services or even having the courage to reach out for these services. So I think we really have to involve groups that work with

them to figure out ways how we can help them access these services.

In addition, the training dollars are going to be so important, again, in helping to train sort of mainstream workers — which there are more of than culturally sensitive, I guess, workers — to be more culturally sensitive. I completely and wholeheartedly endorse this submission. Thank you for bringing it forward.

Hon. G. Campbell: Thanks, Sindi.

Joyce.

Hon. J. Murray: Thank you, Premier.

Wendy, I appreciated that I was able to participate somewhat in discussing this program, as were some of the other cabinet ministers. I've had two women's forums in New Westminster. At both of them, top issues that came up were helping women get back into the workforce after raising a family.... That's your mentoring program. But the other one is the help for women that have experienced abuse. Unfortunately, New Westminster is a place that has a high incidence of that kind of violence.

When you have this funding, my understanding is that some of this will be allocated through requests for proposals so that the organizations — whether they're women's centres or other organizations that provide some of these services — will submit a proposal. I see you're nodding, so that's correct.

Hon. W. McMahon: Yes, that is correct.

Hon. J. Murray: Do you have a way that the organizations that may not have done proposal writing before can find out how to do that so that if they're great at service delivery but don't have experience in writing a proposal, they're not at risk of not being able to be part of your delivery team?

Hon. W. McMahon: Thanks, Joyce, for the question.

I appreciate what you're saying. I had a discussion with one of the resource centres in one of my communities. I could tell from speaking with them that they're not comfortable writing proposals. So I think it's something that we will be looking at and perhaps part of our outreach and how we can.... We've done it successfully. We've sent teams around the province teaching people how to do proposals, and I think that this is a good area to look at too.

Hon. J. Murray: Okay. Thanks.

Hon. G. Campbell: Bill.

Hon. B. Barisoff: Thank you, Premier.

Wendy, a couple of questions that I have are the extent that the transition houses are throughout the entire province, throughout the heartlands of the province also, and what kinds of services are offered through the multiculturalism.... The different ethnic groups that we have throughout the province — how do we service those people?

Hon. W. McMahon: Are you talking about the transition house setting?

Hon. B. Barisoff: Yes.

[10:25]

Hon. W. McMahon: There are challenges, I think. And with challenges, of course, are opportunities in how we address the issues. Specifically, are there transition houses for multicultural women? Is that what you're asking? Or are you...?

Hon. B. Barisoff: I think my concern is to make sure that all the ethnic groups — everybody — are accommodated

within the.... I think that abuse doesn't happen in just one segment of society.

Hon. W. McMahon: No.

Hon. B. Barisoff: How are we addressing that issue? Then, of course, is the issue throughout the province of how we're addressing it.

Hon. W. McMahon: That will be some of the.... We have \$2 million set aside for new initiatives to address violence against women, with a focus on multiculturalism, seniors and women with disabilities, because violence happens in many different ways, and many different cultures treat it differently. So we will be addressing it through that.

Hon. G. Campbell: Are you going to do it on a request-for-proposal basis in terms of dealing with first nations people — you know, various cultural groups, etc.?

Hon. W. McMahon: For services we'll be looking at requests for proposals. Some are already providing services. It might be something that they can continue to do. There are a number of different ways that we'll be addressing that.

Hon. G. Campbell: The \$2 million that's going to enhance programs like Stopping the Violence and Children Who Witness Abuse counselling programs — are those public outreach programs, information programs?

Hon. W. McMahon: They're counselling programs within the communities. What we found....

Hon. G. Campbell: Sorry. I know what those two programs are. But are we going to let people know more that they're there, or...? I mean, we can create programs, but the issue is to make sure that people know they can access the programs.

Hon. W. McMahon: Yes. Right.

Hon. G. Campbell: It's the same issue with, for example.... If we deal with this and if we're trying to deal with the diversity that we have here, are we going to be providing services in different languages? Are we going to communicate to them about availability in different languages? Is that part of what this is thinking of?

Hon. W. McMahon: I think that the main issue here will be reducing wait times. We have wait times around the province for services, and that will be the main focus. We can certainly look at providing information in different languages so that people are aware of the programs.

Hon. G. Campbell: I would like you to go back and think about how, particularly in terms of the dollars for the new initiatives, we should.... We do have transition houses that are available now. We're enhancing those services that are important, but we should, I think, be communicating in Mandarin, in Punjabi, in Tegali. We should be making sure that we're aware of those top.... I think there are six languages in British Columbia that are fairly prevalent. We should at least make that information available in that way, particularly when we know there are some cultural challenges in terms of dealing with violence against women in different cultures. Let's try and make sure we're reaching out and understanding those as we go forward too.

Hon. W. McMahon: Thank you. Yes.

Hon. G. Campbell: Rich and then Graham.

Hon. R. Coleman: Premier, maybe I could just help out there. We do have a 24-hour VictimLink line in B.C. which does have multilingual access in a variety of languages. We do, in the specialized victims programs today.... We already have them in some of the ethnic communities — some of our more successful ones like the one in Abbotsford that John would be familiar with in the Indo-Canadian community. A specialized victims program exists. These things would interconnect. I would think that if you were wanting to deal with these programs, you might just want to tie it into VictimLink, and then you can deal with it that way.

Hon. G. Campbell: The other area that you could look at, Wendy, is the NurseLine. Right now I think it communicates in 130 different languages.

I just think it's something we have to put in our heads for when we're delivering services if we want to reach out to those communities.

I had one other. Graham.

Hon. G. Bruce: Wendy, I'm particularly interested in the part about the mentoring program. You're talking about it as a volunteer base. This, really, is the whole issue of empowerment, of helping people get back to that point in life where they're feeling independent and confident again.

I had a woman in my office the other day that runs a skills development agency, if you like. It's interesting, with the economy that's taken off and the job demand that's out there, how the traditional roles have now blended quite significantly.

[10:30]

She'd been working with contractors who were looking for employees and looking into the aspect of female employees. She was trying to do some work in how she could go about increasing the awareness of the opportunities that were there for women in what some would consider to be the non-traditional role.

I was up at a plant that we have in the area, which builds concrete structures for bridges and the like. The fellow who runs the plant was telling me that a young lady that had been working there, who was a friend of my son.... She's gone on to other work now, but the highest-producing crew he ever had was when that young lady was on the crew. She could outwork all the guys, but there was this whole drive to stay up with it. She worked with him for a couple of years.

Hon. G. Campbell: It's kind of a lot like cabinet — don't you think?

Hon. G. Bruce: I would think so.

Whenever he had projects that were falling back, he would put her on that particular crew.

But I just noticed the volunteer aspect. I think that's wonderful. I would also hope that you would make sure that.... There are actual agencies out there right now who are way ahead — looking, trying to find ways to encourage — and there may be a way you could involve them as well. That opportunity, then, for people who find themselves in difficulty and perhaps looking for the rebuilding of self-confidence and that whole issue of empowerment.... Boy, there are tremendous opportunities out there if they could be connected.

Hon. W. McMahon: Thanks, Graham.

Hon. G. Campbell: Tom.

Hon. T. Christensen: Thanks, Premier.

I think, as all members of cabinet will know, that one of the goals of the education system is the development of social responsibility. We have districts around the province that have made improvements in that part of their mandate a priority. I want to thank Murray and Wendy and Linda for the work they're doing and the programs that they've talked about this morning, which support the work that's being done in schools.

Roots of Empathy, obviously, is being delivered through schools. Any of us who's had an opportunity to sit in on one of those lessons can tell you what a wonderful experience that is just to see that interaction between a newborn and — some of us are a little more familiar with newborns than others, immediately familiar — kids that are a little bit older. In fact, it's certainly being delivered in kindergarten classes, but in some cases with grade 3, and I've seen even grades

6 and 7 students that are involved in Roots of Empathy. You could see the impact that it has on those students, particularly those who may not have a younger brother or sister or cousin. They just see that vulnerability, and they learn from that. It's a very interactive experience and a very guided experience.

As well, I think the Violence is Preventable pilot sounds like a strong program and something that would be welcome as a further tool that schools and school districts can use to develop that social responsibility piece.

Wendy, moving away from strictly the education system for a moment, I think the elements you've identified here are exactly what needs to happen. I know from speaking with the folks at my own transition house in Vernon, which is a transition house that enjoys very strong support of the community as a whole, all of these things are areas where, if resources are available, they can do more work.

I think it's important, and I understand that it's one of the priorities here, to try to provide a little more consistency around the province. Some of us do live in communities that enjoy a very strong transition house, and others of us would like to see those services enhanced in their community. I think you've really identified the key parts, and it's clear that it's from the discussions that both you and Ida have had with transition houses. I want to commend you on the work that's here, and I certainly fully support the direction that you're going in.

Hon. W. McMahon: Thanks, Tom.

Hon. G. Campbell: The request is for \$12.53 million annually for the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services for the areas that are outlined.

That is approved. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Wendy.

Thank you, Ida, for the work you did too.

The next item on the agenda is an economic forecast update from Colin.

For Information: Economic Forecast Update

Hon. C. Hansen: Thank you very much, Premier.

Basically, we have seen some incredible strength in the B.C. economy over the last number of months. I think what's most important is that we're starting to see the outlook for the years to come as being increasingly stable and one that is certainly optimistic compared to the kind of economy we were facing in this province four and five years ago.

[10:35]

One of the things that I want to underscore — and you'll see this reflected in the budget when it comes down on February 15 — is that the strong economy and the balanced budget that we now have in British Columbia are not ends in themselves. What it means — the strong economy and the fact that we've got our fiscal house in order in government — is that we're going to be able to support the kind of services that we've just been talking about.

Wendy made the point that this expansion and funding for programs for women facing violence is the first increase in over ten years. You know, if you go back and look at the last half of the 1990s, the NDP simply were not creating the kind of economy or the kind of revenues to government that could have allowed for a sustainable increase in the kind of programs that we've just been talking about.

Today I want to talk a bit about our economic outlook. I want to also talk about the surplus that there has been a lot of conversation about, and really what that means for us as we're going forward.

The economy is truly firing on all cylinders. It's not back to where it should be, certainly. If you look at the ten years that we really lost ground in terms of economic progress in British Columbia.... It's going to take a long time to make

that up. That's not something that happens overnight. Clearly, we have turned the corner on that. We are starting to see the economy rebuild in ways that I think we've all worked very hard to make happen over these last three and a half years.

The economy has been strong in just about every single sector. It's not just one part of the province, and it's not just one sector of the province. It's really across the board. We've seen consumer confidence in British Columbia up 10.8 percent last year alone. That's far ahead of what we see as a Canadian average, where we saw the increase Canada-wide is up about 1.8 percent. Really, the 10.8 percent growth in British Columbia accounts for a pretty big chunk of the overall consumer confidence in Canada.

Just over a week ago I met with Laura Jones of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. She pointed out to me that B.C. has ranked either first or second for six straight quarters when it comes to business confidence. In fact, in the latest survey that they did of their membership, B.C. was way ahead of other provinces when it came to business confidence.

We've also seen very strong retail sales this year. We've seen growth in manufacturing and exports that is in the double-digit territory. We've all heard about the boom in house construction in British Columbia. Last year was truly a banner year, and the forecasts are that that's going to continue into the future. We've also seen a significant increase in non-residential construction as well, which I think is important to note.

When you look at British Columbia in comparison to other provinces, you get a clear picture as to how well we are doing in this province. We've seen growth in retail sales that I mentioned, but we're almost 50 percent higher than the Canadian average. We've seen manufacturing grow by 12.7 percent, compared to the Canadian average of 7.9 percent growth. We've seen exports last year up by 11.3 percent, compared to 9 percent Canada-wide. In terms of housing starts, we are number one in Canada, as I mentioned.

Non-residential building permits. Over all, Canada actually saw a reduction in building permits for non-residential construction; in B.C. last year we were up by 7.3 percent. We are truly leaders in the nation. People have confidence again, and people want to invest in this province in ways that we have not seen for many, many years.

In terms of employment, B.C. ranks first in terms of employment growth. If you compare December of 2001 to December of 2004, we saw a net increase of just under 200,000 jobs in B.C. I think what's even more compelling than that statistic is the fact that 97 percent of those net new jobs in B.C. are full-time employment. I think what is really important is that strong employment means that fewer people are looking for work, and we know that a job is probably the best social safety net that anybody could ask for in this province.

Another important thing I want to highlight is that these jobs we're seeing are not low-paying jobs. B.C. continues to have the highest percentage of its workforce earning over \$16 an hour. I think that is significant.

[10:40]

Every region of the province has seen a reduction in the unemployment rate and has seen growth in employment numbers. Just last month I was up in the West Kootenays. In the Kootenays the unemployment rate has now dropped to 6.6 percent. That is the lowest unemployment rate in the Kootenays since 1973. That is phenomenal and truly something that people.... There was a buzz in the meetings I was in, in the Kootenays at that time.

A Voice: A buzz.

Hon. C. Hansen: It was abuzz.

Hon. G. Campbell: Mills running and mines opening.

Hon. C. Hansen: That's the buzz. It's humming.

You know, I can remember when the stat came out from Stats Canada that showed we had, for the first time,

surpassed two million people employed in British Columbia. That was just a couple of years ago. Today we are now approaching 2.1 million people employed in this province.

You will know that every quarter, the Economic Forecast Council comes together to make its predictions as to where B.C. is heading in terms of economic growth. They met on December 3, which is.... Normally they meet in early December of each year to provide the economic forecast numbers that actually get used as we go into the February budget each year. This year was a bit different because the forecast council asked for the ability to come together again in January to update its forecast. That was the first time that has happened. They met again on January 10.

What's interesting, as a result of that review they put in to us.... They have actually increased their expectations for economic growth for 2004. Even though 2004 is behind us, the actual economic growth numbers will not come in for a long time in terms of the absolute numbers. All of these economists are projecting that the growth they had anticipated even as of December is, in fact, going to be even better when those final numbers come in.

They have also increased their growth projections for 2006. That is significant for us. We're starting to see that this long-term trend of consistent economic growth around 3 percent is starting to settle in. That's something that is going to be very beneficial to the province as a whole, but it's going to be very beneficial to us as government when we start to anticipate the kind of programs we can put in place as we go forward.

You know, it was only about five years ago that this province actually experienced a quarter of negative economic growth. If you think back, that's not that long ago. It has really been an absolutely phenomenal change in the economy of this province in a very short period of time. We have come a long way. Many of the economists are now forecasting that B.C., in fact, will lead Canada in economic growth. There are other economists saying that we may not be No. 1, but we'll be No. 2 — only slightly behind Alberta. When all of the numbers are in, we will see whether in fact we are able to surpass Alberta in terms of economic growth, as many of the forecasters are anticipating.

When we formed government three and a half years ago, we inherited a structural deficit of \$3.8 billion a year. That was the independent panel that went out and looked at the state of the province's finances and came out with that determination. The structural deficit is one that is built in; it's entrenched. It's pretty hard to break down those structural deficits, but we have been able to do that. For the first time in British Columbia we now have a structural surplus that we can count on year after year, having financing that is going to ensure that we pay as we go and that we don't pass on our operating debt of government to our children and our grandchildren.

Hon. G. Bruce: Can I interject? Can I ask a question?

Hon. G. Campbell: I think you just did interject. Go ahead and ask the question.

Hon. G. Bruce: Colin, structural debt and structural surplus. Structural debt — what we're talking about there, in your words — is ongoing moneys that had to be paid out. They weren't accounted for; they weren't booked. Is that what you're talking about?

Hon. C. Hansen: Yeah. The NDP will tell us that there was a year when they had a big surplus in British Columbia. The problem is that it was one-time money. You had the big energy spikes of sales to California, and the United States generally, of electricity and natural gas. That produced a big spike. The problem was that at that time, what they did was ramp up not one-time spending but program spending based on a one-time infusion of revenue to government.

[10:45]

When we start talking about a structural deficit, those are moneys that government has committed that have to be funded year after year after year — like the \$12.5 million we just approved for programs for women facing violence. You know, you can't come in and build those programs and then eliminate them 12 months later because suddenly the long-term money isn't there. We have to, first of all, make sure that we've got stability in revenues, and then we can ramp up spending in a responsible way. That's really the difference between a structural surplus and a structural deficit.

You can increase program spending based on a structural an't do is increase program spending based on that one-time money examples.... Last week the Premier announced an extra \$50 million go into the forest revitalization trust, which allows for transitioning of forest workers who are facing job loss or contractors facing loss of work. Now, that's one-time money. That's great that you can fund that out of things like the recalculation of equalization payments that we're facing this year. What you can't do out of that one-time money is fund things like the \$70-a-month increase that we are providing for disability income for those in British Columbia who are facing mental or physical disabilities. That was the first increase in over ten years in those disability allowances, and that's going to be there year after year after year.

Another example is the \$122 million that Rich announced yesterday or the day before on increased policing costs in British Columbia. Again, that has to be built into the budgets every year going forward. We're doing that, and we can only do that now because we have sustainable revenues in government going ahead.

We will be investing in our children through education and child care initiatives. We'll be investing in the health care system. We have opportunities to look at other priorities, whether it's program funding or tax incentives, that will allow us to stay competitive.

We also need to invest in infrastructure in this province — whether it's the transportation infrastructure that Kevin has been talking to us about, education infrastructure that Tom is working on in the province or the health infrastructure that Shirley is working on. You know, we saw a real decline in our physical infrastructure in British Columbia over the 1990s because that investment wasn't put there. We need to make sure that we invest wisely in those areas.

The budget, when it comes down on February 15, will be a balance of three things. It will be tax reduction to make sure that we stay competitive but tax reduction, as well, to make sure that those with low incomes have a better chance of keeping more money in their pockets. We are looking at program spending that will make a difference in people's lives — carefully planned program spending like the kinds of initiatives that Wendy was talking about earlier today.

We will also see debt reduction in the budget. There's one very important line in the budget that I hope everybody will take a serious look at, and that's the line that is titled "Direct Government Operating Debt." Direct government operating debt is our credit card bill. It's the debt that governments have run up in the past to pay for the groceries, basically. It's not building infrastructure for the benefit of our children and grandchildren. It's actually taking our operating costs, the cost of the groceries today, and passing that debt on to our children and grandchildren. We saw that direct government operating debt double during the 1990s. As you will see in the budget when it comes down, we're going to start paying off some of that so that we don't pass on some of those operating debts to our children and grandchildren going forward.

I must say I am just so impressed with the officials in the Ministry of Finance who have been working long, long hours seven days a week, trying to get the budget numbers locked down. The third Tuesday in February, by law, is budget day, and that's February 15 this year. I'm looking forward on that day to sharing with everybody in British Columbia a lot of good news that's going to be coming down in just under three weeks.

Hon. G. Campbell: At last, a Finance minister with good news. [Laughter.] Let me just....

Interjection.

Hon. G. Campbell: Yeah, that was a joke.

A Voice: Gary is watching.

Hon. G. Campbell: I don't think he is.

I just have a couple of comments here, Colin. When we look at the examples here.... Geoff was mentioning it to me. When you look at the examples of our comparison to Canada.... I don't remember what slide that is — slide 3. You do that with Canada. I assume British Columbia is included in what you call the Canada statistics there. I would guess that when it's like this, we would be doing, in fact, even better compared to the rest of Canada. Is there a way that you

can break out the rest of Canada in those stats — compared to B.C.? Does StatsCan do that, or could they do that? Or could we do that?

[10:50]

Hon. C. Hansen: Yes, that would be possible to do.

Hon. G. Campbell: I say that for this reason. As you know, we hear an awful lot from our opposition saying that this is only because there are good commodity prices, and there are. There's a lot happening in terms of commodity prices, but I think it's important to note that those same benefits are there for the rest of Canada as are there for British Columbia. This really is, I think, a very-good-news report, and I appreciate it.

The second thing that I wanted just to mention here is that when you look at that and you look at the economic outlook update.... This is one of the areas that I think we really have to get all of our heads around. Colin mentioned our capital plant — mentioned investment in capital plant as a way not of generating immediate economic activity but of providing a foundation for long-term benefits to flow to the province.

Mike de Jong is not here today. He's in China at the Dream Home project. We all know this. People are starting to know it, but I don't think we have really reflected it in terms of either national policy or even the way we look at the world. We're still dealing with the Atlantic and the previous time as opposed to the Pacific and the future. The fastest-growing economy in the world is China, and the second fastest-growing economy in the world is India. It's about, I think, 9 or 10 percent in China and 7 or 8 percent in India. Those are economies. India has the fastest-growing middle class in the world. Those are huge opportunities for us.

China, for example: ten million housing starts a year. In the Dream Home project, we increased the number of.... We took 40 percent of wood- frame homes. We increased it by 40 percent in China. The Dream Home project is just over 200 homes. We have a long way to go in pushing a wood culture and wood opportunities into the Chinese economy as well as into the Indian economy. We know that when you put those houses up, even if they have ten million houses, they've got demands for copper, for minerals and for other commodities that we have here. We really want to capture that.

One thing that won't be reflected here is that last week, after five years of work, the federal government secured approved destination status for Canada for tourism. The rising middle class in China is going to tour more. It's estimated that there will be 100 million global tourists coming from China alone by 2020.

The fastest-growing middle class in the world today is in India. They are starting to move across the world. We have to, as we have been advocating with the federal government, advance an Open Skies policy that includes British Columbia's airports — freedom policies which allow people to pick up passengers here on their way someplace.

I always think these forecasts are based on where we are, and that's good. I think that we have to keep being.... We have to think about that, but there are enormous opportunities for this province to lead this country into the next decade. That should mean economic opportunity for people in every community in every region of this province. We've set a strong foundation that's important for us to build on as we create economic growth.

I'll close with this. I do want to reiterate what Colin said earlier. We did have a good year in 2004. We had very good lumber prices. We had very good commodity prices. We had a very competitive forest industry that was able to take advantage of those. We had a coal industry that was willing, as I mentioned earlier, to double the amount of coal that was shipped to China this year. We're starting to have capacity issues with regard to our rail infrastructure as well as our road infrastructure.

But every year is not going to be a great year like 2004. There are going to be years when things happen that we can't anticipate, which make it more difficult. We do need to have stability as we move ahead — continuity, yes, but stability as we move through — so we have a framework for economic growth, but we protect ourselves from what may take place outside, as well, in the long term.

I'm encouraged to hear that there will be opportunities for debt reduction as well as for service improvements as well as for competitive opportunities on the tax side. That's how we're going to keep this economy going. We are not at our destination yet. We've just started; we're just moving. The optimism that people feel is starting to be contagious across the province — hopefully. We look forward to your budget on February 15. We look forward to the years ahead.

We will now adjourn and reconvene back in the room across the way. Thank you very much.

The cabinet adjourned at 10:55 a.m.