



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

First Session, 43rd Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT
OF DEBATES
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, April 9, 2025
Afternoon Sitting
Issue No. 38

THE HONOURABLE RAJ CHOUHAN, SPEAKER

ISSN 1499-2175

PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR

Her Honour the Honourable Wendy Cocchia, CM, OBC

First Session, 43rd Parliament

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Honourable Raj Chouhan

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Premier and President of the Executive Council	Hon. David Eby, KC
Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities.....	Hon. Brittny Anderson
Minister of Agriculture and Food	Hon. Lana Popham
Attorney General and Deputy Premier	Hon. Niki Sharma, KC
Minister of Children and Family Development	Hon. Jodie Wickens
Minister of Citizens' Services.....	Hon. George Chow
Minister of Education and Child Care	Hon. Lisa Beare
Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness	Hon. Kelly Greene
Minister of Energy and Climate Solutions.....	Hon. Adrian Dix
Minister of Environment and Parks.....	Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson
Minister of Finance	Hon. Brenda Bailey
Minister of Forests.....	Hon. Ravi Parmar
Minister of Health	Hon. Josie Osborne
Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs.....	Hon. Ravi Kahlon
Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation	Hon. Christine Boyle
Minister of Infrastructure	Hon. Bowinn Ma
Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation	Hon. Diana Gibson
Minister of State for Trade.....	Hon. Rick Glumac
Minister of Labour	Hon. Jennifer Whiteside
Minister of Mining and Critical Minerals.....	Hon. Jagrup Brar
Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills	Hon. Anne Kang
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General	Hon. Garry Begg
Minister of State for Community Safety and Integrated Services.....	Hon. Terry Yung
Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.....	Hon. Sheila Malcolmson
Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport	Hon. Spencer Chandra Herbert
Minister of Transportation and Transit.....	Hon. Mike Farnworth
Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship.....	Hon. Randene Neill
Minister Without Portfolio	Hon. Grace Lore

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Leader of the Official Opposition	John Rustad
Leader of the Third Party	Jeremy Valeriote
Deputy Speaker.....	Mable Elmore
Assistant Deputy Speaker	Lorne Doerkson
Deputy Chair, Committee of the Whole	George Anderson
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.....	Kate Ryan-Lloyd
Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel.....	Seunghee Suzie Seo
Clerk Assistant, Parliamentary Services.....	Artour Sogomonian
Clerk of Committees	Jennifer Arril
Committee Clerk	Karan Riarh
Committee Clerk	Darryl Hol
Senior Legal Counsel	Hayley Hill
Sergeant-at-Arms	Ray Robitaille
Director of Hansard Services	D'Arcy McPherson
Legislative Librarian.....	Peter Gourlay

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS BY PARTY

BC NDP

Anderson, Hon. Brittny	Kootenay Central	Kahlon, Hon. Ravi	Delta North
Anderson, George	Nanaimo-Lantzville	Kang, Hon. Anne	Burnaby Centre
Arora, Rohini	Burnaby East	Krieger, Nina	Victoria-Swan Lake
Bailey, Hon. Brenda	Vancouver-South Granville	Lajeunesse, Dana	Juan de Fuca-Malahat
Beare, Hon. Lisa	Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows	Lore, Hon. Grace	Victoria-Beacon Hill
Begg, Hon. Garry	Surrey-Guildford	Ma, Hon. Bowinn	North Vancouver-Lonsdale
Blatherwick, Jennifer	Coquitlam-Maillardville	Malcolmson, Hon. Sheila	Nanaimo-Gabriola Island
Boyle, Hon. Christine	Vancouver-Little Mountain	Morissette, Steve	Kootenay Monashee
Brar, Hon. Jagrup	Surrey-Fleetwood	Neill, Hon. Randene	Powell River-Sunshine Coast
Chandra Herbert, Hon. Spencer	Vancouver-West End	Osborne, Hon. Josie	Mid Island-Pacific Rim
Chant, Susie	North Vancouver-Seymour	Parmar, Hon. Ravi	Langford-Highlands
Choi, Paul	Burnaby South-Metrotown	Phillip, Joan / Amshen	Vancouver-Strathcona
Chouhan, Hon. Raj	Burnaby-New Westminster	Popham, Hon. Lana	Saanich South
Chow, Hon. George	Vancouver-Fraserview	Rotchford, Darlene	Esquimalt-Colwood
Davidson, Hon. Tamara / Laanas	North Coast-Haida Gwaii	Routledge, Janet	Burnaby North
Dhir, Sunita	Vancouver-Langara	Sandhu, Harwinder	Vernon-Lumby
Dix, Hon. Adrian	Vancouver-Renfrew	Shah, Amna	Surrey City Centre
Eby, Hon. David, KC	Vancouver-Point Grey	Sharma, Hon. Niki, KC	Vancouver-Hastings
Elmore, Mable	Vancouver-Kensington	Sunner, Jessie	Surrey-Newton
Farnworth, Hon. Mike	Port Coquitlam	Toporowski, Debra / Qwulti'stunaat	Cowichan Valley
Gibson, Hon. Diana	Oak Bay-Gordon Head	Whiteside, Hon. Jennifer	New Westminster-Coquitlam
Glumac, Hon. Rick	Port Moody-Burquitlam	Wickens, Hon. Jodie	Coquitlam-Burke Mountain
Greene, Hon. Kelly	Richmond-Steveston	Yung, Hon. Terry	Vancouver-Yaletown
Higginson, Stephanie	Ladysmith-Oceanside		

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF BC

Banman, Bruce	Abbotsford South	Luck, Tony	Fraser-Nicola
Bhangu, Harman	Langley-Abbotsford	Maahs, Heather	Chilliwack North
Bird, Rosalyn	Prince George-Valemount	McCall, Macklin	West Kelowna-Peachland
Block, Lynne	West Vancouver-Capilano	McInnis, Scott	Columbia River-Revelstoke
Boulton, Amelia	Penticton-Summerland	Milobar, Peter	Kamloops Centre
Chan, Hon.	Richmond Centre	Mok, Lawrence	Maple Ridge East
Chapman, Brent	Surrey South	Neufeld, Korky	Abbotsford West
Clare, Sheldon	Prince George-North Cariboo	Neufeld, Larry	Peace River South
Davis, Pete	Kootenay Rockies	Paton, Ian	Delta South
Day, Brennan	Courtenay-Comox	Rattée, Claire	Skeena
Dew, Gavin	Kelowna-Mission	Rustad, John	Nechako Lakes
Dhaliwal, Mandeep	Surrey North	Stamer, Ward	Kamloops-North Thompson
Doerkson, Lorne	Cariboo-Chilcotin	Sturko, Elenore	Surrey-Cloverdale
Gaspar, Reann	Abbotsford-Mission	Tepper, Bryan	Surrey-Panorama
Giddens, Kiel	Prince George-Mackenzie	Toor, Jody	Langley-Willowbrook
Halford, Trevor	Surrey-White Rock	Van Popta, Misty	Langley-Walnut Grove
Hartwell, Sharon	Bulkley Valley-Stikine	Warbus, Á'a:liya	Chilliwack-Cultus Lake
Hepner, Linda	Surrey-Serpentine River	Wat, Teresa	Richmond-Bridgeport
Kindy, Anna	North Island	Williams, David	Salmon Arm-Shuswap
Kooner, Steve	Richmond-Queensborough	Wilson, Donegal	Boundary-Similkameen
Loewen, Kristina	Kelowna Centre		

BC GREEN PARTY

Botterell, Rob	Saanich North and the Islands	Valeriote, Jeremy	West Vancouver-Sea to Sky
----------------------	-------------------------------	-------------------------	---------------------------

INDEPENDENT

Armstrong, Tara	Kelowna-Lake Country-Coldstream	Kealy, Jordan	Peace River North
Brodie, Dallas	Vancouver-Quilchena		

PARTY STANDINGS

Total seats – 93

BC NDP – 47 | Conservative Party of BC – 41 | BC Green Party – 2 | Independent – 3

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF RIDINGS

A

Abbotsford-MissionReann Gasper
 Abbotsford South..... Bruce Banman
 Abbotsford WestKorky Neufeld

B

Boundary-SimilkameenDonegal Wilson
 Bulkley Valley–Stikine..... Sharon Hartwell
 Burnaby CentreHon. Anne Kang
 Burnaby East..... Rohini Arora
 Burnaby–New Westminster..... Hon. Raj Chouhan
 Burnaby North.....Janet Routledge
 Burnaby South–Metrotown Paul Choi

C

Cariboo–ChilcotinLorne Doerkson
 Chilliwack–Cultus Lake Á'a:líya Warbus
 Chilliwack North Heather Maahs
 Columbia River–Revelstoke.....Scott McNinnis
 Coquitlam–Burke Mountain Hon. Jodie Wickens
 Coquitlam–Maillardville Jennifer Blatherwick
 Courtenay–Comox..... Brennan Day
 Cowichan Valley Debra Toporowski / Qwulti'stunaat

D

Delta NorthHon. Ravi Kahlon
 Delta South Ian Paton

E

Esquimalt–ColwoodDarlene Rotchford

F

Fraser–Nicola Tony Luck

J

Juan de Fuca–Malahat Dana Lajeunesse

K

Kamloops Centre Peter Milobar
 Kamloops–North Thompson Ward Stamer
 Kelowna Centre..... Kristina Loewen
 Kelowna–Lake Country–Coldstream Tara Armstrong
 Kelowna–MissionGavin Dew
 Kootenay Central..... Hon. Brittny Anderson
 Kootenay MonasheeSteve Morissette
 Kootenay Rockies..... Pete Davis

L

Ladysmith–Oceanside Stephanie Higginson
 Langford–Highlands..... Hon. Ravi Parmar
 Langley–Abbotsford.....Harman Bhangu
 Langley–Walnut Grove Misty Van Popta
 Langley–Willowbrook Jody Toor

M

Maple Ridge EastLawrence Mok
 Maple Ridge–Pitt MeadowsHon. Lisa Beare
 Mid Island–Pacific Rim..... Hon. Josie Osborne

N

Nanaimo–Gabriola IslandHon. Sheila Malcolmson
 Nanaimo–Lantzville George Anderson
 Nechako Lakes John Rustad
 New Westminster–Coquitlam..... Hon. Jennifer Whiteside
 North Coast–Haida Gwaii Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson

North IslandAnna Kindy
 North Vancouver–Lonsdale..... Hon. Bowinn Ma
 North Vancouver–Seymour.....Susie Chant

O

Oak Bay–Gordon Head..... Hon. Diana Gibson

P

Peace River North.....Jordan Kealy
 Peace River SouthLarry Neufeld
 Penticton–Summerland..... Amelia Boulton
 Port Coquitlam Hon. Mike Farnworth
 Port Moody–BurquitlamHon. Rick Glumac
 Powell River–Sunshine Coast..... Hon. Randene Neill
 Prince George–MackenzieKiel Giddens
 Prince George–North Cariboo.....Sheldon Clare
 Prince George–ValemountRosalyn Bird

R

Richmond–Bridgeport..... Teresa Wat
 Richmond Centre Hon. Chan
 Richmond–Queensborough Steve Kooner
 Richmond–Steveston Hon. Kelly Greene

S

Saanich North and the Islands Rob Botterell
 Saanich South..... Hon. Lana Popham
 Salmon Arm–ShuswapDavid Williams
 SkeenaClaire Rattée
 Surrey City Centre..... Amna Shah
 Surrey–Cloverdale..... Elenore Sturko
 Surrey–Fleetwood..... Hon. Jagrup Brar
 Surrey–Guildford Hon. Garry Begg
 Surrey–Newton..... Jessie Sunner
 Surrey North.....Mandeep Dhaliwal
 Surrey–Panorama.....Bryan Tepper
 Surrey–Serpentine River Linda Hepner
 Surrey SouthBrent Chapman
 Surrey–White Rock Trevor Halford

V

Vancouver–FraserviewHon. George Chow
 Vancouver–Hastings..... Hon. Niki Sharma, KC
 Vancouver–KensingtonMable Elmore
 Vancouver–Langara Sunita Dhir
 Vancouver–Little Mountain Hon. Christine Boyle
 Vancouver–Point Grey..... Hon. David Eby, KC
 Vancouver–Quilchena.....Dallas Brodie
 Vancouver–Renfrew..... Hon. Adrian Dix
 Vancouver–South Granville Hon. Brenda Bailey
 Vancouver–Strathcona Amshen / Joan Phillip
 Vancouver–West End.....Hon. Spencer Chandra Herbert
 Vancouver–YaletownHon. Terry Yung
 Vernon–Lumby..... Harwinder Sandhu
 Victoria–Beacon Hill Hon. Grace Lore
 Victoria–Swan LakeNina Krieger

W

West Kelowna–PeachlandMacklin McCall
 West Vancouver–Capilano.....Lynne Block
 West Vancouver–Sea to Sky Jeremy Valeriote

CONTENTS

Wednesday, April 9, 2025
Afternoon Sitting

Page

Routine Business

Introductions by Members.....	1221
Statements	1222
Vancouver Canucks	
Korky Neufeld	
Introductions by Members.....	1222
Members' Statements	1222
Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples	
Amshen / Joan Phillip	
Passover	
Claire Rattée	
Canadian Unity and Values	
Paul Choi	
Gurdwara Sahib Sukh Sagar	
Steve Kooner	
Lapu-Lapu Day	
Mable Elmore	
Battle of Vimy Ridge	
Tony Luck	
Point of Order (Speaker's Ruling)	1224
Oral Questions.....	1225
Safety of Nurses in Health Care System	
Elenore Sturko	
Hon. Josie Osborne	
Kiel Giddens	
Supply and Training of Specialized Nurses	
Harman Bhangu	
Hon. Josie Osborne	
Government Action on Homelessness	
Rob Botterell	
Hon. Ravi Kahlon	
Medical Assessment Fees for Seniors	
Heather Maahs	
Hon. Josie Osborne	
Safety of Nurses in Health Care System	
Claire Rattée	
Hon. Josie Osborne	
Safety of First Responders	
Brennan Day	
Hon. Ravi Kahlon	
Violent Incidents in Hospitals and Safety of Health Care Workers	
Misty Van Popta	
Hon. Josie Osborne	
Korky Neufeld	
Lorne Doerkson	
Steve Kooner	
Hon. Niki Sharma	
Trevor Halford	

Orders of the Day

Government Motions on Notice	1230
Motion 14 — Appointment of Special Committee on Democratic and Electoral Reform	
Hon. Mike Farnworth	
Motion 13 — Membership Change to Finance Committee	
Hon. Mike Farnworth	
Motion 15 — Membership Change to Children and Youth Committee	
Hon. Mike Farnworth	
Committee of Supply	1231
Estimates: Ministry of Health (<i>continued</i>)	
Peter Milobar	
Hon. Josie Osborne	
Anna Kindy	
Sheldon Clare	
Jeremy Valeriote	
Rob Botterell	

Proceedings in the Douglas Fir Room

Committee of Supply	1262
Estimates: Ministry of Environment and Parks (<i>continued</i>)	
Trevor Halford	
Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson	
Jeremy Valeriote	
Dallas Brodie	
Estimates: Ministry of Forests	
Hon. Ravi Parmar	
Ward Stamer	
Gavin Dew	
Donegal Wilson	
Larry Neufeld	

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025

The House met at 1:33 p.m.

[The Speaker in the chair.]

Routine Business

Prayers and reflections: Ward Stamer.

[1:35 p.m.]

Introductions by Members

Hon. Jennifer Whiteside: How lucky are we today. It's another New Westie day today. It is such a pleasure for me to introduce a whole team from New Westminster who are here advocating on education issues. I think it's unique, because I think this is the first time that we've had representatives from the whole sector coming together.

We have Maya Russell, from the New Westminster school board; Cheryl Sluis, the vice-chair of the New Westminster school board; Karrie Andrews, the president of CUPE 409; Laura Kwong, New Westminster DPAC chair; Mark Davidson, the superintendent of New West schools; Kristie Oxley, the president of the New West Teachers Union; Ken Millard, president of the New Westminster Principals and Vice-Principals Association.

I just have to say that I am personally so impressed and grateful all the time for their extraordinary advocacy for kids in New Westminster.

I have one more introduction after this, but if the House would please join me in making folks from education in New West very welcome to the House.

As if that wasn't fabulous enough, I also just want to give a pre-welcome to the New Westminster students from École Glenbrook Middle School, grades 7 and 8, who are on the precinct and who will be in the gallery this afternoon. I'm so grateful to the staff who have accompanied them here today, grateful for the weather.

Would the House please join me in welcoming the students from École Glenbrook as well.

Steve Kooner: Today we have some representatives from Gurdwara Sahib Sukh Sagar who are in the gallery today from Queensborough–New Westminster. They include Sukninder Singh Senghar, treasurer and acting president; Jagjit Singh Sal, secretary; and Senthok Singh Sal, senior volunteer group member.

Please make them all welcome.

Hon. Christine Boyle: I have two introductions I'd like to make today.

The first I made yesterday mistakenly. They have joined us today, so I want to again ask the House to join me in welcoming, in the gallery, leadership from Doig River First Nation, including Chief Trevor Makadahay, Councillors

Justin Davis and Starr Acko, as well as Shona Nelson. I'm looking to make sure they're here, but maybe I can't see them.

I had the pleasure of meeting with Chief Makadahay and team yesterday as well as last week. I also again will mention that Doig River is joined here today by someone familiar to this House, former MLA Dan Davies. I understand he received a number of text messages after I introduced him yesterday. He was, in fact, not here and was very confused by it.

I am glad to have all of them joining us here today.

Will the House join me in making them feel welcome.

I have one more introduction, if you will allow.

Joining us in the gallery today also from my riding of Vancouver–Little Mountain is my constituent Bobby MacDonald. Bobby is here representing Union Gospel Mission, an incredible organization with an 80-year history of serving our most vulnerable neighbours.

Bobby and the dedicated team at UGM work every day to meet people where they are at, providing essential services such as supportive housing, nutritious meals and addiction recovery. My colleague next to me here wanted to make sure I mentioned that they are also providing incredible services in New West, Vancouver and across the region, as well as here in Victoria.

Will the House join me in thanking them for their work and welcoming Bobby in the House.

Harman Bhangu: I'd like you to give a warm welcome to my family that's joining me here today.

My wife, Courtney, who's been a rock — a lot of us have our significant others; they play a key role for us to do our jobs in here; my daughter, Audriana, who will be turning five tomorrow; and my son, Bal. They are having a blast here.

Please give them a warm welcome.

[1:40 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: It's my pleasure to introduce staff from the Heart and Stroke Foundation, along with some of their partners, volunteers and guests, who are all joining us in the gallery today. We met them earlier for lunch, members from across all sides of the House here, and learned a great deal about heart failure and how it affects the lives of over 137 British Columbians who are living with this diagnosis.

Now, that includes Mayor Doug Kobayashi from the city of Colwood, who shared his own personal journey and his work to improve health care access in his community.

It also included Dr. Nathaniel Hawkins from Vancouver Coastal Health, who shared the work that he is doing in research and driving change to lead to earlier diagnosis and care.

Would the House please join me in making them all feel very welcome today.

Statements

VANCOUVER CANUCKS

Korky Neufeld: Something that's very close to all of our hearts is that the Vancouver Canucks made NHL history last night, and very few outlets picked it up. So here it is.

Last night, versus the Dallas Stars, they were down three goals in the last minute of the game, 5-2. In that last minute, they scored three goals — the first time in the NHL's history. And then to top it off, they won in overtime.

Introductions by Members

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: My mother raised a strong woman, and I am very proud to say that I raised an even stronger woman. This is what we do as Indigenous women.

Today I'd like to have the House welcome my daughter Samantha, who is here on the precinct, wish her well today and hope that she is safe in this place.

Ian Paton: Today I can see in the gallery two of the most fun, well-known government relations people that are here all the time. I think there's a B.C. Gaming luncheon tomorrow.

Please welcome Shiera Stuart and Chuck Keeling.
I'm sorry. There's a gentleman in between them.
I welcome all three of you here today.

George Anderson: As we recognize the 108th anniversary of Vimy Ridge, I would like to recognize one of my constituents, Cierra Robinson, an elementary school student who placed second in the B.C.-Yukon Remembrance Day poster contest that was held by the Canadian Legion. She placed first in her school, first in the district and first on the Island, second overall in B.C. But she says next time she's going to get first for British Columbia.

I would hope that the House would, essentially, say congratulations to Cierra for the great work that she's done in remembering our veterans.

Bruce Banman: I have two introductions. The first one is quite quick and easy. That would be former MLA Dan Davies, who actually joins us.

Would the House join me in making him feel welcome.

Secondly, it comes as a shock to many of us, I think, as to how much the public sits and prays for us and looks after our well-being. Today we were reminded of that. There was a breakfast meeting that was put on by Jason Goertzen.

Many of the members were here. It's a non-partisan breakfast, and it gave a message of acknowledgement to us and for us to get together. It was great to actually break bread with one another.

A special shout-out goes to the member for North Vancouver-Seymour, who joined me in actually singing our national anthem at said event. I do want to thank that member for standing with me and helping lead us in that national anthem.

The Speaker: I, also, would like to thank Jason, Tim and Anna for hosting us this morning.

They had a wonderful speaker by the name of Stacy. During his speech, do you know what he said? "Let's be childlike, not childish."

Let's follow Stacy's advice.

[1:45 p.m.]

Members' Statements

RECONCILIATION WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Amshen / Joan Phillip: Today I'd like to talk about the importance of the work being done by this government to advance reconciliation, particularly when there are certain voices that wish us to go backwards.

Indigenous rights, sovereignty and liberation are causes I've fought for my entire life and are now entrenched in the Canadian constitution and supporting laws. As a political and politicized person, there has been no other option.

We know how much Indigenous peoples have lost through colonization. At Kuper Island school, in one year, 269 students registered; 107 died, a whopping 40 percent. And I see it every day in the constituency of Vancouver-Strathcona, the pain and trauma felt disproportionately by Indigenous peoples. I see the issues today as continuations of the same colonial problems that existed when I was a kid.

In spite of the generational trauma and ongoing racism, because of the work being done by this government things are improving. I encourage all governments to join us to continue this important work while lifting everyone up.

I'd like to end with a quote by my grandpa Dan George. "Like the Thunderbird of old, we shall rise again out of the sea. We shall grab the instruments of the white person's success, their education and skills, and with those new tools, we shall build our people into the proudest segment of society." We are his dream come true.

Huy ch q'u siem.

[Applause.]

PASSOVER

Claire Rattée: Today I rise to recognize that this week-end marks the beginning of Pesach, or Passover, a sacred holiday in the Jewish faith that commemorates the Exodus, when the Israelites were freed from slavery under pharaoh in ancient Egypt.

This is a time of remembrance, renewal and reflection. Around Seder tables here in B.C. and around the world, Jewish families will gather to tell the story of liberation and reflect on a story as old as our people, a story of faith under fire and of the enduring fight for freedom.

But Passover is more than just a historical remembrance; it's also a call to action. In the wake of the horrific attacks on October 7 and amid a rise in antisemitism that many believed we would never see again, the story of Exodus is a timeless reminder that freedom is not something to be taken for granted, that justice, dignity and human rights must be defended in every generation and that silence is never an option. Passover is a time to celebrate the resilience of our people.

Freedom is not just a concept but a sacred responsibility. In an era where governments are seeking to exert even more control over our lives, the message of Passover is clear. Liberty is fragile, and we must protect it with courage and vigilance.

One of the most powerful teachings in the Haggadah tells us that in every generation, each of us is obligated to see ourselves as though we personally came out of Egypt. That message challenges all of us to stand against oppression wherever we see it and to work toward a world where no one is left behind. Let us honour our ancestors by standing firm in our faith, proud of our heritage and unafraid to speak the truth, even when it is unpopular.

As someone who represents communities facing real hardship — whether it's homelessness, addiction or the lack of access to basic services — I find the themes of Passover particularly meaningful. The struggle for freedom and dignity is not ancient history; it's ongoing. We as legislators bear the responsibility to ensure that hope and liberation are not just symbolic ideals but lived experiences for the people we serve.

To all who are observing, chag Pesach sameach.

May this Passover bring peace, healing and renewed strength to the Jewish people and light to a world that needs it now more than ever.

CANADIAN UNITY AND VALUES

Paul Choi: I rise today filled with gratitude for this House, for the people we serve and the extraordinary nation we are privileged to call home.

[1:50 p.m.]

At a moment when turbulence echoes beyond our borders, Canadians from every province, every faith and

every walk of life are drawing closer together. We are rallying behind Team Canada, not merely a slogan but a promise we make to one another that, shoulder to shoulder, we are stronger than any storm.

I stand here as a proud Korean immigrant who found, on these welcoming shores, a country that turns diversity into strength and kindness into second nature. Where else in the world is “sorry” both a punchline and a badge of honour? Only in Canada do courtesy and courage walk hand in hand.

Team Canada means breaking down the walls that divide us, whether it is interprovincial trade barriers, languages, cultures or misinformation. It means harnessing B.C.'s unique position as a Pacific gateway, not just for the province but for the whole country, so the prosperity that flows through our ports lifts families from St. John's to Saskatoon. It means forging bold partnerships across Asia-Pacific, diversifying our markets and future-proofing our economy for the generations yet to come.

So we celebrate because we have much to celebrate: our hockey triumphant that unite living rooms coast to coast, our vast glacier lakes and towering forests that still take our breath away. These are not just points of pride. These are reminders of who we are and when we are at our best — the true north strong, free and unafraid to dream big.

Yet pride must walk with humility, and we cannot speak of Canada without honouring the First Peoples who have stewarded this land since time immemorial. Reconciliation is not just a chapter we visit. It is the spine of the book that we are still writing together.

Together let us carry this torch of hope, compassion and unbreakable resolve. Let us stand up for each other, for reconciliation and for prosperity for Team Canada.

GURDWARA SAHIB SUKH SAGAR

Steve Kooner: During Sikh Heritage Month and in honour of Vaisakhi, I'm proud to recognize the amazing work of Gurdwara Sahib Sukh Sagar in Queensborough, New Westminster. Gurdwara Sahib Sukh Sagar is much more than just a place for prayer. It's a place where people come together to help others through seva, which means selfless service, a core part of Sikh faith.

Since it opened in 1919, this gurdwara has been giving back to the community. Every week the kitchen at Sukh Sagar prepares over 4,700 meals, 200 of which are delivered to people in need in the community.

Moreover, Gurdwara Sahib provides education classes to more than 200 kids each week involving Punjabi language, Sikh martial arts and music. Throughout the year, the gurdwara provides youth camps for over 1,000 children and also runs a summer internship program for more than 20 students to gain real-world experience and mentorship.

Moreover, Gurdwara Sahib Sukh Sagar also has a sen-

iors centre where elders come together to give back and guide others. This gurdwara initiative sets the standard that service has no age limit.

Gurdwara Sahib Sukh Sagar has become a true community hub, a place where people feel supported, respected and empowered. I commend Gurdwara Sahib Sukh Sagar for its great community service.

LAPU-LAPU DAY

Mable Elmore: Across the world and throughout history, Indigenous peoples have fought to protect their land and preserve their culture.

From Canada to Brazil and Australia and elsewhere, Indigenous peoples have been rising and battling colonization, dispossession and suppression. Theirs is a long line of stories of resistance, resilience and renewal. It's a legacy that endures to modern times in different forms of activism in pursuit of justice, dignity and survival.

[1:55 p.m.]

Among those who etched their names in this proud heritage was Lapu-Lapu, a warrior chief from the Philippines. Lapu-Lapu lived at a time when European colonization started in Asia during the 16th century, leading to the disruption of Indigenous societies and cultures.

In 1521, Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese navigator serving Spain, arrived in the Philippines to lay claim to native territories. Lapu-Lapu was not going to bow to a foreign master.

On April 27, 1521, Lapu-Lapu and his warriors faced off with Ferdinand Magellan and his forces in the historic Battle of Mactan-Cebu. Lapu-Lapu prevailed in this early act of defiance against foreign rule, thus inspiring future generations of Filipinos to fight for their freedom and independence. My family legend has it that my mother, Maria Tabotabo, shares lineage with Lapu-Lapu.

On April 26 this year, the legacy of this Indigenous hero will be celebrated in a block party in my riding of Vancouver-Kensington, organized by Filipino BC in partnership with the Sunset on Fraser Business Association and the Hogan's Alley Society and the Black community. It will be a day-long festival that features music, dance, art, displays, culinary offerings and family-friendly activities.

I'm inviting everybody to join the 2025 Lapu-Lapu Day block party. Everyone here in the House is invited to join a great celebration in South Vancouver, Saturday, April 26. I hope to see you all there.

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

Tony Luck: On April 9, 1917, 108 years ago today, under grey skies and bitter wind, Canadian soldiers rose from the frozen trenches at Vimy Ridge in Northern France. They were miners, clerks, farmers and sons, ordinary men asked to do something extraordinary. For the first time, all

four divisions of the Canadian Corps, drawn from every province across our young country, fought side by side.

They faced a formidable enemy. The Germans had fortified the ridge for years. Both the French and the British had tried and failed to take it, suffering heavy losses.

But the Canadians brought something different: innovation, preparation and a deep sense of unity. They trained tirelessly, rehearsing their movements on full-scale mock-ups. They used creeping artillery barrages, an advanced tactic for the time, and relied on detailed maps carried by even the lowest-ranking soldier.

On that Easter Monday morning, they advanced through mud, gunfire and wire. And they took the ridge. Brig-Gen. Alexander Ross would later stand on that battlefield and say: "In those minutes, I witnessed the birth of a nation."

He was right. Vimy Ridge wasn't a military success; it was a coming of age. It showed the world that Canada was no longer just a colony of the British Empire. We were a proud, capable nation — resilient, courageous and united in purpose.

This victory came at a heartbreaking cost. More than 3,500 Canadians lost their lives. Over 7,000 were wounded. The land they claimed was paid for in blood. As historian Pierre Berton once wrote: "Vimy was the place where the nation took root. The fighting may have created a sense of unity, but the price was unimaginable."

Today we live in the freedom that they helped secure. We speak our minds, pursue our dreams, raise our families, all because they believed in something greater than themselves.

"Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep."

We owe those brave souls a debt we can never truly repay, but we can honour them by remembering, by living with purpose and by upholding the values they fought so hard for. At Vimy Ridge, Canada found not only victory but its voice; not only courage but its soul.

Mr. Speaker, a request: may this House rise united for a moment of silence to honour these brave souls who sacrificed so much for Canada and for us.

[The House observed a moment of silence.]

Point of Order (Speaker's Ruling)

The Speaker: Hon. Members, yesterday after the oral question period, the member for Kelowna-Mission rose on a point of order, stating that the Minister of State for Trade used unparliamentary language.

[2:00 p.m.]

As the minister in question did not rise to respond to the point of order, the Chair took the matter under advisement. Having not heard the remarks in question, the Chair reviewed the record of oral question period proceedings.

Pursuant to practice, Speakers have ruled that if the Chair did not hear the offensive word or phrase and if the offensive language was not recorded in the *Debates*, the Chair cannot be expected to rule in the absence of reliable record. In this instance, the unparliamentary remarks are not captured in *Hansard*.

However, the Chair will take this opportunity to caution the House that all hon. members bear responsibility for their remarks in this place and the overall civility and decorum of proceedings.

Further guidance is available in the order and decorum booklet circulated to members yesterday.

Oral Questions

SAFETY OF NURSES IN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Elenore Sturko: Fraser Health recently had two incidents where nurses were severely hurt and may never be able to return to work. But when WorkSafe investigated, they blamed the nurses. One nurse was even suspended and made to do her violence prevention training.

Staffing shortages put nurses in situations where they are forced to make a choice: treat a patient on their own, or delay care. This is a failure to meet care standards. Both scenarios leave nurses in jeopardy of losing their licence.

B.C.'s nurses are being placed in impossible situations. Imagine how demoralizing it must be to be blamed for getting hurt because of a no-win situation created by this government.

When will the Premier look in the mirror, stop blaming nurses and stand up for their safety?

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

Hospitals and health care facilities are places where people go to get better, to get well. Violence has absolutely no place in any health care workplace, in any workplace in British Columbia. That is why we take this so seriously and have worked so closely with the Nurses Union, the health authorities in establishing relational security officers and bringing in people who are specially trained in helping to create safer workplaces.

If we are going to attract and retain more nurses, which we know we need to strengthen our health care system, creating a safe workplace is an absolute requirement. I'm absolutely dedicated to this initiative: to working with the Nurses Union, to working with the health authorities, to continuing that work to ensure that our workplaces are

free from violence, that health authorities are following policies in place, meeting our expectations for those safe workplaces for patients, for workers, for all British Columbians.

The Speaker: Member, supplemental.

Elenore Sturko: Our health care system is losing nurses because they're becoming injured and they can't work, and sometimes even worse.

Last month 33-year-old nurse Roseanne Wallace took her own life. She was attacked twice in the psychiatric unit where she worked. Roseanne's father said he would like the people in charge to spend a day shadowing a health care worker. He said: "I'd like one of those higher-ups to come and spend a shift in a facility like that. I'm sure they wouldn't believe it, and I'm sure they wouldn't feel safe."

Perhaps the minister should listen to Mr. Wallace's suggestion and spend a shift working in the dangerous conditions Roseanne was subjected to before she took her life.

How does the minister expect nurses and health care workers to follow her rules when NDP staffing shortages are making it impossible for nurses to meet care standards?

Hon. Josie Osborne: What happened with this nurse is absolutely devastating, and I know that this loss is felt across her workplace, in her community and by her family and her friends. It is absolutely tragic what took place.

[2:05 p.m.]

That's why we have to continue the work that we are doing to create safer workplaces. That's why we're going to continue the work that we're doing with relational security officers, people who are specially trained to help de-escalate situations, to help identify aggressive behaviours. That's why we're going to continue with this work on bolstering curriculum around violence prevention in the workplace, because we know that it takes everybody.

We have to do this work. We're going to continue working with the union, with the nurses. I've had the opportunity to hear directly myself from front-line nurses. Any of us putting ourselves in their shoes and understanding how frightening these situations are will help bolster all of us in the work that we need to do to continue to attract nurses to safe workplaces.

Because we know that nurses are an absolutely essential component of B.C.'s health care system, and part of strengthening that health care system is creating safer workplaces.

Kiel Giddens: The B.C. Nurses Union reports an estimated 46 serious assaults per month. A nurse in Langley was assaulted with a weapon after the patient she was treating got into an altercation with another patient who pulled the weapon.

The union's president said that the health care system

needs to keep weapons out of hospitals and health care settings. Yet last year a leaked memo that members will remember from Northern Health instructed: “Staff do not remove personal items from the patient’s room, even if there is a knife or weapon.”

When will this government finally protect nurses and keep weapons out of our hospitals?

Hon. Josie Osborne: Weapons are banned in hospitals — full stop. We’re working to strengthen our policies and to ensure that this rule is enforced, the policies and procedures that must be in place. That includes expanding the use of weapons screening at hospitals that are at the highest risk.

That’s a very serious step to take. Weapons screening is currently in place in certain places like St. Paul’s Hospital. The security staff there are trained to look for, to watch for, to address weapons that someone might have on their person. Conversations regarding the feasibility of implementing more weapons detection are underway.

It is a sad place to be where we have to recognize this, but it’s important that we take action, and that’s why we’re going to continue to do that.

The Speaker: Member, supplemental.

Kiel Giddens: That answer isn’t good enough for today’s working nurses, and it’s hampering our ability to recruit the next generation of nurses because it’s not the reality in our hospitals. Weapons are in our hospitals.

In November, a student nurse in her first clinical placement was attacked by a patient with a knife at Vancouver General Hospital. Nurses from the health region told the opposition: “We see weapons on a regular basis — knives very frequently, box cutters, machetes, hammers, guns and, more recently, a crossbow.”

To the Premier, would he feel safe if someone came to his office with a crossbow?

Hon. Josie Osborne: Once again, everybody deserves to feel safe and to be safe in their workplace, which is why we have taken action in creating safer workplaces through the establishment of security officers and have had conversations with the Nurses Union, with health authorities around the highest risk sites, getting input from the Nurses Union directly on where these officers should be.

I’ve outlined the steps that we’re taking around weapons detection and ensuring that they are kept out of hospitals, because again, they are banned from hospitals — full stop, as I said.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Shhh, Members.
Members, let the minister finish.

Hon. Josie Osborne: We are going to continue this work. We do have specialized teams of police officers, mental health-trained nurses around B.C. to help respond to incidents outside the hospital, to try to prevent events like that from taking place in a hospital.

We can all imagine just how frightening, how scary that would be to be a patient, a nurse, any health care worker in a facility like that, in a setting like that. That’s why we’re going to continue to listen to nurses and take action.

[2:10 p.m.]

SUPPLY AND TRAINING OF SPECIALIZED NURSES

Harman Bhangu: In Langley, the shortage of specialized nurses has reached a crisis point. Nurses are being asked to work outside their legal scope of practice, a reckless move that endangers lives.

To meet the bare minimum for safety, specially trained nurses are constantly having their shifts changed without notice, throwing patient care into chaos. This isn’t just mismanagement; it’s a dangerous failure of leadership.

When will this Premier stop risking lives and take action to train and deploy the specialized nurses that our health care system desperately needs?

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question.

Again, nurses are an absolutely essential part of our health care workforce, and they deliver front-line care that everybody depends on.

We are facing a global shortage of health care workers, and that includes nurses. That’s why we have taken steps to hire and train more nurses here in B.C., expanding the number of seats for training nurses, bringing in nurses from international destinations who are internationally educated, making it easier for nurses to come from the States to British Columbia.

British Columbia is a fantastic place to work and to live. We’re going to do everything we can to continue to build our nursing workforce here in British Columbia.

GOVERNMENT ACTION ON HOMELESSNESS

Rob Botterell: For the past two weeks, forceful evictions have taken place in Kelowna. Residents of Kelowna’s outdoor sheltering 4, known as OS4, experienced harmful and continuous displacement. Bylaw and police officers created an exclusion zone barring anyone from entering, including media, community advocates and cultural support workers.

As we’ve seen in cities across the province, residents of OS4 were dispossessed of their belongings and survival gear. We know that for many of our friends and neighbours, displacement equals death. These cycles of violence are unacceptable.

To the Premier: will your government adopt a human rights-based approach to homelessness?

Hon. Ravi Kahlon: Having encampments in any community is unacceptable. That's why we've been working so hard with our partners to be able to rapidly deploy supportive housing, different forms of housing, in communities throughout the province.

We have been working closely with Kelowna — 120 homes within a year; 80 of them are up. We're seeing success. People are moving in. They're getting the supports they need. In fact, 40 people have already moved into supportive housing and moved into stable housing, either with family, on their own — found employment.

I appreciate the member's question. We certainly know that there are some challenges that Kelowna is facing. I would advise the member that there's a lot of work happening from all partners to try to get every individual into housing.

There is a criminal element that also is going into situations and preying on vulnerable people, and that also is unacceptable. So it's important that the work that Kelowna does ensures that they're following laws, which.... My understanding is that they're following the rules. If not, of course, they'll have to address those challenges.

We're going to continue to work with Kelowna and all communities to be able to ensure that people can get indoors to get the supports that they desperately need.

The Speaker: Member, supplemental.

Rob Botterell: It's been two years since the massive Hastings Street decampment. Since then, several of these displaced residents have died alone, and many more suffer from injuries and trauma incurred during these sweeps. From the Downtown Eastside to Kelowna, spring cleaning should not involve the violent displacement of our neighbours and violation of their human rights.

Last year the federal housing advocate released a report titled *Upholding Dignity and Human Rights* identifying six major calls to action.

To the Minister of Housing: will you work with all levels of government to implement the federal advocates' recommendations for upholding dignity and human rights in homeless encampments?

Hon. Ravi Kahlon: Again, thanks to the member for the question.

I had the opportunity to meet with the advocate when I was in Ottawa just over a year ago to discuss what British Columbia is doing to address encampments. In fact, I would share with the member that we were praised for our leadership, for deploying housing and providing wrap-around supports for individuals.

[2:15 p.m.]

These are complex situations. Encampments are not safe for the people living in them. They're not safe for the community at large. We need to ensure that we're getting people indoors.

A member mentioned Crab Park. The member would know that there was close to 100 people in encampments there. We found housing for all those individuals. The encampment no longer exists. It's not because they were moved out; it's because we found housing opportunities. We got people indoors.

We're doing the same in Prince George, where Moccasin Flats had close to 100 people, working closely with council. We have now four people left at that site, and we're going to find housing for those last four people as well. That work will continue in all communities that need housing.

MEDICAL ASSESSMENT FEES FOR SENIORS

Heather Maahs: While nurses are being attacked, seniors are being shaken down when they struggle to put food on their tables.

A constituent of mine in her 80s contacted me to tell me she was being charged almost \$300 to get a health checkup so she could keep her driver's licence.

Why are seniors on fixed incomes being forced to pay out of pocket instead of being covered by MSP?

Hon. Josie Osborne: Seniors are such a valuable part of our society, and they've put so much work into creating the place that we have here. That's why this government is committed to continuing to support seniors by increasing their access to health care services, increasing rent supplements for seniors living with low incomes and taking so many steps to keep costs down.

I appreciate the member's question very much. Our Medical Services Plan provides for medically necessary procedures and for services that people require for their good health. I appreciate the member's question.

SAFETY OF NURSES IN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Claire Rattée: Last month a nurse new in her career was strangled unconscious and had to be dragged to safety by her colleagues. This attack happened in the psychiatry in-patient unit at VGH. The person that strangled her was a patient.

The B.C. Nurses Union deserves an answer to the question that their president asked: "What is it going to take? Is it going to take one of my members actually being killed on the job in order for some substantive changes to take place?"

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the

question and, again, identifying a tragic situation that has taken place.

I want to assure the member and all members of this House just how seriously this government takes workplace safety. Every patient who walks through a hospital door, every nurse who starts a shift, deserves to be safe. Nurses are trained to help people with their health care problems. They're not trained to be security officers.

That's why we've taken steps, adding over 750 relational security officers in hospitals and sites across B.C. That's why we're going to continue this work and ensure that there are people who have specific training in trauma-informed practices who are able to identify these behaviours. And it's why I've made it clear to all health authorities that we need to see that all policies and procedures are being followed.

We have more work to do to build our nursing workforce; to ensure that we have the minimum nurse-to-patient ratios — we've made this commitment to the B.C. Nurses Union; and to build this in acute care sites to start with. We're going to continue that work and ensure that workplaces are safe for everybody.

SAFETY OF FIRST RESPONDERS

Brennan Day: Members of this House will remember what happened just a few steps from here. While responding to a call, a paramedic was violently beaten trying to provide care on Pandora Avenue. Health care workers and front-line responders are speaking out.

This side of the House hears you.

How has this government allowed violence against first responders to become just another part of the job?

Hon. Ravi Kahlon: I thank the member for the question.

Certainly, encampments are a challenge. I mentioned that in a previous question as well. I can share with the member that we have been, again, rapidly deploying housing opportunities in Victoria.

Interjection.

Hon. Ravi Kahlon: I don't understand why this question needs to be heckled. It's a simple question.

[2:20 p.m.]

We're working closely with stakeholders, with local businesses, with our first responders on Pandora. We actually have a working table that has the city and has our not-for-profit partners all sitting together so that we can identify where challenges are, to make sure that when first responders are responding, they're able to do so in a safe way, and also so that our not-for-profit partners that are going in to provide supports can be safe as well.

We have seen some progress because of that table. Work continues. I certainly hope that we're able to get the

last few folks into housing so we can address that encampment. But it is work that is ongoing.

VIOLENT INCIDENTS IN HOSPITALS AND SAFETY OF HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Misty Van Popta: At Eagle Ridge Hospital, a nurse opened a curtain and found herself face to face with a man waving a machete, screaming, threatening, forcing staff to evacuate patients from the ER.

Nurses' lives are on the line, and this NDP government has turned a blind eye to the safety hazards they encounter daily.

Can this government please tell this House how many days, weeks, months, years until nurses can consider B.C. hospitals safe workplaces?

Hon. Josie Osborne: It's absolutely untrue that this government has turned a blind eye. This government....

Interjections.

The Speaker: Shhh, Members. Members.

Hon. Josie Osborne: This government, like all governments of any political stripe should, takes workplace safety incredibly seriously and understands that nurses and all health care workers need safe places to be able to deliver care to British Columbians.

That's why we're taking action to increase our nursing workforce. That's why we've made a commitment to the Nurses Union around minimum nurse-to-patient ratios. That's why we've added security officers, specially trained security officers, in these sites. That's why we're going to continue this work to ensure that nurses are able to deliver the care for people that they need to be able to deliver, without fear of violence.

Nothing could be more serious, when people are seeking care, than to know that the people who are there to deliver it are able to do that, are able to be focused, are able to stay focused on those patients and deliver that care.

We're going to continue this work to increase our nursing workforce. We're going to continue this work to create safer workplaces. The entire House needs to understand that this government is entirely dedicated to that.

Korky Neufeld: Well, what we've heard here this afternoon is: "We will continue to work. We will continue to work. We will continue to work." The only thing that we're certain is continuing are the major incidents in our hospitals. We have had three major incidents at Eagle Ridge Hospital in just the last few months.

Nurses, the public and even a police officer were attacked. Health care workers are sounding the alarm, but this government continues to treat these assaults as isolated incidents instead of systemic failures.

How many more attacks will it take before this NDP will wake up and admit to its own failed policies that are fuelling the chaos unfolding in our hospitals today?

Hon. Josie Osborne: Each and every one of these incidents needs to be brought to light, and we need to know about them, and we need to take serious action. When these incidents do take place, health authorities investigate. They ensure that the proper steps are taken, and they take action to make improvements.

That's what this government will continue to do: address the systemic issues behind violence in the workplace, address issues of mental health and substance use and sickness in people to ensure that we are doing everything we can to support people.

We're going to continue to support nurses by establishing these security officers in hospitals, continuing to listen to the Nurses Union about those highest-risk sites, encouraging and ensuring that health authorities are taking every action that they need to.

We're also facing a systemic issue in the shortage of health care workers, which is why this government continues to take so much action, creating new nursing seats, training nurses who will stay here in British Columbia.

[2:25 p.m.]

Every nurse deserves a safe workplace. Every health care worker deserves a safe workplace. Every patient deserves to have that. We will not give up.

Lorne Doerkson: I can't believe for a minute that the answers we are hearing today are providing any comfort for front-line workers that are afraid to go to their workplace.

After these three attacks at Eagle Ridge Hospital, staff were told to plan escape routes. Only now, after multiple assaults, has Fraser Health increased security. The Nurses Union says it is not enough, calling the situation alarming and saying: "It isn't the environment that nurses should be expected to provide care in, and patients should not have to be concerned about being exposed to violence." Well, no kidding.

Why on earth has it taken three major incidents and serious injuries for this NDP to finally act?

Hon. Josie Osborne: This government has been acting since the day we took office. This government has been adding nurses...

Interjection.

The Speaker: Please continue.

Hon. Josie Osborne: ...making a serious and important commitment around minimum nurse-to-patient ratios,

part of ensuring that the staffing is there to help ensure a safe workplace for nurses.

We know just how critical nurses are, and that's why we're adding nurses to B.C.'s health care workforce at a faster rate than any other major province. We registered over 10,400 new nurses last year.

But there is more work to do, and we know that. That's why we are going to continue to do that. We are going to continue to train nurses here in British Columbia. We're going to continue to attract nurses from other workplaces to come — from the States, for example. We're going to continue to support the Nurses Union, to listen to the issues, to listen to the incidents that are happening, to learn from every single one of them and to create the safest possible workplace.

Steve Kooner: Eagle Ridge Hospital has seen a series of violent incidents in just a few months, leading to serious staff injuries. The B.C. Nurses Union says that people often get away with harming and assaulting health care workers.

Why isn't this Attorney General making it a priority to hold violent offenders who harm our health care workers accountable?

Hon. Niki Sharma: We take all violent incidents extremely seriously. The Minister of Health has gone over a series of measures that we're taking in the hospital to make sure that nurses are safe.

I expect our justice system to deal with every instance of violence appropriately, and we have put better resources in the system to deal with repeat violent offenders to make sure that our bail policy is strong when it comes to people that are offending and reoffending. We will continue to do that work to keep everybody safe in B.C.

Trevor Halford: Here's the problem. These questions to the government aren't new. The bigger problem is that we've got a minister that's answering these questions now the exact same way the former Minister of Health answered those questions. We have a government that continues to put politics before people. We're hearing stories....

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members.
Please continue.

Trevor Halford: We're hearing stories after stories of nurses having to battle through the bureaucracy of Work-Safe. We're hearing stories of the minister handing out seven-figure severance packages to a failed health executive.

[2:30 p.m.]

The gaps in the system aren't sustainable, and they're clearly not safe. But even worse than all that, days ago this Health Minister confirmed to my colleague the MLA for Skeena that there is no new money for increased security in our hospitals —none, zero.

We've had minister after minister stand up and talk about the importance of keeping our front-line workers safe, but they don't walk the walk. They fail time after time, story after story.

My question to the Minister of Health is a very simple one. Why can she not make it a priority to actually fund and protect our front-line workers instead of failing them day after day?

Hon. Josie Osborne: We have canvassed all of the actions that this government is taking because we take workplace...

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members, shhh.

Hon. Josie Osborne: ...safety seriously.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members. Members. Come to order.

Hon. Josie Osborne: This is a government that takes workplace safety so seriously that we are funding 750 security officers across B.C.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members. Members, shhh.

The question was asked, and the question was very clear. I think the minister understood your question. Let her answer now. There is no need to continue to heckle.

Please, finish it.

Hon. Josie Osborne: This is a government that understands just how important nurses are to our health care workforce and why we are taking so many steps to increase the number of nurses that are working on the front lines delivering health care to people.

Adding more nursing training seats, making it easier for nurses to be licensed to practise here in British Columbia when travelling, coming from other locations. That's why we're continuing to do this work to ensure that we are going to meet minimum nurse-to-patient ratios in acute care centres, for example. That's why we're going to continue to listen to the Nurses Union and work with them.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Shhh. Shhh. Take it easy.

Member, please conclude.

Hon. Josie Osborne: That's why we're going to continue to take action and continue to strengthen B.C.'s public health care system for all British Columbians.

[End of question period.]

Hon. George Chow: I ask leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

Hon. George Chow: I am very happy to welcome a group of grade 10 students in the gallery who are leaving right now. I'm sorry. They come from David Thompson Secondary School in my riding, and they are here to tour the building as well as learn about the building's history and the democratic process.

Would the House please make them all feel welcome and say goodbye.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions on Notice

Hon. Mike Farnworth: I call Motion 14 on the order paper.

MOTION 14 — APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL REFORM

Hon. Mike Farnworth: I move Motion 14, of which notice has been given in my name on the order paper, to appoint a special committee on democratic and electoral reform.

[That a Special Committee on Democratic and Electoral Reform be appointed to:

1. Examine and make recommendations related to:
 - a. increasing democratic engagement and voter participation, and
 - b. models for electing Members of the Legislative Assembly, including proportional representation

and report to the House thereon by November 26, 2025.

2. Review the administration of the 43rd provincial general election, including consideration of the Chief Electoral Officer's report on the 43rd provincial general election, and make recommendations for improvements for future elections, and report to the House thereon by May 14, 2026.

That the Special Committee have the powers of a Select Standing Committee and in addition be empowered to:

- a. appoint of its number one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters

referred to the Special Committee and to delegate to the subcommittees all or any of its powers except the power to report directly to the House;

- b. sit during a period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;
- c. conduct consultations by any means the Special Committee considers appropriate;
- d. adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and,
- e. retain personnel as required to assist the Special Committee.

That during a period of adjournment, the Special Committee deposit its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, or in the next following Session, as the case may be, the Chair present all reports to the House.

That the Special Committee be composed of the following Members: *Jessie Sunner* (Convener), *George Anderson*, *Rob Botterell*, *Sheldon Clare*, *Amna Shah*, *Ward Stamer* and *Qwul'ti'stunaat / Debra Toporowski*.]

Motion approved.

Hon. Mike Farnworth: I call Motion 13 on the order paper.

MOTION 13 — MEMBERSHIP CHANGE TO FINANCE COMMITTEE

Hon. Mike Farnworth: I move Motion 13, of which notice has been given in my name on the order paper, regarding the membership of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

[That *Steve Morissette* replace *Harwinder Sandhu* as a member of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.]

Motion approved.

Hon. Mike Farnworth: I call Motion 15 on the order paper.

MOTION 15 — MEMBERSHIP CHANGE TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH COMMITTEE

Hon. Mike Farnworth: I move Motion 15, of which notice has been given in my name on the order paper, regarding the membership of the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth.

[That *Susie Chant* replace *Paul Choi* as a member of the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth.]

Motion approved.

Hon. Mike Farnworth: In this chamber, I call continued debate on the estimates for the Ministry of Health. In the Douglas Fir Room, Section A, I call continued

debate for the estimates on the Ministry of Environment and after that for estimates for the Ministry of Forests.

[2:35 p.m.]

The House in Committee, Section B.

The committee met at 2:38 p.m.

[Lorne Doerkson in the chair.]

Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF HEALTH (continued)

The Chair: Thank you, Members. We'll call this House back to order, where we're going to contemplate the estimates of the Ministry of Health, and we'll call on the minister to move the vote.

On Vote 32: ministry operations, \$34,996,928,000
(continued).

Peter Milobar: Just a couple questions for the minister. I'm sure it won't come as a surprise to her that I'll be asking a couple questions around the proposed Kamloops cancer centre, and I'll explain why I'm saying the word "proposed" shortly.

There's been a lot of discussion about the design of the Kamloops cancer centre. The minister made herself available to myself and the member for Kamloops-North Thompson. I know she met with the hospital board delegation shortly after that.

This has been canvassed in this chamber now for a couple of years around the overall design of the Kamloops cancer centre. The fundamental problem is that the Kamloops cancer centre will be the only one in the province, if not Canada and certainly North America, that is designed as a site with two different locations.

[2:40 p.m.]

The ministry is now having to figure out how to have their information software of Interior Health talk with the information software of B.C. Cancer. Part of cancer services in Kamloops would be run inside the hospital by Interior Health, where they don't have the same expertise per se, necessarily, as B.C. Cancer does.

Again, this is the only setup like this within the B.C. Cancer network and, indeed, across North America.

We've heard lots of different reasons and excuses from the government, back to this minister's predecessor, for why this design has to be this way: anywhere from the site's constriction, to cost, to the building footprint, to a height variance being needed for something. Like a critical cancer centre in a building that's going to be built into a hillside — that it needs about a three-foot variance to add a floor to it.

As a former mayor, I can assure the minister it's a completely ridiculous argument to think that a city council would not give that type of a variance in a city that does not protect view lines when rezonings come forward. We are a city of valleys and hills, so we've never protected view to begin with.

All that said, the most recent comments by the minister again indicate that not only will we have the only cancer setup like this, despite the urging of local medical professionals and cancer medical professionals that this is a system and a design that was not workable and will make it next to impossible for proper recruitment.... We've had positions unfilled for the better part of a decade in Kamloops already.

We now find out we won't have a PET-CT scanner as part of this new building either — yet again, substandard compared to any modern cancer centre being designed. I would point out that there are actually more people from the Kamloops area that go to Kelowna for PET-CT scans, and Vancouver, than for radiation treatments.

Yet this new centre — brand-new build, it hasn't even broken ground yet; it's still at the drawing stage — cannot be accommodated with the changes to actually make it a modern cancer centre on par with everyone else. Kamloops isn't asking to be treated differently. We're asking to be treated the same when it comes to cancer care, of all things.

The last piece, which is perhaps the most offensive piece, frankly, to the people of Kamloops, is that cost keeps getting flung out by the minister and previous ministers as another reason why not. While there's already money being budgeted for the interior renovation that could be moved over to the new build, there's the new-build budget as well.

I would point out to the minister that of 15 hospital projects under construction right now in British Columbia, they are a cumulative 16 years behind schedule. A cumulative 14 of the 15 are over budget, to the tune of \$4.3 billion. So it seems if you're a health care facility in any other part of this province, it's okay to go \$1.2 billion or \$1.3 billion over budget. But if you're the Kamloops cancer centre, you better be held to the exact dollar figure or you're not going to be approved.

We can't find any extra dollars for a cancer centre that's supposed to have a 30- or 40-year lifespan, at least, in it to build it properly on the front end. We'd rather have a 40-year recruitment problem in Kamloops instead. It's not acceptable. It needs to change.

The last piece is that we get told: "Well, we don't want any further delays." Actually, they don't say "further." The government says: "We don't want delays." This was a cancer centre promised by the late John Horgan in 2020 that would have its doors open by the fall of 2024, and the drawings aren't even completed on it yet. Now this government says if they can't get building immediately, they

won't build it at all. It's already delayed, and it's going to be built improperly.

When will this government, this minister, commit to actually designing the B.C. cancer centre in Kamloops to the same standard and the same design specs of every other cancer centre in British Columbia and provide people of Kamloops the same access to cancer care as people in Victoria will have with their centre, people of Nanaimo, people of Surrey with the one under construction, people in Prince George, people in Vancouver and people in Kelowna?

We are not asking for something other than already exists. It would be like saying you are building a tertiary hospital, but you're not going to have a bunch of tertiary services in it. You are not building a full-fledged B.C. cancer centre if it's designed the way the one in Kamloops is.

[2:45 p.m.]

Why is Kamloops the only project that is deemed to be okay to be built under standard to every other cancer centre in the province and the only one that this minister and this government seem to be worried about going cost overrun?

[2:50 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you for the question from the member for Kamloops Centre.

Yes, he accurately references the fact that I have had the opportunity to sit down with him and his neighbouring MLA. I've had the opportunity, on behalf of myself and the Minister of Infrastructure, to sit down with the regional hospital district representatives and have a really good discussion about this project.

First and foremost, this is about delivering better cancer care to people, closer to home. This is about.... I know that the member has advocated strongly for years, as have local representatives, about just how important it is to deliver cancer care closer to home. The travel that people have had to go through, from places like Clearwater or Barriere down to Kelowna, for example, has been very challenging.

That's why this government has been so committed to expanding the amount of cancer centres across British Columbia and reducing some of those barriers, hiring more oncologists, more radiation therapists, bringing in the equipment that's necessary for people to get that cancer care.

Now, I think the member inaccurately references the amount of work that is needed to happen in order to redesign a project, and I don't think the people of Kamloops and the surrounding area want to see delays in having that care come to them.

We are in a situation now where a ministry responsible for this has undertaken this work, so I will direct the member to that ministry for the specifics around those

questions. But the costing and design and procurement — that is done. Construction is expected this summer.

I know that the member has been out in the media and has told me that he could tolerate up to a one-year delay. But this would be longer than a one-year delay, and this is not necessary in order to deliver excellent cancer care to the people in Kamloops and the surrounding region.

B.C. Cancer has been working with Interior Health, has been meeting with physicians on site. Some of the things I can confirm for the member are that the information technology systems will come together by the time the cancer centre is open. That's important. That's addressing a major concern that has been heard from physicians.

Of course, I know the member is very familiar with what will be in the Kamloops cancer centre: the three linear accelerators and the bunkers that are required for that; radiation therapy planning, including a CT simulator, which is new technology that is making it easier for physicians to precisely locate tumours and be able to treat them; an outpatient ambulatory care unit with ten exam rooms and two consult rooms.

Most patients do not receive chemotherapy and radiation therapy on the same day. B.C. Cancer and Interior Health and staff at the hospital are working together to make it easy for patients to travel from one part of the campus to another part of the campus, should that be necessary. But I would point out that there are other places in British Columbia where people do travel much longer distances in order to receive treatment in the same day — for example, receiving one form of treatment at Lions Gate Hospital and then needing to travel to downtown Vancouver to receive the other part.

We want to do everything we can to make cancer care easier to access for people, to make it simpler for people to access, but we have to have a cancer centre in Kamloops to be able to do that. And I don't think the people in Kamloops want to wait years to get that cancer care.

As I mentioned, the project is in the final stages of procurement. The construction will begin this summer. We are going to be delivering excellent cancer care for the people of Kamloops and the surrounding region.

I thank the member for his advocacy, and I thank, especially, the local leaders for their advocacy in coming down to Victoria to meet with me, to understand this, to talk about the fact that the PET-CT scanner is not part of the project right now.

[2:55 p.m.]

The former Minister of Health was clear about that when the business plan was released in February 2024 last year — that that was not going to be a part of the centre at this time.

Peter Milobar: Well, it's this government's stubborn adherence to a poorly designed cancer centre that is causing the delays. I absolutely have said if it takes this late in

the game to get the government to finally listen to reason, yes, I would publicly.... I have publicly said that of course if there's a bit of a delay, I'd rather see it built properly for the next 40 or 50 years of serviceable life than to have it rushed through and designed improperly.

This isn't myself saying.... I'm not a medical professional. My father was a specialist. I'm certainly not. But if, god forbid, I get a cancer diagnosis, I'm going to rely on the cancer professionals to tell me how I need to be treated. I'm relying on their opinions and their advice on what they see as the shortcomings of this centre.

This is directly from the medical staff in Kamloops. This has been raised in this chamber three times now at budget estimates and been ignored by.... The community has been ignored repeatedly by this government.

Although the government has chosen to create a whole other minister responsible for infrastructure now, it's only been the Minister of Health that's ever answered questions about this facility, and it's only been the Minister of Health that does media about this facility in Kamloops. I'm going to keep asking the Minister of Health about the medical aspects of this facility, and the government can figure out who wants to actually manage the actual construction of the project.

The Surrey cancer centre was announced at the same time. It's not being designed like this. It's being built from scratch. If this was such a superior model, why is that not the case? If this was the new way to provide top-line cancer care for people, why are the new cancer centres in the ten-year cancer plan not being designed like this? Why is the update to the equipment in Kelowna not necessitating a redesign of the Kelowna cancer centre to replicate what's going on in Kamloops or in Prince George or in Victoria or in Vancouver?

The minister conflates travelling from one part of Vancouver to get downtown to the full cancer centre as somehow different or the same as people having to travel between two buildings within Kamloops. I'd point out to the minister that people are travelling from Williams Lake once this centre gets built. People are travelling from Blue River once this centre gets built.

They're currently having to travel to Kelowna. They're going to have to continue to travel in greater numbers to Kelowna for PET-CT scans because the government refuses to put that into this. Just because it was announced by a minister a couple of years ago that it won't be part of this building doesn't make it right. That is the underlying problem with this whole process — the government's stubborn refusal to acknowledge what the medical professionals in Kamloops have been calling for, for years.

That is a properly designed cancer centre at the same level as other cancer centres and not being sold a bill of goods about how superior this will be because of one piece of equipment with a design that doesn't even match up with other cancer centres literally being designed at the

same time. Then the community is made to feel potentially guilty about any possible delays in a design that this government has stubbornly clung to despite repeated requests by those same community members.

The hospital board has wanted this redesigned the whole time. The MLAs have wanted it redesigned the whole time. The medical staff have wanted it redesigned the whole time. The only people that haven't has been this government. And now our understanding is it gets ratcheted up a level where the government is alluding to.... If there are any further delays, the project will be scrubbed completely.

Now, Kamloops has a long history of distrust with NDP governments and cancer centres. They're not going to re-litigate the original decision that got yanked away from Kamloops by then Premier Harcourt. But the community is still angry about that. So a simple request. We're going to keep fighting to have this designed properly — to the minister.

[3:00 p.m.]

Can the minister confirm that the Kamloops cancer centre is not under threat by this government in any way, shape or form for cancellation? If there's any delay, if the community keeps advocating for a properly designed cancer centre in the first place, and if, by some weird fluke, the government finally starts to listen to reason and actually delivers a properly designed cancer centre, that is not suddenly the excuse for this government to cancel the cancer centre, as we are starting to hear has been now threatened to our community.

Hon. Josie Osborne: We clearly value this project. Despite all the economic uncertainty that we're experiencing and that members of the opposition bring up consistently in this House, this project is going ahead. This project is in the final phases of the procurement process, and construction will start this summer.

This project will address the needs for people to get cancer care closer to home, and that is far superior to a situation where they are not getting that care. The project is moving ahead.

Anna Kindy: To the minister: I'm just going to give you a bit of an overview and then some questions.

On reviewing the StrongerBC service plan for the upcoming three....

[3:05 p.m.]

Actually, let me premise first, just secondary to the member for Kamloops Centre's comment regarding the PET scan. There is a track 1 and track 2 for referrals. Track 1 is for cancer care. Once you get cancer care, you get treatment.

The issue, and I've had quite a few letters and people complaining of that, is that unless you get your PET scan, often you do not get to see the cancer care because they

need the results of the PET scan. So I think not having a PET scan available locally defeats the purpose a little bit. Just a comment to maybe take into consideration.

On reviewing the StrongerBC service plan for the upcoming three years, I have many concerns, which we'll eventually get to. But I have some overriding, specific concerns, and they are the lack of legislated health standards, meaning acceptable wait times; nursing ratios.... I think they're 4 to 1. Also, one that's never mentioned is laboratory turnaround time and, also, the lack of transparency and clear data showing the progress in the area of concern.

We need to know where we're going, hence the health standards. How can we move forward without that data? And just to put it in context a little bit, unfortunately with the health authorities, many of the rural ridings have lost services.

I'll just take one, for example, the lab services. Locally in Campbell River, we were able to do Gram stains. A Gram stain is a very basic test. It's done around the world, in Third World countries — very standard test.

The reason we sometimes need the result right away is, for example, if somebody comes in with necrotizing fasciitis, or flesh-eating disease, sometimes you're not quite sure. The way you can actually diagnose it is to see what kind of bacteria grows. And to actually wait for a result when a young person comes in with flesh-eating disease.... And if you wait too long, that below-the-elbow amputation becomes above-the-elbow amputation, which can become actually a life-threatening issue.

We've lost that service in Campbell River. We went from 14 lab techs, and at one point we were down to three lab techs. What that meant was that if one lab tech took a holiday, and we got to that point, the hospital was going to close. What I mean by close is that we would not have been able to give or take blood. That's why, sometimes, centralizing services, which was done with the health authority, works against the rural background.

Coming back to my questions, having given you context, does the minister plan to create standards in wait time for diagnostics, consultations and treatment so that the population of B.C. clearly knows what is acceptable, and how will the minister share this progress with the public and this government?

[3:10 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question.

Good to see you again. We'll have a good session today, I know.

Thank you for the question around wait-time targets or benchmarks or standards around lab services and diagnostic imaging, for example.

[3:15 p.m.]

I am going to talk first about the standards and the question that the member asked. I'm going to talk a little

bit, too, about the need to train and recruit more health care workers who perform these important tasks and the equipment that's required to do them.

First of all, I think it's good to note that currently there are no nationally agreed-upon wait-time targets for medical, diagnostic or MRI, CT and ultrasound imaging, and there is a wide variation with respect to the collection and assessment of medical imaging data.

Here in British Columbia, the suggested wait times are aligned with the Canadian Association of Radiologists national designation five-point classification system, and they're based on medical urgency — for example, priority 1, immediate to 24 hours; priority 2, maximum seven days; priority 3, maximum 30 days; priority 4, maximum 60 days; and priority 5, scheduled exams. Those are timed follow-up exams that take place on a specified date.

The B.C. prioritization guidelines were developed to provide imaging departments with a provincial approach to prioritizing the commonly ordered medical diagnostic and imaging tests. In B.C., these priority levels can be assigned by the referring practitioner or other roles in health authorities — for example, booking clerks, technologists, radiologists. It depends on the health authority. There's a bit of variability there.

Given that the prioritization levels might not be consistently assigned across the province, right now the ability to ensure standardization and compare across health authorities, for example, of the priorities is limited. But I take the member's point and understand what she is seeing. That's why there is work underway right now in the ministry and in the health authorities to ensure that there is greater standardization of the implementation of these priority levels across the health authorities, and that will ensure consistency. That takes care, I think, of the question around standardization.

I want to talk a little bit about diagnostic imaging access and all of the supports for laboratory medicine services.

First of all, we recognize that there is a growing demand on medical imaging services, of course, as the health care demands grow with an aging population, with a growing population. That's why we launched a diagnostic imaging strategy to help catch up and to keep up with the demand.

There's still work to do, but I'm going to talk a little bit about some of that work. We are making progress. That's around ensuring that more people have access to the diagnostic imaging services that they need.

Since 2016-2017, since we formed government, we have increased the total number of MRI units to 44 from 25 and the total number of CT units to 74 from 63. There are 11 net new CT units and 19 net new MRI units that have been added across B.C. because, of course, as machines age, they need to be replaced. This is helping to both increase capacity and also improve geographic access, improving access for people who live in rural and remote areas, for example.

Additionally, since we formed government in 2017, health authorities have significantly increased exams. Last year — these numbers are not finalized, but these are the estimates — over 340,000 MRI exams, which is 95 per cent more than when we formed government, so almost a doubling in the number of MRI exams performed over the last eight years.

In the case of CT exams, over one million CT exams. That's 45 per cent more, compared to the 2016-2017 year. Two years ago, in 2023, B.C. ranked second out of seven reporting provinces for MRI exam wait time. Nine out of ten people in B.C. waited 159 days or less for their MRI exam, compared to a national average of 167 days. That's in accordance with last year's Canadian Institute for Health Information, or CIHI, report.

[3:20 p.m.]

We've made tremendous access on increasing the capacity for these services. We just wouldn't be able to achieve that kind of access without the collaboration and partnership we've seen with health authorities and everybody who's been involved, of course, too, from the Ministry of Health in increasing this access and delivering these services.

Just to talk a little bit about the technologists who run the MRI machines. We launched a direct-entry MRI technologist training program at BCIT in 2023 to help build the workforce, and we certainly.... As I have said many times in this House, we're experiencing a global health human resource shortage, and we need more workers in practically every part of the health care sector to help deliver the health care for British Columbians.

This program at BCIT is allowing high school graduates to apply instead of requiring an existing medical imaging certification.

Any high school students out there interested in becoming an MRI technologist? Just saying; it's a great career.

This is an example of how we are increasing access to seats and training more people. We know that when people are trained in health care jobs, professions here in British Columbia, they tend to stay in British Columbia, and that's a really important point to make.

When it comes to the allied human health supports that are needed for laboratory medicine services, so talking about the lab service side of things, this has very much been a focus of our health human resources strategy and doing the work to support the medical laboratory assistants or MLAs, the medical laboratory technologists, MLTs, and the combined laboratory and X-ray technologists, the CLXTs.

A couple of examples. I won't go too exhaustive on this, but action 34 in the health human resources strategy points to the memorandum of agreement that GoHealth BC has. Now, we've talked about GoHealth BC before in the House and how nurses working for GoHealth BC, for example, have the opportunity to travel out to those com-

munities that are experiencing some of the most severe shortages.

In this case, GoHealth BC has a memorandum of agreement with the HSPBA, and that includes medical laboratory technologists in that program. We've got five MLTs now as part of the GoHealth BC program that are available to some of those communities, for example, in Interior Health and in Northern Health.

There's a cohort of 15 students that's been supported to complete the combined lab and x-ray technologist training program, improving access to the kind of training that's needed to do this specialized but very rewarding profession.

There are students enrolled in both the medical lab assistant and the medical lab technologist programs at post-secondary institutions who are eligible, if they're enrolled between September 1, 2023, and October 2025, for tuition credits. Again, trying to incentivize and bring down some of the barriers and the costs associated with that.

Currently one thing I want to talk about is the education and training that's offered here in B.C. as well. We have 149 medical lab assistant training seats. There are three public and seven private post-secondary institutions that are approved by the B.C. Society of Laboratory Science, and they offer this six- to ten-month MLA certificate program.

In Budget 2021 — again, just remembering that as budgets go by and investments are made, these are sequential investments into the health care system — we added 16 new MLT seats at BCIT, 12 ongoing MLT seats at the College of New Caledonia.

That's an example of the kind of work that's being done to increase the number of people working in this critical part of the health care sector, increasing the number of pieces of equipment that are available, and health authorities, too, working with their staffs and their staffing rotations to expand the hours of access to these critical exams that are needed for people, as well as some work at the beginning there around the need for standardization and the work that's underway in the ministry right now.

Anna Kindy: Again, I think comparisons are very important, because sometimes we compare provinces to provinces. Other provinces are having issues as well with wait times.

[3:25 p.m.]

Just to give you an example of medical technology outside of our borders, Canada is 27th out of 31 OECD countries — again, Europe, Australia, New Zealand. We're 27 out of 31 for MRIs. We have 9.5 per million. We're 28 out of 31 for CT scanners at 38.8 per million.

I think we need to sometimes look for solutions outside our border, especially right now. It's our understanding that there are currently over 500,000 patients waiting for CT scans. We're way beyond the recommended targets

for CTs, MRIs, ultrasound and mammography, as well as image-guided procedures such as biopsies.

You mentioned training seats for techs, which I think is great. The numbers I have here from radiologists are that they need at least 100 new training seats for technologists and 20 new training seats for ultrasound people. One of the key factors, like you mentioned, in terms of wait times, is the medical imaging portion of it, because there are extreme shortages of medical imaging technologists. So the sooner we address that.... I think we need to address it appropriately.

There's a massive deficit of medical imaging equipment in B.C., and a significant portion of the existing equipment is beyond its useful life, as determined by the Canadian Association of Radiologists' equipment life expectancy guidelines, and they need to be replaced. In addition, net new equipment is needed to keep up with medical imaging demand.

Could the minister please provide details on how much funding is required to replace existing medical imaging equipment that is beyond replacement guidelines? What specific plans and funding are in place to accomplish this?

[3:30 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question.

The member is asking around plans for the future acquisition of technologies like CT units and MRI units, for example, and how government will be investing in that. Not to repeat myself, but I will say that one of the things we did in forming government was recognize that we had a lot of catch-up to do. And the replacement of equipment and the acquisition of new equipment, net new equipment, to be able to increase access for people has been a really high priority.

Again, increasing the number of total units to 44 from 25, which is 11 net new; CT units to 74 from 63, which is 19 net new. And of course, it's always important to stay on top of what the latest technology is available in terms of MRI and CTs, for example.

What's the real rate limiter right now are people to run these machines and to perform these exams. That's why it's very important, I think, that to be the most financially responsible, it's also to time those investments in the equipment with the investments in recruiting, and training more people to run those.

The last thing we would want to do is purchase a machine that sat idle too much because there weren't enough people to run it, and then it became outdated over time and needed to be replaced. We want to use every piece of equipment as efficiently and effectively as possible, so that's the right combination of acquiring these units and having the staff to run them.

We're also aware that with innovations in technology, things like artificial intelligence, there's an opportunity to

begin augmenting the staffing that does exist and providing that kind of assistance as well. I've certainly had this conversation with the radiologists recently, myself. Maybe we met with them on the same day. Who knows?

Then not to frustrate the member, but I will say that the actual purchase of these major pieces of capital equipment has moved out of the Ministry of Health and into the Ministry of Infrastructure. So it's important for our two ministries to work together, of course. Looking across government, the Ministry of Post-Secondary and Future Skills is an important partner here too.

We have stood up a working group between the Ministry of Health and the PSFS Ministry to make sure that we're staying on top of what the projections are in terms of the staffing that's needed to run diagnostic equipment and that the seats that are invested in and the availability of new training seats for people are matching there too. It's really important for the three ministries to work together very closely on that, and that's the approach that we've taken since forming government.

We'll continue to do that, recognizing, like the member has so accurately described, just how critical these diagnostic tests are and how physicians and specialists need them in order to be able to do their jobs well and that we are doing it in a way that delivers the best health care for people, including to expand the availability over all hours of the clock if we can. As well, increasingly in smaller centres, making it easier for people who live in rural and remote communities to access these important services as well.

I really appreciate the question.

[3:35 p.m.]

Anna Kindy: Word of mouth is that in Vancouver, for example, the cost of living is so high, and the salary of a CT scanner tech is quite a bit less than an MRI tech. That's part of the difficulty of attracting enough CT scan techs. So just to take that into consideration.

Now, in terms of a community imaging clinic, it's an important provider of publicly funded out-patient medical imaging in B.C. For some of them, the fees aren't quite covering the overhead as they used to, and some are finding it financially difficult to stay viable.

I'm just wondering. When will this government be implementing the permanent changes to overhead fees for CICs? They did institute some changes, but they were not permanent, and to keep those clinics going, they need a helping hand.

[3:40 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: First of all, for the folks at home, to acknowledge that community imaging clinics are publicly funded and privately owned outpatient diagnostic facilities that perform an incredibly important function here in British Columbia. That can't go unnoted. I want

to acknowledge just how important they are. In some regions, they are performing up to 60 percent of the services that people need.

In Vancouver Coastal region, for example, CICs provide 70 percent of diagnostic breast imaging. It's a really important part of the entire health sector ecosystem.

We acknowledge this and the challenges that these clinics are facing. We've heard clearly from them that they are struggling financially and that some are concerned about their ongoing viability. They have expressed some serious concerns around the cost of overhead and administration, for example.

That's why, in January 2024, we established a provincial ultrasound working group, we call it. This has membership from the Ministry of Health, from health authorities, from the B.C. Radiological Society, from radiologists who are directly affiliated with the CICs themselves and from the Provincial Medical Imaging Office. The purpose of this working group is to address these issues, including other issues, but it's primarily to look at the issues around financial sustainability and to look at some of the disparities that exist.

I want to acknowledge the member describing the difference in pay rates, for example, and that we are aware of that issue as well.

The discussions that are taking place at the working group meetings are enabling the collective membership of that group to understand the extent of services that CICs are providing and to understand more fully the financial sustainability issues that they are facing and to explore options for how we can all work together to continue to support patient access to medical imaging and ensure that it remains this important part of B.C.'s health system.

In this work, we've advanced kind of a twofold plan to address some of the disparities that are there. As the member noted, we've undertaken some stabilization payments for CICs. Those go from September 2024 through to the end of August of this year. That is continuing to provide the space and the time for us to work, through this working group, to better understand these issues and then come up with a solution that can last longer than the stabilization funding.

Thank you very much to the member for the question.

Anna Kindy: I am going to pass the question to the member for Prince George–North Cariboo.

Sheldon Clare: My question is about hospice fees. It's really two parts and maybe quite detailed.

What is the current revenue from hospice palliative care fees by health authority? Is there a variation in the hospice palliative care fee rate by health authority, and if so, what are the average fee rates by health authority?

[3:45 p.m. - 3:50 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you very much to the member for the question and an opportunity to talk about just how important palliative, hospice, end-of-life services are and how lucky, fortunate, we are in British Columbia to have such a strong network of hospice and palliative care providers.

I really want to honour the people who do that incredibly important and challenging work. It is so important for people reaching the end of their lives to know that they have the peace and comfort and choice that is related to their own health. Of course, that's incredibly important for their families as well. And I appreciate the member's question.

Palliative and end-of-life care services are provided across a variety of different kinds of settings here in B.C., and, of course, they all share the goal of improving the quality of life for people who have life-limiting illnesses, for example, and of supporting their caregivers as well. There are currently 474 palliative and hospice beds in B.C., and that includes 345 community hospice beds and 129 acute beds.

Again, I just want to pause here and really express gratitude for those community-based organizations that provide these services. I know, certainly in my community of Tofino, we are very fortunate to have a very active hospice organization. I know that many other communities benefit from the services that they provide beyond those end-of-life care services for people. Also, the supports for their families through counselling and grief supports, through vigil sitting, for example — these are really important services.

Palliative and end-of-life services are charged differently based on the care setting, but to the member's question, there is a daily client fee. It is \$48.20 for an in-facility or short-stay hospice care.

[3:55 p.m.]

It is important to know, too, that no client is ever refused services. Should a family, a person, be in a situation where this is not a fee that is feasible for them to pay, there is a process in place to receive a waiver for that.

I want to acknowledge, too, that that's a challenging situation for some individuals and families to be in at that time, to have to contemplate having to go through that process of, essentially, applying for a waiver.

The member has also asked about the differences between health authorities. I can confirm that the rate is the same, the \$48.20, but that the collection of this fee by health authority.... Those records lie with the health authority, and we don't have that data at our fingertips, so I'm sorry to tell the member that I don't have that data.

I want to also reflect that we do have a bilateral agreement with the federal government that was signed 2023-2024. Through that, we are receiving \$52 million over five years to improve access to palliative and end-of-life care, and we're going to continue to invest in other services like

B.C. palliative care benefits. This supports palliative care at home for people in B.C., for residents that are reaching the end stage of an illness.

Again, it is part of our government's commitment as part of a public health system to continue to offer a full range of palliative care options for people in their homes, in their communities and, when required, in community-based facilities or in acute care settings.

I really appreciate the opportunity to talk about the good work that so many people are doing there, and I appreciate the question from the member.

Anna Kindy: Just to clarify, with CICs, you mentioned that the contract ends August 2025 and that right now there is no plan to extend it. We have 500,000 patients waiting on a list for medical imaging exams.

You have to remember that the CICs, like you mentioned, are privately run. As a business, it's difficult to plan if you know you're not.... It would be easier to plan, knowing now, for August. Is there a plan in the works to come up with a solution in the immediate future? I'm going to leave that as a question.

Hon. Josie Osborne: Yes. To be clear, the stabilization payments are not contracts. It's an agreement to provide stabilization funding, which ends on the 31st of August, 2025.

I'm extremely sympathetic that as private businesses, the sense of predictability and needing to know about financial sustainability is, first and foremost, something that they'll be thinking of in addition to, obviously, the care and the services that they provide for people. We really value those services.

Having the working group that has stood up to talk about this.... The intention of the working group is to find a permanent solution. That work is underway right now. It needs the space and time, but I take the member's point that time is of the essence and that it's important for clinic operators to understand what the future will look like. I'm grateful to them for being participants in the working group.

[4:00 p.m.]

I'm looking forward to learning more from my staff, as the working group proceeds, about what kind of solutions can come forward. I appreciate the question.

Anna Kindy: Another key driver for long wait times for medical imaging is a shortage of radiologists. Data provided by the BCRS shows that B.C. currently has a shortage of 58 radiologist FTEs and this shortage will grow by 157 FTEs by 2030. If urgent action isn't taken, this shortage of radiologists in breast imaging, interventional radiology and image-guided procedures such as biopsies will be significant.

In terms of recommendations, I have talked to multiple

specialists, and I hear the same thing through all the specialties. For example, neurologists in Vancouver — I think they graduate five neurologists per year, and because of the cost of living, as well, the retention rate isn't what it should be. Looking at the demographic of the physicians, the specialists, in terms of retirement, and looking at the numbers produced by residency programs, it's totally inadequate overall.

If we're looking at increasing medical school enrolment for GPs, what are we doing about specialists? Consider that to become a specialist takes ten years. If we don't increase medical school enrolment now — we're already in trouble — we're going to be in huge trouble ten years from now.

I'm just wondering if the minister is actually collecting the data to that effect per specialty. What is the cost of increasing residency positions, which I know is taken into consideration? When you look at the effects on health care, the wait times for....

I'll go back to neurology. For example, if you have Parkinson's disease, in terms of seeing a neurologist in Vancouver, it takes a year now.

What is the plan, with the minister, in terms of increasing medical school enrolment?

[4:05 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question.

Just to start by acknowledging the obvious and important role of specialists and the length of time that it takes to train them. First of all, in order to go into a specialty, of course, you need your basic MD, and the undergraduate training is a really important component of that.

[4:10 p.m.]

I just want to give a nod to the fact that through our health human resources strategy — again, where all of this effort is really focused on a strategic approach to ensuring that we are training undergraduates, providing residency spots for postgraduate medical education, looking at all the other health care professions within the sector that are needed....

Through the HHR strategy, we have funded 40 new undergraduate medical school seats, and of course, the new Simon Fraser University medical program will be welcoming a first cohort of 48 students in fall 2026.

Specifically, though, the number of medical residents — I want to talk a little bit about that. Here in 2025, now, B.C. is going to have a total intake of 613 medical residents, which is a 35 percent increase since 2017. I'll give a little bit of a breakdown there: 205 of those will be family medicine residents, and that includes 31 that have been added since 2023 through the HHR strategy; 219 first-year specialty residents; and 189 residents in a combination of sub-specialties, so re-entry into medical residency, family medicine enhanced skills.

Between 2022 and 2028, UBC will add more than 160 new residency positions. There is a resident allocation committee that meets on an annual basis between UBC, the health authorities and the ministry, and they use data directly from the health authorities to determine an appropriate allocation of how residency seats should be divided up and how they should be allocated.

In addition to what I just talked about, medical imaging residencies have also increased from eight to 12 between 2017 and now. I don't have a direct cost per residency because the length will differ for different specialties. I know the member understands that very well.

I will just talk a little bit about the global budget for health education expansions: Budget 2021, including \$96 million over three years for health education expansions; Budget 2023, just over \$302 million for three years for 19 of the focused actions in the HHR strategy. I'll also note that much of this funding is managed by the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills.

I'll just talk a little bit more about the actually filled residency seats and how they have grown over time. For example, in 2022, in specialty, we had 260 specialty and 65 residencies for family medicine enhanced skills — those family medicine practitioners, for example, who want to gain specialization in oncology or in anesthesiology, and an important feature for some of the smaller centres in B.C. where family physicians with that extra training are able to provide services in those settings.

Then increasing in 2023 to 277 specialty seats and 64 family medicine enhanced skilled seats in.... Sorry, that was 2023 that I just read. In 2024, it was 297 specialty seats and 58 family medicine enhanced skills; and then now, in 2025, 314 specialty seats and 84 family medicine enhanced skills seats residencies. I think it's a demonstration of the commitment to expanding the number of residency seats that are available to train the specialists that we need.

I also want to note that in addition to training doctors and specialists here in British Columbia, the work that we are doing to attract physicians to move to British Columbia is an important part of this. With launching a recruitment campaign, for example, specifically targeting the United States and attracting American, or Canadian but American-trained, physicians who are working there to come back to British Columbia or to move to British Columbia.

I recently met with a specialist who made that decision, having lived in the U.S. with his wife for a number of years. She's American. They made the decision to move back to B.C., and I don't think he could be happier, which is really good to hear.

We need to do more of that, so we're going to continue the work that we're doing to fast-track the credentialing of doctors who come in from the U.S., for example, and working with the College of Physicians and Surgeons on that work right now so that we can make it as easy as pos-

sible for specialists coming from the States to come here, practise in British Columbia and enjoy the fantastic province that we all enjoy.

[4:15 p.m.]

Anna Kindy: I think the important thing is to actually collect the data to see what the need is. I think part of the data are the wait times. It gives a sort of indication of what's needed and the demographic of the physicians.

Again, word on the ground in every specialty is there's going to be a wave of retirement. People have been working. Second is also the different numbers needed. For example, in general practice, you need to take into account how people work. The numbers in general practice are not that much different than they were a few years ago, but the need has, for some reason, exponentially increased.

Part of the reason is.... For example, in general practice, like you mentioned with specialties, they sidetracked into different specialties. They'll do either addiction or sometimes skin care, or they'll work solely in emergency. But how many of the old-school doctors did it all, working 80 hours a week? Those days, I think, we have to count as maybe not.... We can't count as much on that. I think we need to take that into account as well.

I think number one is the data collection in terms of the wait times and if we are actually increasing or decreasing. Looking back to neurology, in terms of wait times.... I mentioned it's one year in Vancouver. But if you're from a rural area, to see a movement disorder specialist, it takes anywhere from two to three years. So there's a real discrepancy.

We see that discrepancy, as well, coming from a rural area for cancer care. The issue with cancer care is that the longer you wait, the worse your outcome.

I'm just wondering. Is the province measuring access to specialist care, measuring the difference between rural and city?

[4:20 p.m. - 4:25 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question.

First of all, I want to acknowledge that specialists actually maintain their own wait-lists, and the Ministry of Health does not have a direct line of sight into that.

We do rely on the allocation process, the committee that I described, with the ministry, the health authorities and UBC, using the data that health authorities are able to provide and anecdotal information to make the allocation decisions about residency seats. Absolutely aware of how important data like that are and acknowledge and agree with the member opposite that that's really important information.

I think that this is the right kind of conversation to take to the Specialist Services Committee under the physician master agreement. The Specialist Services Commit-

tee, for those folks at home.... Under the physician master agreement, this is a committee that facilitates collaboration between government, the Doctors of B.C. and health authorities on the delivery of services by specialist physicians, and it supports the improvement of the specialist care system.

This committee has a specific mandate around enhancing and expanding the programs that support delivery of high-quality specialty service to British Columbians to identify projects that have measurable patient-centred goals that are focused on two key areas: a health system redesign and expediting access to care. We're talking about this, I think, expediting access to care, absolutely. Also, the committee supports engagement between facility-based family practitioners, between the specialist practitioners and health authorities.

Another project that I'm aware of that the Specialist Services Committee has been undertaking is around expanding team-based care for specialists, bringing nurses and allied health professionals into a specialist clinic and enabling new ways of managing wait-lists and supporting specialists and the management of those wait-lists.

Evaluation of that has been undertaken. What we know about it is that in every facet, every objective that this pilot study had saw positive results, particularly around patient satisfaction and in provider satisfaction — that specialist satisfaction as well. That is a promising, I think, development and, again, exactly the kind of conversation that needs to continue to happen. I would suggest that the Specialist Services Committee is a good place for that conversation.

In the meanwhile, we will, of course.... The ministry participates in that and will continue to work with those partners. I'll just take the point that the member is making around taking every action that we can to reduce wait times for British Columbians to be able to access specialists.

[4:30 p.m.]

While I'm not able to provide information on the difference between rural and urban residents, for example, I'll just point to the importance of data, as the member has stated, and our commitment to continue to do this work together with specialists and our other health care partners.

The Chair: We just heard why all devices should be on silent mode in this chamber. Thank you very much.

Anna Kindy: I'm not an administrator by trade, but to me, to make a decision, you need data. I'm assuming that data collection has been happening through the years. I think part of having a health authority and having such a big bureaucracy....

[Mable Elmore in the chair.]

There should be data available as to what the needs are today and what the needs will be five years from now and ten years from now. I think if we had actually looked at that data and collected that data and implemented strategies, we wouldn't be in the situation we're in right now. I can't emphasize enough to collect data, and also comparative data — rural versus non-rural areas, wait times, etc. — and make those data public.

I think, as well, sticking a little bit to the rural aspect or non-rural aspect, community-based decision-making.... I just met, at lunch, the mayor from Colwood, who is initiating a community-driven primary care centre. He has pledged not to take physicians from other areas of B.C. He wants not to have one community lose while he gains. Again, that's a community-driven initiative. I think the community knows what it needs.

If we look at a community that is having a lot of issues right now, it's Kamloops. They have very poor access to cardiology, rheumatology, psychiatry and maternity care.

You're mentioning maybe tying.... You mentioned that you're bringing in U.S.-trained doctors and maybe tying in, bringing in, foreign-trained physicians to the needs of the community. If there's a need for maternity care, and knowing that there's a need in Kamloops, that would be prioritized. I think that would be a good way of actually moving forward.

In terms of psychiatry, there's a provincewide lack of access to out-patient psychiatry. In my community, we basically have no access to out-patient psychiatry whatsoever. We don't have psychiatric beds. Again, looking at a community-driven solution as opposed to a health authority-driven solution.... I think it's important.

Part of the reason we are in Campbell River was that the community opened its arms up to having a plastic surgery program, looking at there being a resource industry and the type of injuries that happen in that kind of community. Now it's a very viable program that has attracted more plastic surgeons, and the call group goes from Nanaimo north.

The idea, and I'm just going to say it, is.... At some point, the previous minister said that, well, if people need to travel, they just have to travel. I don't think that's an adequate answer. We need to look at.... Every community needs to form its own strategy, and maybe the health authority needs to open its eyes to that community-driven solution.

We know there's a general lack of specialists, and the numbers quoted in terms of residency spots opening seem to me very inadequate. Again, looking at not saying the point that there's a global shortage, because there isn't a global shortage in terms of wait times and in terms of number of physicians per country.

I think we need to, again, look at true numbers, because the decisions we make today will impact what is happening in five years. This will not change. I don't fore-

see it changing quickly. But if we don't change now, we're going to be way worse off in five years and looking at other systems of model.

[4:35 p.m.]

I'm just going to go to primary care a little bit. In terms of primary care attachment, I'm just wondering how the minister tabulates attachment to primary care.

[4:40 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Welcome to the chair, Madam Chair. Nice to see you.

Thank you to the member for the question around primary care, the importance of primary care and for people to be attached to a family doctor or nurse practitioner and receive that important longitudinal care especially, as well, and how attachment is measured and reported.

First of all, just a little bit of history. In the past, we relied on a Canadian human health survey and also looked at utilization patterns, so some information around the number of visits a person would make to a provider.

Now, this is imprecise, and you need to do some extrapolation to guesstimate how many patients are out there seeking doctors and how many people are attached to a family doctor or nurse practitioner. The lack of precision in this approach led to the development of the provincial attachment system that we are developing and using today.

In this case, what we're doing is working towards getting the records from every primary care practitioner about their panels and how many patients they have. Then we have an understanding of who is attached. Combine that with the health connect registry that any British Columbian can and should, if they're seeking a primary care practitioner, sign up to.

[4:45 p.m.]

The health connect registry gives us a good line of sight into how many people want to be attached to a primary care provider. Then we can accelerate the attachment with the patient attachment coordinators that we have and have hired who do that work.

For the first time ever, now we actually have primary care providers telling us that they want patients. They can tell the system that they want patients. This is a really important move, I think, away from the burden for people seeking a doctor or a nurse practitioner, primary care provider, from having to sit through the telephone book — maybe we don't use telephone books anymore — or go through the internet and find as many local clinics as they possibly can and start calling every single one of them.

This is a system that's helping make much more informed decisions. In the case of new-to-practice family doctors, for example, using this system to help slowly load their panel as they become accustomed to being full-time family doctors and enabling them to practise before.... They might move away from a new-to-practice contract,

for example, into the longitudinal family payment plan model that's here.

We have a lot of work to do, we know, in terms of continuing to train and attract family doctors and nurse practitioners. Year after year we are attaching more and more people to a primary care provider in their community. Since the launch of the primary care strategy in 2018, more than 695,000 people have been attached to a family doctor or nurse practitioner. In 2024, during that calendar year, 248,000 people were attached to a primary care provider, compared to 186,000 the year before that and 130,000 the year before that.

You can see that the rate of attachment is accelerating, and last year, 2024, on average, 680 people a day attached to a primary care provider. That's a 33 percent increase in the attachment rate from 2023. It's work that we have to continue.

In terms of how many family physicians we have here in British Columbia, again, we are trending in the right direction, with more work to do. B.C. was the first province in Canada for physicians per capita of 138 family physicians per 100,000 people and 134 specialists per 100,000 people.

We are attracting more out-of-province physicians than any other province, with the highest positive net inflow, meaning that more physicians come to B.C. from other countries and provinces than leave B.C. for other countries and provinces. In 2023, for example, we had a net international inflow of 27. Second place was Alberta at five. That same year we had a net interprovincial flow of 122. Second place goes to Quebec with 33.

This is, really, around building on the successes of the initiatives that we're taking in showing that B.C. is an attractive place to live and to work, and the work that we continue to do to incentivize people to move into rural and remote communities.

I'm so glad that the member mentioned specifically the mayor of Colwood. And of course, we got to visit with him today at the Heart and Stroke Foundation lunch and hear a little bit more about his inspiration behind standing up a community clinic. I think this is really worth talking about because of the initiative that the city of Colwood has shown in trying something different, a different model.

I'm proud that our government, the Ministry of Health, supported the city of Colwood in the development of what they decided to do in standing up a municipally owned clinic, essentially attracting physicians. Again, in his commitment to attract physicians from outside of the province, he didn't want to have an impact on the flow of physicians and the need of physicians in existing communities and has hired from places like Ireland, for example, in bringing physicians to the city of Colwood and working as municipal employees.

I think this is exactly the kind of innovation and partnership that we continue to need and need to see more of.

When a municipality like Colwood.... I'm aware that not every single municipality is able to put in the kinds of investment and work that Colwood has, especially smaller places, and it's really important that we continue to do everything to support them.

I do want to just briefly highlight a few other communities around British Columbia that are standing up to lean into this work of attracting physicians to their communities.

[4:50 p.m.]

I think of places like the Cariboo regional district that has set up a service inside the regional hospital district, I believe it is, to pay for recruitment coordinators, people who are working with local communities to attract physicians; to help welcome physicians and nurses into their communities — to help them land well, to arrive into a home that has a fully stocked fridge and to have toys for the kids; and who have an understanding of what the interests of a physician or their family are and being able to match them there.

I believe that in Burns Lake recently, they've just stood up a recruitment coordinator as well, and other places like the Comox Valley have put an incredible amount of work into attracting primary care providers.

We will do everything, and I will do everything that I can, to continue to support communities in making these kinds of steps and trying innovative new models and standing up clinics.

I recently had the opportunity to visit Shoreline clinic up in Sidney, just north here of the Legislature, and was really inspired by the forward thinking of the team of people leading that clinic in understanding that, as the member has referred to, a wave of retirements.... It might be five years, might be ten years, but it's going to impact a community, and that's why they stood up and have developed what looks to me like a fantastic team-based facility.

When I toured it recently, with the member for Saanich North and the Islands, I was given to understand that they practically have a waiting list of doctors who want to join their clinic because they've created such a fantastic work environment. That's exactly the kind of thing that we need to continue to see.

With that, I'll wait for the next question.

Actually, can I ask for, like, a five-minute recess, please, so I can concentrate?

The Chair: Certainly. We'll take a five-minute recess. It is now 4:51, so we'll see you back shortly.

The committee recessed from 4:51 p.m. to 4:59 p.m.

[Mable Elmore in the chair.]

The Chair: Okay, I'll call the committee back to order to resume the debates on the Ministry of Health.

Anna Kindy: When we institute a program, there are potentially unintended consequences. For example, having urgent and primary care centres or PCNs in a smaller community can draw the physician out of the private practice and into the urgent and primary care centres. Some of those private practices have significant patient attachments. We're talking maybe two physicians with 5,000 patients attached.

[5:00 p.m.]

What is the plan for the unintended consequences, from setting up UPCCs and now PNs, for the private practice physicians?

[5:05 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question.

Yeah, the plan for unintended consequences and how sometimes thinking of the health care system.... Let's just talk about the primary care system, for example. It is a little bit of a spider's web, and it feels like you can make adjustments here and they're going to reverberate throughout the web. We have to be aware of what those impacts might be and do our best to plan for them.

I think, also, in an earlier question, we were talking about the changing nature of work and the changing nature of the way family doctors, nurse practitioners, are practising. There was reference to the old-style family doctor that worked 80 hours a week and coming to terms with different ways of practising medicine.

Certainly, something I think we are seeing amongst family physicians is the need for choice and that people are looking to find workplaces and settings that work best for them in the stage of life that they're at. Maybe they have a young family. Maybe they've been in practice for quite a while. Maybe people are moving towards retirement.

Some people want to live in an urban environment. Some people are looking for a rural lifestyle. It's important that the work we do with family doctors in those different settings, whether hospitalists or those entrepreneurial doctors who want to set up their own private clinics, for example....

Those who are choosing to work in places like UPCCs and those who have wanted to move into the longitudinal family physician payment model.... I want to talk just briefly a little bit about that because I think that's a place where a lot of work has been done that's been very helpful in answering the concerns that we've heard from doctors about improving the way that family doctors are compensated and supported for the time that they spend with patients.

When the longitudinal family physician, the LFP, payment model was brought in, we did that in collaboration with, of course, the Doctors of B.C. and B.C. Family Doctors. It was part of a response to an urgent need that all British Columbians are feeling around retaining and at-

tracting family doctors, and the ongoing requests that were coming forward to really revolutionize or modernize the long-standing fee-for-service model that for many doctors wasn't working anymore.

It's a model that recognizes the complexity of long-term patient care and helps to compensate family doctors for their time and for their patient interactions, and then the number and complexity of patients that they have in their panel as well. As of December 31, 2024, there were 4,418 family physicians actively working under the LFP payment model.

[5:10 p.m.]

Of course, assessing other models and other ways that family doctors, primary care providers, are working and how the system is working for British Columbians is really important as well. That's why I'm glad to see that in our agreement for cooperation and responsible government, the accord that we've struck with the Third Party, the B.C. Greens, as part of that.... I'm just going to read it right into the record here. One of our agreements with the B.C. Greens is:

"Performance analysis of the health system is critical. Government will assess all elements of the primary care system, community health centres, urgent and primary care centres and family practices.... This will involve an analysis of the performance of CHCs and UPCCs.

"The Minister of Health's special adviser will work with the B.C. Green caucus, the NDP caucus and Ministry of Health officials to develop terms of reference for this analysis. The resulting report will be made public within 45 days of completion."

That's a commitment we've made to the B.C. Greens, and a commitment we're making to British Columbians, around this kind of performance analysis and being able to be open and transparent about what we find and, using those findings, to continue to adjust and improve the primary care model.

It's not that that kind of evaluation, to different degrees in different places, is not happening. In fact, there's a whole set of different monitoring, reporting and evaluation initiatives inside the ministry, looking at aspects of the primary care system — just a couple of them that I'll list as examples.

For example, including the real-time virtual supports, the RTVSs, is an evaluation of this. This is a program that is looking to provide timely and efficient medical support to remote, rural and First Nations communities and other Indigenous peoples in B.C., looking at the use of those kinds of virtual supports and how they can augment access to health care.

Looking at team-based-care evaluation, again, we're increasingly hearing from all kinds of health sector employees — family physicians, nurse practitioners, social work-

ers, dietitians, physiotherapists, other allied health professionals, of course — that a team-based setting is desirable.

It's a workplace setting that people enjoy having, and it's delivering excellent care for people, enabling people who work in that kind of a setting to specialize in what they do, and ensuring that a family physician, for example, is able to focus on the things that they are trained to do. There might be somebody else, like a dietitian or a mental health worker, in that same clinic to be able to provide supports to people.

Included in this is a reporting program for the longitudinal family physician payment model. This is looking at things like physician registrations, model uptake numbers, the source of registrants into the LFP — were they locums, or were they new to MSP, for example? — the proportion by health authority, the age and gender, and the billings by fee item.

This kind of reporting, again, provides that line of sight into the LFP plan and helps us make better decisions around the way that model is being used and what changes might need to be made.

The member also mentioned primary care networks. A primary care network core attributes measurement system and performance metrics have been developed for these core attributes of a primary care network, including longitudinal care, coordinated care, timely access, extended hours, comprehensive care, team-based care, population and public health promotion, digital enablement, culturally safe care and equitable access.

All of this is to say, in addition to other reporting and evaluation that takes place, that it's a really important part of being able to make informed decisions around things that may, as the member points out, have that unintended consequence. You know, you ping the spider's web, and you see a reaction somewhere else.

Our commitment, of course, is to continue this kind of evaluation and reporting and to know that the work we're doing with the Greens is important work. I look forward to this work. That reporting will become public too. It's a really important part of us all being able to work together in this House and across government to build and strengthen our universal public health care system.

[5:15 p.m.]

Anna Kindy: To the minister: with all due respect, you didn't answer my question. This is an urgent matter. We're talking of the small community of Cranbrook. I believe you got the same email.

This is a physician who's been working in this town for numerous years. Because of the unintended consequences, he and, I believe, one or two partners are left with 5,600 patients, with the inability of attracting new doctors in his clinic because of the opening of the UPCC, or the PCN.

If there's not something done immediately, he will leave, so the bureaucracy needs to move faster. I'm not sure why

practice contracts can't be issued for private practice, for example. They need help as well. We know that they have had many attached patients for many years. I'm not sure why these contracts are only available — or special contracts, potentially — to government-run clinics.

We have to look at the efficiency of the private clinic and how many patients they see, and the lack of GPs that they are able to attract at this point in time. Either something is done immediately, or this physician will leave. Is this something that the minister is willing to accept — the loss of a GP or couple of GPs? If he leaves, the clinic will close, and we're talking about 5,600 patients attached to this clinic.

[5:20 p.m. - 5:25 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for focusing her question specifically on this particular clinic in the Kootenay-Rockies riding, in the community of Cranbrook. I am aware, and my office has been in touch with the member for Kootenay-Rockies about this specific situation.

Of course, any time a community hears that doctors may be leaving, it's a cause of concern. We always want to make sure that everything is being done to recruit new doctors into a community like this, to be able to assume a panel of patients or be able to work amongst the complement of providers there. In case there's any misunderstanding, I want to be very clear that all clinics have the ability to access service contracts, so that should not be an obstacle for this clinic.

Also, just to talk a little bit about — I mean, we talked about this before — the changing nature of the way people are practising medicine and the choices that are being made around community-led clinics versus private clinics. Physicians and other health care providers are finding the best fit for them and, ideally, finding the best fit with their community as well.

I recognize the struggles that some clinics face. We were talking about this before with community imaging clinics, for example — the cost of overhead and the cost of doing business, quite literally.

Part of the work in developing the longitudinal family physician payment plan was around, again, creating a more fair compensation plan for family physicians and recognizing those costs of their time and the overhead they need to bear and then letting those physicians, and other providers they choose to partner with, choose the model that works best for them.

In the case of a clinic with multiple physicians, like this one, for example, obviously I know that they understand the work that needs to be involved in succession planning and recruitment. We spent a lot of time talking about the importance of recruitment and how there's natural fluctuation and overhead in the operations of a clinic like that.

The clinic is already being supported by the Ministry of

Health through the primary care network, with a range of nursing and Allied Health professionals and those salaries that are being paid for. It's important that we continue to support this clinic so that they can continue to provide the health care services that people in Cranbrook and the area are depending on there. We'll continue to do that.

[5:30 p.m.]

Also, I'll just point out the difference I was observing before, as I've travelled around and met with family physicians and other care providers in different clinic settings — again, pointing to Shoreline clinic and my really interesting visit there and learning more about their model and the work that they are doing.

I'll continue to work and support the member for Kootenay-Rockies in this, and I really appreciate the question from the member. Obviously, we want everybody to be attached to a family care provider of some kind, and we're going to continue that work in the attachment and supporting communities like Cranbrook.

Anna Kindy: Thank you for that answer. But I think maybe the ministry needs to look at temporary relief for areas in need. I think this is just the beginning, to be honest. I think we need to still look at who is providing an effective service and try to support those that are in need. This can be temporary as well, but I think that needs to be looked at. That's my two cents on that.

My understanding is that the ministry's plan is to create 50 more urgent and primary care centres and 100 primary care networks across B.C. If we're looking at the consistency in delivery of care, it has been variable from UPCC to UPCC — quite variable, actually. The cost per visit averages \$129, but there is variability there. It's twice as much as a longitudinal care visit, which I think is \$59 per visit, and four times that of fee-for-service, which was \$32.50 per visit. These clinics actually are failing to offload the emergency departments in many communities where they exist.

What are the accountability measures for these clinics to make sure that they are actually working as they should? What is the plan once we have the accountability measure to change what's happening, the cost per visit?

[5:35 p.m. - 5:40 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question around urgent and primary care centres. I'll take a little time just to quickly describe them and address the question and the assertions that she's made.

These are clinics that provide access to same-day, urgent, non-emergency primary care. They help increase existing primary care capacity, enable new patient attachment in certain situations and are intended to reduce pressures on emergency departments. This, we know, is a priority in all aspects — and being able to provide care through a variety of different means.

Here, of course, we have got community health centres. There are private clinics. There are First Nations-led clinics. There are UPCCs. And different needs in different communities.... Also, as we continue to build up the primary care provider workforce here in B.C., we know that for people who are not attached to a primary care provider, or people who have a primary care provider but are not able to access an appointment on an urgent basis and need that help right away, UPCCs are there to help provide that care.

Now, it's not consistent across all UPCCs, but some are often open on evenings and weekends, on statutory holidays, again providing access to care for people that can access it outside of regular business hours or who may be attached to a doctor but that clinic is not open to them during those hours. Really importantly, they provide a primary and urgent care option for people and families who might otherwise have gone to a hospital emergency department for issues that, frankly, don't require emergency care. That's really important in alleviating some of the pressure on our hospitals.

There are some UPCCs that attach people to primary care providers on a longitudinal basis and have the opportunity for that long-term health relationship with their primary care provider.

But a few statistics. We now have 42 open, and we are working toward 50 across the province. They are delivering more than three million patient visits since the first UPCC opened in 2018 as part of this primary care strategy.

In the first three quarters of last year alone, leading up to January 2025, they provided 648,964 patient visits and have attached almost 30,000 people to longitudinal care in the last fiscal as well, which is an increase of 1,811 patients.

Again, together with the work being done through primary care networks, community health centres, First Nations-led primary care centres, nurse practitioner-led primary care centres and UPCCs — all together, designed to help increase access to health care and provide a more comprehensive system across B.C.

The long and the short of it is that when we launched our primary care strategy, we did so because we recognized that we needed capacity. So we built capacity. We needed flexibility during the pandemic, and UPCCs helped to provide some of that flexibility that was needed.

I recognize that there's variability across the UPCCs and, again, reflect back on the agreement that we have with the B.C. Greens to undertake the primary care review. And that work looking at UPCCs is an important part of that.

It's not to say that monitoring and reporting on UPCCs doesn't happen, because it does. There are a number of key performance indicators that are measured with UPCCs, and that'll provide an important source of information for the work that we're going to be doing with the B.C. Greens.

[5:45 p.m.]

We have stood up these urgent and primary care cen-

tres quickly because we know that the need is there. Continuing to monitor them, to evaluate them, to make the changes that are necessary so that they're performing the way that they need to is obviously going to continue to be important.

I think it's challenging to compare across different models of care directly on a cost-per-visit basis, in part because it does not always acknowledge the complexity of a patient. It does not always acknowledge the geography, and there is variability across different parts of British Columbia.

Ultimately, we all want to make sure that our health care dollars are going into a system that is providing as much efficiency as possible, but our expectation, of course, is to continue to deliver excellent care for British Columbians. We'll continue to do that work in attracting the health care workforce that we need here, providing different options and ways for, for example, family physicians to be able to practise and ensuring that a community's needs are being matched.

Again, this is where the primary care networks are such an important tool as well, because enabling that.... It isn't a one-size-fits-all approach, and we're talking about the needs of different communities throughout estimates and needing to recognize that different models will be more appropriate for some communities over others.

I think the work, especially the work that we will do with the Greens, will help to tease out and reveal more of that so that we know we're making the best choices possible and really optimizing the use of our health care dollars. It's never been more important to do that work, and that's why we'll continue with this work moving forward.

Anna Kindy: I'm just going to go back to the principles of the Medicare Protection Act. One was value for money, and you mentioned that. I'm not sure how we can assess value for money if we don't collect the data and there are no accountability measures.

Going back to the cost per visit, you didn't say that my numbers were inaccurate, so it seems to me the cost per visit is high. I'm just wondering again about the accountability measure. I think that's something that the minister needs to look at.

The other question is just for my own knowledge, and I'm going to ask more than one question here. What constitutes a visit in the UPCC statistics? Can a single patient visit to a UPCC generate more than one visit? And the other — it shouldn't take too long to figure that one out, I think.

[5:50 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question.

I'll never argue with her that value for money is an important metric and that we need to do everything we can

to optimize our health care investments. But I would suggest that, and I don't think she is suggesting this, to only measure dollars per visit would not be an adequate way to measure health outcomes and the actual impact of the health care system on people.

I don't know the source of all of her numbers, so I'll neither agree nor disagree with them, though I will counter that the figures that we have between different health authorities, in terms of the average cost per visit, are a little bit different than what the member has.

She's asked specifically around a definition of visits, and I will tell the member that is one of the key performance indicators, of course, that is measured — total patient visits, the number of patients receiving clinical care in a UPCC on a single calendar day. Each patient is counted as one visit for that day, no matter how many people they see, how many direct care staff they see in that setting. So one patient, one visit.

Also, what is measured are patient encounters, and this is broken down by provider type. Encounters that patients have with direct care staff during their visit.... Within one patient visit, the patient may have encounters with different direct care staff — let's say a physician and a registered nurse. All patient encounters are counted for each patient visit.

The statistic that I read previously, the 648,964 unique patient visits, is just that: one person, one visit. But if you look at encounters for that same time period, it would be 1,066,629, just showing that a patient in a team-based-care environment like that can touch more than one provider, so we count both the number of patient visits as well as the number of encounters that that person has.

Anna Kindy: Of course quality always matters, right? I always take that into account. Having been a physician myself, I think quality is as important, if not more important. That's where longitudinal care allows GPs to spend more time with their patients. From a quality perspective, it is better care.

There's also a balance, because we do have limited funding, so we need to look at that balance.

Just a thought. I'm wondering if the minister has any contingency in place to incentivize family doctors to have after-hours clinics or to have more than 250 patients on their panels to receive.... Basically, if they have more, the payment goes up. Is that something that they would consider to incentivize?

[5:55 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: With respect to after hours, of course, the college requires family doctors, as part of their standards of practice, to be available to their patients literally 24-7-365. Of course, in practice, that would be very challenging, which I know is why physicians, often in a

community, for example, will work together to create call groups and share the workload, if you will, for that.

[6:00 p.m.]

Something that we have been doing in partnership with HealthLinkBC and the Family Practice Services Committee and the divisions of family practice is launch what's called an after hours care program. This is a pilot program that provides after-hours care for attached patients of participating longitudinally primary care practices. It's a program that that launched back in September 2023.

There are five participating divisions of family practice: Victoria, the South Island, Langley, Thompson and South Okanagan-Similkameen. Then, at the beginning of last year, January 2024, it was expanded to include Shuswap-North Okanagan.

This is an interesting program and one that has some very interesting core strategic objectives, which is, I think, what we're talking about here, in part. It is to reduce the burden on family doctors associated with meeting that college requirement for providing after-hours care, and, of course, like we're talking about, to provide patients with timely access to care when their provider's practice is closed.

It provides physician supports to attached patients of family practitioners and nurse practitioners when the community family practice clinic is closed, so 5 p.m. to 9 a.m. on weekdays and all day on weekends and statutory holidays.

The way it works is that during this after-hours period, attached patients from the participating longitudinal primary care practices are either transferred or provided with a dedicated number, a separate phone number from 811. They're connected with the after-hours-care program team, who then can connect the patient with a doctor. Again, it's a pilot program that's addressing some of this need that we know that communities need around after-hours care.

Now, with respect to incentives in terms of panel sizes, the longitudinal family payment plan includes just that. Of course, it's not just a fee-for-service model, which could be viewed, maybe, as a sort of a peer incentive in terms of panel size, but one that accommodates the factors of a doctor's time that is spent, the number of visits and then the number of patients they have and their complexity.

Baked into the formula of the LFP model is an incentive around panel size. I think that, taken together with some of the work looking at after-hours care, is beginning to address some of the things that the member is bringing forward.

Anna Kindy: To the minister, thank you for that answer. I do think incentivizing is a good way to go. I think 250 is a relatively small panel, if you look at Alberta. I'm not saying that they shouldn't get the longitudinal pay-

ment plan but that maybe an incentivization to increasing the numbers and would be important.

Can I ask the minister: at some time in the future, could the minister provide me with the average cost per patient visit to the UPCC around the province, as well as the LFP and emergency departments?

My next question will be related to health authorities and numbers of hospital beds per thousand population per health authority.

[6:05 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: The number of base beds per thousand population in Interior Health is 1.89; Fraser Health, 1.32; Vancouver Coastal Health, 1.77; Vancouver Island Health Authority, 2.09; and Northern Health Authority, 2.10.

Anna Kindy: Is it divided by region served or hospital? For example, the Langley Memorial Hospital. What would be the number of beds per thousand? How do you guys figure out the needs?

Hon. Josie Osborne: This is all the beds in all facilities in a health authority divided by that health authority's population. It's an average over the entire health authority, but I'm not reporting on a facility basis.

Anna Kindy: How does the ministry decide on the number of beds needed — for example, for a new hospital being built or the number of beds that need to be added to a community in a health authority?

Hon. Josie Osborne: I appreciate the question from the member.

I'm providing the statistics on the number of beds per thousand population, which is often used to compare capacity across regions or across time, but the rates measure capacity without adjusting for factors that affect the needs of the population that they're serving. So I think the member's question is a really good one. How is planning undertaken? What factors are taken into consideration to project and to use as a basis for capital planning?

[6:10 p.m.]

I'll talk about four main factors.

One is the age structure of the population. A population, for example, with a large proportion of seniors would generally require more beds per capita than an area with a small proportion of seniors.

The health status of the population — a healthier population would require, generally, fewer beds per capita than a population of people with poorer health, and we know that there are regional disparities in terms of population health.

Third, interregional flows and the location of tertiary services. Of course, tertiary services are highly specialized

places. They require highly specialized personnel and equipment, and they're generally centralized in a single location. A good example is B.C. Children's Hospital. That's an important consideration to make when comparing this data or these statistics across health authorities in B.C.

Finally, isolation of the population. Because of the distance between communities, a province or a region that has many isolated communities will require often more hospital beds per capita than an urban region.

All of that taken together are factors that are used in capital planning. Of course, I have to note that capital planning for hospitals and health care facilities has come out of the Ministry of Health and now lies with the Ministry of Infrastructure, so further questions maybe around capital planning could be directed there.

Of course, the Ministry of Health continues to staff and operate hospital facilities.

Anna Kindy: Premier Eby promised Nanaimo during the 2024 election campaign that there was going to be a cath lab built for the region.

You were talking about quality of care. Quality of care includes, as well, timely access to care. Considering that in '23-24, some 4,000 caths were done in Vancouver Island and 60 percent of those were north of the Malahat and the current standard is.... If you're from the north Island, that standard is unacceptable — the length of time before you get the cath.

What has happened to that promise? Where are we at?

The Chair: Just a reminder not to use names.

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question. It certainly is a question that has come up in conversation around Vancouver Island and Nanaimo, for example, obviously.

Unfortunately, I have to defer that to the Ministry of Infrastructure because they are the capital planning ministry now which has taken on that. I know that the Minister of Infrastructure, she may have been asked questions on that in her estimates, and *Hansard* would reflect that. That is the ministry that can answer that question.

Anna Kindy: Port Hardy Hospital is one of the hospitals where the emergency department is no longer accessible. Now it's been for two years. It closes at five. There have been patients that have passed away travelling to Port McNeill. From what I hear on the ground, there is the staff needed to open it. I'm just wondering why, at this point, knowing that an emergency department is an essential service.

[6:15 p.m.]

The second question regarding Port Hardy Hospital is that the acute beds are taken up by long-term-care patients, so there are no acute admissions in that hospital.

It's basically gone from a fully functional hospital to an urgent care centre, in a sense. What is the plan for Port Hardy Hospital? I would like timelines as well.

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question and specifically raising Port Hardy. It's in her riding, of course.

In fact, Mayor Corbett-Labatt, was the first mayor that I spoke to in my new role as the Health Minister back before Christmas. I really appreciated the conversation I was able to have with her. Again, having been a former mayor of a small community myself, a lot of understanding about the kinds of impacts that this can have on a community. I appreciate the member bringing this up.

I want to just talk a brief bit about the history and the current issues that the region is experiencing. I know that the member has heard me speak many times about the work that we are doing and the work that we must continue to do to attract physicians and nurses and other critical health care staff to our rural communities, places like Port Hardy.

[6:20 p.m.]

Between the summer of 2022 and January 2023, the three emergency departments in the north Vancouver Island area — Port Hardy, Port McNeill and Cormorant Island Health Centre — were all experiencing frequent temporary closures due to staffing shortages.

That's really difficult for communities to bear — the uncertainty that that creates, the anxiety that it creates for people. Of course we want emergency health care services to be available to people 24-7, and those are the intentions of emergency departments, and it's really hard on communities.

As I've also commented in the House before, I've heard from a number of mayors now from around the province about impacts beyond just those that are felt by community members but also in attracting new businesses, new families, sports tournaments, things like that, where people are depending on health care services to be there for people.

In response to the challenges that this region was facing in the summer, to the last half of 2022, in early 2023, the Ministry of Health and Island Health announced a plan that outlined some significant investments in the communities and included a predictable schedule for emergency department services in the region, again, bringing at least some peace of mind in the predictability and knowing what was and wasn't open.

The number of temporary service interruptions at the Port Hardy emergency department then decreased significantly. That was, as the member has pointed out, a result of a reduction in the operating hours from the previous 24-7 to create that certainty in the hours of operation during the day, and evening and night emergencies going down to Port McNeill.

It is really difficult when one hears that people have passed away as a result of not being able to access care immediately, and I just want to express my condolences to the member and to the communities that have experienced that in the Port Hardy region.

Despite the staffing improvements that have been made, there are still not enough staff to operate all three sites 24-7. By maintaining the hours that are in existence now, we are able to see a minimization of service disruptions and diversions and, really, to stabilize those services. The aim is to continue to do the work to mitigate unexpected or short-term coverage issues by keeping the hours as they are currently, for now.

Now, Island Health needs to sustain the current staffing and the ancillary support services — like community services, partnerships, support services, physician and staff recruitment and retention efforts, all the infrastructure and building improvements — to support Port Hardy, both with the hospital and with community services. All three of these sites in the north Island are continuing to rely on agency nursing, on GoHealth BC and on Island Health staff who travel from other sites to maintain the current operating hours.

I think what this is.... It gets to the heart of the matter again about the need to continue to train more physicians here in British Columbia, to attract them to move and live in our rural communities here in British Columbia and to recruit physicians from out of country and out of province to come to British Columbia. And as I've described in previous answers today, we are trending in the right direction, and we are adding physicians and nurses at good rates, but more work needs to continue to be done.

I know there was concern, as well, about a helicopter resource in Port Hardy, and I'm pleased to say that that resource has been extended, and that's been communicated to the mayor. So I think the community, as well, understands that now.

We're going to have to continue to work, so I cannot put a timeline on when resolution will be found because I don't want to promise something that we can't guarantee delivering. What I can guarantee is that we are going to continue to do everything we can in partnership with Island Health, in partnership with Doctors of B.C., the Nurses Union, other health care unions and workforces, with post-secondary institutions in creating seats, trying to attract high school kids like we had earlier here in the House today to choose a very rewarding profession in health care.

This needs to be done not just for communities like Port Hardy but for communities like Burns Lake and Merritt and Clearwater and Oliver and other places around B.C. that, all too unfortunately, have been experiencing these temporary service disruptions. It is a key mandate item in my mandate letter given to me by the Premier.

[6:25 p.m.]

I think, particularly because of my rural background, it's something that is a particular passion for me, and I can definitely commit to the member to continue working with her. Very happy to sit down and talk with her further about the north Island and her riding and to do everything we can to ensure that that kind of stabilization and predictability is there and that the health care services are there for people when they need them.

Anna Kindy: If there's a will, there's a way, and that's what concerns me, to be completely honest. We've turned a fully functioning hospital into an urgent care centre with no ability to admit because of the beds being filled with acute ALC patients.

Rather than getting the roundabout answer, I'd much appreciate a commitment to reopen in Port Hardy a fully functioning hospital, meaning the ability to admit acute care patients as well as having an emergency department open 24-7.

Hon. Josie Osborne: I really appreciate the member's sentiment that if there's a will, there's a way, and I absolutely share that. I think it's the will of all of us to do everything we can to recruit the staff that we need, to invest in the facilities that we need, and to strengthen the health care system so that health care is there for people. I want to assure the member that I have a lot of will, and I want her to be able to count on that.

I am aware that in Port Hardy there is a long-term-care facility. I think it's 21 beds, and clearly it's operating at capacity. And the member is speaking about the number of people inside the hospital, a 12-bed hospital at the ALC stage.

My understanding is that currently there are seven people at that, living in an alternative level of care and waiting for placement into the proper care in a long-term facility that they need, and that at the Port McNeill Hospital, being the one right now that has the 24-7 emergency department, beds are kept open so that they are there for those acute needs. That's an important part of it.

There is a long-term-care facility coming to Campbell River that will add space for 153 residents, but yesterday, or it might have been the day before, we had a really good conversation around the fact that one of the challenges in rural communities is having to travel or move, effectively, out of your community to access long-term care, and that is really challenging.

[6:30 p.m.]

It was the member for Prince George-Mackenzie, I think. He and I were having that discussion, and I was reflecting that that has long been a desire in the place where I live, out on the west coast of Vancouver Island, and that there are no long-term-care facilities available there. To-fino General Hospital, where I live, has often had people

there because that long-term care is just not available for them.

My commitment to the member is to continue to work with her and to continue to work with Island Health and support them, again, in providing the predictable, stable health care services that people need in that Port Hardy region and in the whole north Island region.

I look forward to more discussions with her.

Anna Kindy: I'm not hearing a commitment here, and that concerns me. Port Hardy services four First Nations, and I'm not sure why we should be providing second-rate health care to four First Nations that live there. I'm just wondering how the health authority can explain that one.

[Lorne Doerkson in the chair.]

Shifting a little bit here, talking about First Nations, they have a managed alcohol program with the First Nations there. There's a van that goes to the First Nations and brings them alcohol.

One, I'm wondering what the evidence is behind doing that; and two, if the evidence is so strong, why are we not implementing that provincewide?

[6:35 p.m.]

The Chair: Minister of Health.

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Nice to see you. Welcome back.

Thank you so much to the member for this really important question.

In talking about the managed alcohol program that the member refers to.... Managed alcohol programs are evidence-informed harm reduction programs that support people living, particularly, with long-term alcohol use disorder and issues and is an important form of care for people as they are able to access other treatment and supports that they need.

These programs do run in other places in the province. I don't have an exhaustive list at my fingertips, so what I'd like to do is offer further information to the member after today's estimates. It is one of the innovative ways and one of the necessary ways to provide and work with First Nations and Indigenous peoples in supporting health and wellness initiatives.

[6:40 p.m.]

I'm really, really grateful the member has talked about the importance of Indigenous health care, because I could not agree more that this is a place that is so incredibly important in the work that we are doing as a government, as a legislature, in ensuring that First Nations and Indigenous peoples across this province have equitable access to health care services that they deserve and need.

I want to speak just a little bit about the work that we are doing in Indigenous health funding, the partner-

ships that we have with health authorities, the First Nations Health Authority, the B.C. Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres and the Métis Nation B.C. to support the advancement of Indigenous health and wellness initiatives, and, first and foremost, reiterate our government's commitment to addressing and eliminating Indigenous-specific racism in health care and acknowledge that Indigenous health concerns and the experiences of racism continue to be reported as a barrier to accessing care in British Columbia.

That's why we continue to invest in and support a range of Indigenous-led, culturally safe health and wellness initiatives, and I just want to list a few of those. That includes annual funding to health authorities, the First Nations Health Authority, the B.C. Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres and Métis Nation B.C. It's a commitment to open 15 First Nations-led primary care centres throughout B.C. Two of those are open, and the remaining 13 are in various stages of planning, implementation and completion.

It's a commitment to renovating six and building two new First Nations-run treatment centres. With the member for Skeena, of course, we canvassed quite a lot around treatment and recovery options, both noting the importance of Indigenous-led solutions in that space and ensuring that culturally appropriate, culturally safe, care is provided for people and that it is Indigenous-led and within the practices and the cultures of Indigenous nations and peoples around B.C.

This also includes establishing additional Indigenous patient support positions, Indigenous patient navigators and cultural competency training for health care workers. I've had the opportunity to meet some of these navigators — for example, in my riding in the West Coast General Hospital and also at the Road to Recovery centre at St. Paul's Hospital.

I can see with my own eyes the obvious ease and support that they provide to Indigenous patients as they help them navigate a system that can be so scary for some individuals that they will not even walk through the front door of a hospital.

Living with the legacy of colonialism and residential schools and knowing the impact that I can only imagine a person might feel in walking into what is such an institutional environment and the feelings that that brings.... The importance of these navigators and of continuing to work with health care workers who have that trauma-informed training and that practice and commitment to supporting Indigenous patients....

Again, we are supporting virtual care through the First Nations Health Authority's First Nations virtual doctor of the day and virtual substance use and psychiatry services. We are going to continue to do this work in partnership with Indigenous peoples, continue to invest in the time

and the collaborative work that's needed to help improve health outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

We know, and we have talked about in this chamber, the disproportionate impacts of the toxic drug crisis on Indigenous peoples. That is just one example of the disproportionate impacts of so many factors that have impacted the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples.

I want to again thank the member for the opportunity to talk about this and to reiterate our government's commitment to do better and to continue to support First Nations and Indigenous peoples in leading the transformation of a health care system that needs to do better to serve Indigenous peoples.

Anna Kindy: To the minister: you've answered zero of my questions.

I'm a physician and science-based. I asked for evidence for managed alcohol programs. As far as I know, alcohol use disorder is a medical issue. I've never heard before, for example, if you're a diabetic, that you will treat a diabetic First Nations person differently than a non-First Nations person.

[6:45 p.m.]

Again to my question, I'm going to ask again, and I'd like to have an answer this time. What is the evidence behind a managed alcohol program, in terms of implementing it, and what other jurisdiction is it being implemented in?

The second question is.... We know there's diversion. There is diversion of safe supply, and I'm hearing on the ground that there is diversion of alcohol. So if a pregnant woman drinks alcohol that's diverted, it affects her pregnancy, obviously. If a kid drinks alcohol, which is diverted.... And that's what is happening in that community. I know that for a fact.

Coming back to my question, in view of the fact that in March of 2024, in the course of two months, there were 11 overdoses and suicides, and we know that alcohol is a depressant.... It's a depressant. People commit suicide when drinking.

Again, to my question, what is the evidence for providing alcohol to a community managed alcohol program, and if the evidence is so strong, why are we not implementing it provincially?

Hon. Josie Osborne: To the member's question, I appreciate that she has asked it a second time, and I need to reiterate part of my previous answer. I'm not a doctor. I'm not a physician. I'm not medically qualified to talk at length about the evidence behind managed alcohol programs. That's why my offer remains to the member to get her that information from the people that I know can provide it after estimates is over.

I do know these programs are used to support people who have severe alcohol use disorder.

Again, I just want to reiterate my commitment to get that information to the member. That is the nature of estimates at times, when we don't have the information right at our fingertips. I just can't get it to you this evening, but we will get it to the member. I appreciate that and hope that, as frustrating as that may be, the member will understand.

Anna Kindy: Yeah, I'd like to have an answer. I obviously am not getting one right now.

Again I'll reiterate. The question is: what is the evidence behind managed alcohol programs? If the evidence is so strong, why...? There are other communities with severe alcohol use disorder. Why is it not implemented provincially? What is the diversion rate of the alcohol?

Again, looking at the data, we're talking 11 suicides in a nation of 1,100 people. That's almost 10 percent in two months that committed suicide and overdosed.

[6:50 p.m.]

I think this is something, as well, to consider: Port Hardy Hospital is associated with the GNN Nation, the same nation that had a full, functioning hospital with the ability of doing detoxes and maybe transitioning to a treatment centre, and now that ability is gone. With alcohol comes many illnesses, and now Port Hardy does not have the ability to admit. With the complexity of illnesses, Port Hardy Hospital is no longer a functioning hospital.

I just want to leave it at that. To me, it's completely unacceptable.

Going into hospitals in general, we know that a hospital that's being run over-census is unsafe, in the sense of the data collection of.... I'm just wondering. What census does this minister consider a safe census for hospitals?

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you for the question around hospital capacity.

Of course, ensuring that patients have timely access to emergency and acute care services in maintaining hospital capacity is absolutely imperative, and that's especially during those periods of increased demand. We see that seasonal variation — for the winter respiratory illness season, for example — and combine that with shortages in human health resources.

It is absolutely a fact that hospitals here in B.C., and in Canada, are generally seeing higher volumes not just in emergency departments but of higher-acuity patients.

[6:55 p.m.]

We are continuing to work with health authorities to address the risks and barriers and the supports that are required to manage these surges, the increased congestion that hospitals are experiencing and the escalation in delays in accessing care. That's done through a daily provincial coordination call.

In the event of an increased demand, like the respiratory illness season that I just referred to, there are plans

and processes in place at hospitals and within networks of hospitals in regions to add beds and to expediate patient flow as is required and to help ensure that hospitals are ready for periods of that increased in-patient demand.

There is a standard provincial seasonal surge response plan, and that's been based, developed, on learnings of the past four seasons, for example. It's based on partnership and learnings in the relationship with Health Emergency Management B.C. and the health authorities. We're going to continue to work with the health authorities in managing hospital capacity and really standardizing practices across the health care system, increasing inpatient capacity wherever possible.

As we have talked about, the importance of.... It's not only emergency departments and ensuring more stabilization there, but also in the long-term-care sector side, preventing people from having to have long hospital stays and to release those hospital beds for people that need them.

Then, of course, I have to point out the absolutely record level of investments that this government is making in new hospital facilities — opening, renovating, expanding hospitals and adding capacity across British Columbia and communities large and small.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would like to ask for a 15-minute break, if possible, just for some sustenance.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I anticipated that question coming forward, and I've already talked to our opposition critic.

We will take a 15-minute recess, beginning now.

The committee recessed from 6:57 p.m. to 7:14 p.m.

[Lorne Doerkson in the chair.]

The Chair: Thank you, Members. We will bring the chamber back to order, and we will begin by recognizing the member for North Island.

[7:15 p.m.]

Anna Kindy: There seems to be a little bit of confusion as to how many hours I have, so I might be passing to the member sitting there. I'm potentially going to wrap up, potentially not, but I just have a question I want to ask as a wrap-up, maybe, and I will be emailing, if it's okay, questions for response.

This question is regarding B.C. emergency health services. Particularly, I'll just focus on East Kootenay hospital. I've received communication from them in the last few months regarding the issue with transport of pediatric patients. There's a letter, as well, from the mayor, that there have been at least ten infants in pediatric transport cases that have not gone smoothly, and one has resulted in a death.

The pediatrician there was saying that prior to COVID, they had the STARS contract with Alberta. The contract,

as compared to what.... The service they are receiving now is not comparable. With STARS, the turnaround was quick, and the outcomes were good. But with BCEH, because of the time to transport, it puts the patients at risk.

I'm just wondering if the minister can commit to having STARS transport until the BCEH has the same level of care provided.

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question in raising this really important case or set of cases.

I have been in touch with the mayor directly on this, and my office is working with him to explain some of the situation of the way transfers work and the way the two provinces work together. Rather than get into a long answer right now, I just want to respect the time that the B.C. Greens have, which I know is diminishing, and I'm going to make the commitment to get that answer to the member in writing, after estimates.

[7:20 p.m.]

Anna Kindy: I'm going to pass on the questions to the member for West Vancouver–Sea to Sky, the Leader of the Third Party.

Jeremy Valeriot: Thank you to the minister and staff. I know these are the last two hours of a gruelling, multi-day session, so I will try and be brief.

I'll apologize in advance. We're a small caucus, so I have not heard all the questions that have been asked. There may be some repetition, but I will try to minimize that. A couple of broad questions, and then I'll get into specifics.

First one. We have heard a lot in this chamber about emergency room closures impacting all parts of B.C. In my colleague's riding of Saanich, the emergency room has been temporarily closed at night for almost two years. Recently the Squamish Hospital has been struggling to retain consistent ob-gyn coverage, which could force expecting mothers to travel hours to deliver. Insufficient staffing has been an ongoing issue, as we all know.

Can the minister summarize what the government is doing to improve the level of doctors and medical staff? I'm specifically trying to focus on rural parts of B.C.

Hon. Josie Osborne: Welcome to the Leader of the Third Party. Good to have you in the room, and thank you for the questions. I'll also do my best to try to give responsive answers and refer you, perhaps, in some places, to *Hansard*, where we have canvassed some of these questions before.

Also, I'll try to keep my answers relatively high-level, and I'm happy to talk with the member more after.

First of all, when it comes to the number of doctors and health care practitioners that we need to train and recruit and attract to live in our rural communities, this is one of

my top priorities. I want to first say that as a former mayor of a rural community myself, the thought of having an emergency department temporarily closed — I can well imagine what that must feel like as a citizen of that community and knowing that you need to be able to count on medical services being there for you at your time of need.

Also, to put it in the context of the global health care worker shortage that we are experiencing not just here in B.C., of course, but across Canada, other provinces are experiencing emergency room closures in aspects with their health human resources that we are here too.

I'm just going to briefly go through some of the many different programs and steps that our government is taking and point out that this is a key deliverable in my mandate letter from the Premier: to make progress on attracting physicians, nurses and others that are needed to make sure that emergency departments are open and ready for people.

One of the ways we are doing this, through the health human resources strategy, is through the expansion of the practice-ready assessment program, offering 96 seats. It's a pathway to licensure for internationally trained family physicians, in exchange for a three-year, return-of-service commitment into a community of need, as identified by a health authority.

[7:25 p.m.]

We are working with the UBC Faculty of Medicine to support international medical graduates through their postgraduate medical education training in family medicine, in psychiatry, in general pediatrics, in internal medicine.

In terms of rural recruitment and retention, there are several different programs that are underway through the Joint Standing Committee on Rural Issues for rural programs under the rural practice subsidiary agreement, and these support specifically the recruitment and retention of physicians.

There is the rural retention program. It provides financial benefits to encourage physicians to live and work in eligible rural communities. There is what we call the RRP flat fee. This includes a rural business cost modifier, which is paid to any physician who permanently resides and practises for at least nine months of the year in an eligible community.

The northern and isolation travel assistance outreach program provides funding for travel expenses and travel time honorariums to approved visiting physicians. They deliver medical services in rural and isolated communities when service isn't available. A recruitment incentive fund provides up to \$20,000 to a physician who's recruited to fill a vacancy in an eligible community.

I want to talk a little bit about distributed medical education, the program at UBC. It's the first fully distributed medical education program in North America, where there are over 1,000 medical students and over 1,500 med-

ical residents who are learning and training in communities across B.C.

UBC now has the single-largest family medicine program in Canada, and this distributed medical education will continue to play a really pivotal role in creating more physicians here in B.C., expanding the number of family physicians who complete their residencies and transition into practice here in B.C.

We've expanded postgraduate medical education significantly. We've added 162 positions, including specialty positions, and we've been canvassing specialties in estimates today. In 2025, we have a total intake of up to 613 new postgraduate medical education residents, and that includes family medicine, family medicine enhanced skills, first-year specialties, subspecialties.

We have created new physician extender occupations. The member has mentioned the Saanich Peninsula Hospital. I'm really glad that he did because that is the site of British Columbia's first two physician assistants in emergency departments. They've joined the team there. And the purpose.... They have been described as physician extenders — people who work in that team-based environment in an emergency department and assist physicians working there.

Now, we've got two at Saanich Peninsula. Northern Health has four PA positions posted, two each in Prince George and Dawson Creek, and they're hoping to fill that this spring. All of the health authorities are working to identify sites where they can introduce physician assistants.

We also have what are called associate physicians. This is a route to meaningful employment in the health system for international medical graduates who are not otherwise eligible for independent licensure. We have 78 of these associate physicians who are working in a wide range of different settings across British Columbia.

Then, maybe lastly, I'll just talk briefly about the work that we're doing to reduce barriers, supporting bylaw changes to reduce barriers for U.S.-trained physicians and supporting bylaw changes to remove the Medical Council of Canada examination requirement for internationally trained medical graduates. Again, this is about, of course, meeting the test of the public interest and ensuring that physicians are qualified, have training that is equivalent to what one would receive in Canada and enabling them to come and work here faster.

These are just examples of some of the many different kinds of programs, from creating new physicians to incentivizing physicians to move into rural and remote areas, and not just family doctors, which we know are so important, but also the specialties that are required.

The member had mentioned maternity services, for example, so ob-gyns and other essential members of the health care team.

Jeremy Valeriote: Thank you to the minister for that summary.

I'll jump straight into some specific questions, some of them on behalf of my Green caucus colleague — this one, you'll notice, definitely is. Will the ministry cover travel expenses for residents of the Gulf Islands who need to travel off-island for health care?

[7:30 p.m.]

I will just say that, personally, I became aware of the travel assistance program when my daughter was back and forth to Children's Hospital from Gibsons. That worked extremely well on the Langdale-Horseshoe Bay ferry.

I gather there's some wrinkle with the TAP program on the Gulf Islands. So the question is: can those travel expenses be covered by the ministry?

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question and for mentioning his own use and knowledge about the travel assistance program, which is a really important program supporting people, primarily travelling on B.C. Ferries from the destinations that B.C. Ferries serves.

I'm really happy that last December we were able to announce an expansion to the travel assistance program to provide support for communities — I know this is not the Gulf Islands — like Bamfield, for example, which have ferry-supported routes but are not publicly run through B.C. Ferries.

We talked a little bit about the travel assistance program over the past couple of days, and I had mentioned that this is a program eligible to all communities that are served by B.C. Ferries. That does include Gulf Islands. Last year there were 16,291 medical travel trips, for residents of the Gulf Islands, which were approved.

In addition to the travel assistance program, I just want to mention for Gulf Island residents that they do have access to Island Health's health connections program for assistance with travel for medical services. It's a health authority-run program. It offers subsidized transportation options that help defray the costs. Of course, costs are just one of the barriers that people face, coming from small places like the Gulf Islands, to travel in for care. This program supports non-emergency, physician-referred medical care outside of somebody's home community.

Through funding from the Ministry of Health, the health connections program really helps to meet some of the unique needs that selected communities have in regions. These funds contract transportation providers, creating a transportation network around the Island Health Authority area, supporting people, including multiple different Gulf Islands. They're contractors who provide door-to-door, non-emergency patient transportation services.

I'll also just briefly mention that there are targeted provincial travel supports for people, available through the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduc-

tion and through the Ministry of Children and Family Development that some Gulf Island residents may also qualify for. In addition to all of this, some Island Health residents and some Gulf Island residents might qualify for the First Nations Health Authority medical transportation benefit. That helps to cover the cost of meals, accommodations and transportation to assist in travel to medical appointments outside of their homes.

[7:35 p.m.]

Jeremy Valeriote: Another Gulf Islands question. Can the minister provide clarity on the state of a B.C. ambulance service on Saturna Island so that residents there have equal access to emergency services when they need them?

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you for the question about B.C. emergency health services and how it works for an island as small as Saturna Island, a beautiful island.

B.C. emergency health services is a provincial service, and ambulances of both air and ground are always sent to the highest-priority calls when they're needed. That's regardless of community boundaries. So despite the fact that Saturna Island does not have its own, and it never has had its own, B.C. emergency health services station, it does receive services. It's really important for residents to know that service is available by air, ambulance or water taxi when it's needed.

Note that there are under 100 events annually on Saturna.

A couple of other ways that emergency health services provide support. One is by providing medical supplies and training to the Saturna Island Rescue medical responders group. The dispatch centre for Saturna Island is based in Langford, and it provides the 911 call assessment and the emergency assistance over the phone to local residents.

There is a local fire department, I will also note, but they do not respond to medical events, unlike some other communities where they are also trained to respond to medical events.

I really appreciate the question. I think it's important for people living on the Gulf Islands to know how they are supported by B.C. emergency health services by air, ambulance and water taxi. That is the key ways that these critical life-saving services are provided.

The Chair: I would encourage members to turn off or silence their electronic devices during this conversation.

Jeremy Valeriote: Continuing on with the ambulance service, I've heard, in my riding, about advanced-care paramedics not being able to work to their designation in rural areas. These advanced-care paramedics are typically only funded for urban areas. In rural areas, this increases the need for nurse practitioners or other medical profes-

sionals to accompany ambulance transfers, which actually ends up increasing costs.

Is the ministry looking at increasing funding for advanced-care paramedics in rural areas? It's my understanding that the \$8-an-hour differential would be recovered in other ways by eliminating the use of other professionals to be on board in some of these ambulance transfers.

[7:40 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question. I think that's exactly the kind of thinking that's really important in determining different ways of being able to provide service in rural and remote communities.

My understanding is that B.C. emergency health services does have advanced-care paramedics stationed in specific rural communities. We are looking at that. I think there's going to be a lot to learn from these placements. We can see how well they are working in the system of care that's available in those communities and the specific work that they can do and, with that knowledge, look to recruiting, training and hiring more advanced-care paramedics as a solution for providing care in rural communities.

So far, the communities where advanced-care paramedics are stationed are Salt Spring Island, Port McNeill, Cranbrook, Valemount, New Denver and Zeballos.

Jeremy Valeriote: A bit of a broader question. The 2025 budget allocates significant additional resources to increase the capacity of our health care system, which is good news. However, it's our view that lack of access to a physician is not only the result of a limited number of doctors but also due to increases in administrative burdens that are eating up doctors' time and resources.

What is this government's plan, what is the ministry's plan, to alleviate the administrative pressures for doctors that prevent them from providing more care for patients and less time for paperwork?

[7:45 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Certainly, when I meet with doctors, one of the top issues they raise with me is around administrative burdens and all the steps and ideas that they have and that we are doing together — I'll speak about these in just a moment — to reduce that burden so they can spend the most time possible with patients.

I completely agree with the member. That's one way that we can help maximize and optimize the best use of our health care resources by making sure that physicians and nurse practitioners, primary care providers, are spending the most time possible with their patients.

We have actually struck an Administrative Burdens Working Group that's committing the Ministry of Health, the health authorities and Doctors of B.C. together to look

at ways to reduce the current physician administrative burden and potentially shift some of that to other appropriately trained staff. That will, again, better enable physicians to focus their time on patients.

A few areas where the group has been discussing changes are around things like medical imaging — focusing on different processes and ways of undertaking medical imaging that will save time for physicians. Looking at the way special authorities are provided. That includes authorization renewals, drug listing reviews, the digital integration that is available there.

We have a campaign commitment that we have made around reducing the use of sick notes and eliminating that requirement, which family doctors especially have mentioned many times is an administrative burden that they feel is unnecessary. We've made that commitment to work with them, and we'll have more to say about that in the future.

A lot of this really is around replacing paper and fax with digital tools, using the technologies that are available to better connect health care systems. By digitizing referrals, consults and orders, it makes it easier for doctors and patients to share information with each other, and it means faster, more efficient and fairer access to care. Those are some examples of the work that's underway.

The last thing that I'll say to address this question is around the longitudinal family physician payment model and recognizing, through that model, the time that doctors need and needed to be compensated for paperwork that they are undertaking. We can report that family physicians on the LFP payment model on average are spending 76 percent of their time on direct patient care now, 23 percent of their time in indirect patient care and 1 percent of their time on administration.

I think that's an important sign of the progress that's being made and our continued commitment to use the technologies that are available, eliminating sick notes and taking more steps to digitize processes and make for faster, fairer care.

Jeremy Valeriote: A couple of questions specific to the Sea to Sky, the area that I represent.

The first one is a big one. The ministers and ministry staff are probably aware that Squamish needs a new hospital at some point. Rapid population growth and age means that Squamish is outgrowing its hospital, or has outgrown it.

[7:50 p.m.]

There has been some preliminary work on a health sciences precinct on a new site, very preliminary. I'm just wondering if the minister can say where this sits in the overall ministry's capital financial plan, where on the horizon it might be and when Squamish might be able to expect a new facility.

Hon. Josie Osborne: I will be very happy to pass that question along to the Ministry of Infrastructure. They now have the responsibility for capital planning and building hospitals.

Jeremy Valeriote: Thank you for confirming that. I noticed the capital expenditure in Ministry of Health was \$30,000, so it's probably not enough. I will redirect to the Ministry of Infrastructure. Thank you.

In the Pemberton Valley, Sea to Sky Community Services is partnering with Vancouver Coastal Health, Foundry and the Lilwat Nation to address the crisis in youth and Indigenous mental health in the Pemberton area. Based on their effective and cost-efficient Foundry partnership in Squamish, the service would be co-located in a 63-unit affordable housing and community services development due to open in September of 2026.

The greatest challenge at a critical time for the project seems to be some internal decision-making from the ministry. If you bear with me for a second, I'll just get a bit more detail.

Vancouver Coastal Health is supportive of the project. However, there seem to be some administrative issues, one about co-location and one about the formula for staff space. I'm recognizing this is pretty specific, but I'm hoping that the minister or ministry staff might be able to update where that....

Obviously, it's been very successful across the province. Foundry has been successful in Squamish since it opened a couple years ago. I think, given the challenges.... The whole Pemberton Valley, including Mount Currie.... This would be a very beneficial service, and it seems to be most of the way there, with a little bit more support required.

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question inquiring about this specific project.

Foundry projects that are expanding across British Columbia provide really critical services for youth to access all kinds of health and mental health services all under one roof. I know in a community like Pemberton and in the valley there, it's just as essential for youth there as it is for youth living in any community in B.C.

What I'm going to ask is for the member to give us an opportunity to go dig into the specifics of this case so that we can report back to him and get him an update that he needs for the project.

[7:55 p.m.]

Jeremy Valeriote: Thank you to the minister. I appreciate that.

Continuing on with mental health, the Mental Health Act has been in desperate need for examination and update for years, yet despite two decades of increased knowledge and research into mental health, it has not been amended since 1998.

Will the minister and this government commit to an evidence-based analysis of the Mental Health Act to support improving mental health care in our province?

[Mable Elmore in the chair.]

The Chair: Minister.

Hon. Josie Osborne: Welcome, Madam Chair. Nice to see you.

Thank you very much to the member for the question around the Mental Health Act.

I want to start off by recognizing that it is important to review the evidence and implement changes to legislation and policy to ensure that we are providing the very best mental health and substance use care possible for British Columbians, and that includes amendments to the Mental Health Act.

It's equally important that we undertake this work carefully, given that the Mental Health Act governs the treatment and care for some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society, in our communities, and in a very complex system of primary, acute, tertiary and community settings. Changes need to be done in a thoughtful way, to ensure that services continue to be provided to people always with their best interests at the heart.

Since the act came into force in 1998, as the member refers, there actually have been a number of changes to the act and its regulations, so I'll just briefly run through a few of those.

For example, in 2005, the prescribed forms 13 and 14, which are forms that support patients who are being informed about their rights under the act.... These forms were rewritten in plain language and updated to be more patient-friendly.

In 2011, the definition of "near relative" in the act was updated to be more inclusive.

In 2022, our government passed amendments that introduced a right for involuntary patients to meet with an independent rights adviser. The independent rights adviser service is operated through the Canadian Mental Health Association. It's run by Health Justice.

[8:00 p.m.]

This service provides free, confidential and independent support and information to people who are detained and experiencing involuntary treatment under the Mental Health Act here in B.C., to help them understand what their legal rights are and how they can act on those rights. The service is available at all 75 facilities that are designated under the Mental Health Act and for those who are in community on extended leave. It's an important step that was taken to improve and modernize the process in the Mental Health Act for involuntary treatment.

In 2023, there was an amendment to allow nurse practitioners to assess and sign the first medical certificate for

an involuntary admission under the act. This supports nurse practitioners to work within the full scope of their practice and supports patients, as well, by enabling a more seamless admission process during what very often is a time of crisis.

We're going to continue to review and make the appropriate changes that are needed to best support patients, to support their caregivers, as well, and the entire system of mental health services here in B.C.

Following on that, there are also two key documents that I want to talk about briefly. They support individuals and practitioners, mental health facility operators and the public in understanding the application of the Mental Health Act. They are the *Guide to the Mental Health Act* and the *Standards for Operators and Directors of Designated Mental Health Facilities*. These are two important, really cornerstone documents that seek to direct and inform people about how the act works for people who are most affected by it.

Updates to these documents are underway right now, and they're being guided by the revisions of the act that I have just run through. They reflect the current-day understanding that we have around how to best deliver mental health services to those people who are in crisis.

As I said, work to revise this. It's a 2005 edition, so it's high time that we do this work. We're doing this based, in part, on recommendations that came from the Office of the Ombudsperson to help improve compliance with the Mental Health Act, to help people understand what the act encompasses and to ensure that there's consistency between the guide and the standards, which are also being revised and updated. This is work that will be completed this year.

Jeremy Valeriote: On a similar note, access to mental health care is out of reach for countless people in B.C. Evidence shows that preventative care and access to mental health resources improve outcomes for those struggling with mental health-related illness.

Despite our work under the cooperation and responsible government accord to bring psychologists into the system, most mental health resources are not covered under MSP, blocking people from accessing the life-saving counselling and psychiatric care they need.

When will the ministry commit to a comprehensive approach to mental health that provides people with MSP coverage for mental health services to prevent the worsening impacts of mental health disorders?

[8:05 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question, and welcome to his colleague who has joined him as well.

I really appreciate an opportunity to talk about mental health care, because I think, now more than ever, par-

ticularly with the pandemic, we have seen the growing impacts of mental health issues amongst children and youth, into adults as well. This government is committed to expanding the supports that are available for people and ensuring that mental health is treated as it should be, which is part of Health.

I'll note that we set aside mental health and addictions into a stand-alone ministry in 2017 and then took the decision just late last year to roll that back into Health. While I think a stand-alone ministry served a very important purpose, now was the time for more efficient and expedient decision-making around mental health care and supports for people suffering from substance use disorders, for example, and that we roll that right back into the Health Ministry.

The member has asked specifically around mental health resources and the Medical Services Plan. I'm going to just talk briefly about what is covered under MSP or the eligibility there, and then I want to talk a little bit, too, about some of the rest of the work that's done outside MSP to support mental health.

First of all, the services of psychiatrists are eligible for MSP coverage because psychiatrists are medical doctors and they have that training specifically related to psychological issues and they are eligible to prescribe medications and provide psychotherapy, a form of counselling.

Under MSP, coverage is provided for the services of psychiatrists, up to a maximum of one hour per day, up to two hours per week. Exceptions can be made to those limitations if the psychiatrist provides MSP with evidence that additional services are medically required.

For an appointment to a psychiatrist, you do need to be referred by your family physician. I acknowledge that there are a number of people in British Columbia, of course, that are not attached to family physicians. This presents a barrier, and we've canvassed extensively during estimates around the work being done to attach more and more people to primary care providers.

There are supplementary health care services that are not covered by MSP, like psychologist services. I just want to be clear that lack of MSP coverage for those services is not a comment on the value of those services, but it really reflects some of the limits of available public funding. Some people who have extended health care plans or employee assistance programs, for example, are able to access the services of a psychologist. They may have the coverage of those services.

As well, low-cost counselling may be available — I'm going to speak a little bit more about this in a moment — in the community, at clinics, at universities, at colleges. And there is a lot of information that is provided through the B.C. Psychological Association.

[8:10 p.m.]

In terms of mental health resources that are available outside the MSP system, I do want to talk a little bit about

community counselling grants. This is an area that our government has invested in heavily in trying to create more access for people to community counselling, knowing that it is a key early intervention for people who have mental health and substance use challenges and for whom cost remains a barrier that will really limit access for people to timely support.

Beginning in 2019, our government, in partnership with the community action initiative, developed the community counselling grants program to fund low- and no-cost community-based adult mental health and substance use supports. These are grants that are intended to increase access to underserved or hard-to-reach populations and to make counselling more accessible, including in rural and remote and Indigenous communities.

The program began with grants to 29 different organizations. It was expanded to include 20 more in the year 2020 — that was a part of our response to COVID-19 and the pandemic — for a total of 49 providers. As of February 2025, there are 47 counselling services that are organizations that are receiving grants. We continue to support them and have recently committed to extending funding to the community action initiative to continue this program with an additional \$6.7 million approved to fund for yet another year.

We're continuing to build an integrated network of voluntary services to support children, youth, young adults and their families by promoting mental wellness. These are services designed to prevent the onset of mental health and substance use challenges and really identify those people who are struggling early and connect them to effective and culturally safe supports and services.

In this bucket, if you will, are integrated child and youth teams, expanding those across the province, with 39 teams operating in, or implementation about to begin in, 20 different school district communities. These are teams that work in an integrated way to deliver multidisciplinary wraparound mental health and substance use supports and services to children, youth, their families and caregivers and really connect them to the care that they need in a school setting or in a community setting.

They include school-based counsellors, youth concurrent disorder clinicians, peer support workers, family support workers, Indigenous roles to provide that culturally safe service that's so important, and further services that are available through the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The first phase of these teams is serving an average of almost 1,500 children and youth every single month, which is just fantastic to hear.

Of course, the expansion of the Foundry network continues to be a priority of this government, a network of integrated youth health and wellness centres and virtual supports. There are 17 of these Foundries that are established. There are 18 more in development, to bring the total to 35 once the whole provincewide network is com-

plete. This really is a one-stop shop for youth, providing primary care, mental health services, substance use supports, peer family support and social services specifically targeted for people aged 12 to 24 and their families.

PreVenture is a provincewide program that includes licensing, training and implementation costs for school districts. PreVenture is delivered by the Foundry central office to interested school districts, and it's a prevention program for youth aged 12 to 18 that uses personality-focused interventions to promote mental health and reduce the risk of substance use. They use school-based workshops that are designed to help students learn useful coping skills, set long-term goals and channel their personality traits towards achieving them so that they can thrive in all aspects of their lives.

There is an early psychosis intervention program. These are services that we have expanded through Budgets 2021 and 2023 by approximately 100 new full-time professionals, increasing the number of staff involved in these specialized services, which provide early identification and treatment for psychosis.

[8:15 p.m.]

That really aims to improve the outcomes and minimize the impact of the condition on a person's life. These teams include a variety of different professionals like psychiatrists, community clinicians, therapists and other specialists to provide the comprehensive care that's required.

The programs are very recovery-focused. They aim to help individuals really achieve and succeed with their goals at work and school and within their social networks.

I hope this provides an answer about MSP and the services that are provided with psychiatrists but also kind of an extensive look at a lot of the other mental health supports that are out there, available for people and for youth.

Finally, the member reflects on the agreement that we've made together, as two political parties, to work on the integration of psychologists into primary care teams. I'm excited by this work, enjoying the work that we're doing together and the meetings that we've been having and discussing this, and I really look forward to making progress on this together.

Jeremy Valeriote: Thanks to the minister for outlining.... It does make me optimistic, the amount of prevention and intervention, especially with youth, that is going on.

However — it's always a however — it's our understanding that the province is struggling at the limits of public funding to find enough resources to support voluntary treatment beds for those who are already suffering from substance use disorders.

Research has proven the impacts of involuntary treatment can be detrimental to the health and recovery of those suffering. Will the government, and will the min-

ister, commit to using an evidence-based approach to prevent involuntary treatment for those suffering from substance use disorders?

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question. In opening on this, I want to say I really appreciated the discussion I had with the member for Skeena.

We had a lot of discussion around supports for mental health and substance use and talking about the voluntary system of care that our government is so focused on — building out a seamless system of care for people, through programs like Road to Recovery, where people can access same-day medical assessments and be connected with the right level of support for what they need at that time; recognizing that continuing to build out the system of care with voluntary treatment and recovery beds is a key priority for this government.

[8:20 p.m.]

I won't go into all of the investments there because I know the question specifically is around involuntary care. I just want to be clear, though, that the system of voluntary care is absolutely of the highest priority.

The toxic drug crisis is something we know all too well. It's devastating families and communities and people. I think every single person in this House has been touched, and I think every British Columbian, for the most part, has been touched by this terrible crisis, and we need to continue to do everything we can to address it.

We know that there are some individuals who have very complex mental health and addictions issues. They may have acquired brain injuries as the result of repeated overdoses, and they are not able to make good decisions about their care. These people who are living with these concurrent disorders may benefit from involuntary treatment, in a way to help get them on a path to treatment and recovery.

I want to be very clear, though, that a person who is suffering from a substance use disorder as their only diagnosis is not a person who is eligible to be admitted involuntarily under the Mental Health Act. And I appreciate that there's a lot of information out there, but I think that's a really important clarification to make — that there are four criteria for admission under the act, and all four of these criteria have to be met.

In the plainest language: the person is experiencing a serious mental health issue that makes it hard for them to deal with situations or people around them in a safe way; the person needs treatment in or through a facility; the person needs care, supervision and control to stop their mental or physical health from getting worse or to keep themselves safe or others safe; and they will not get the treatment they need if they were a voluntary patient.

As the member knows, this government is being advised by Dr. Daniel Vigo. He is the chief scientific adviser for psychiatry, toxic drugs and concurrent disorders. And

he recently released a clinical guidance document to support practitioners in determining when a person who has concurrent mental health and substance use challenges... To help clarify for practitioners when it's acceptable to treat a patient when their substance use disorder may be exacerbating a mental health disorder.

This is guidance that will help ensure that providers have the right information that they need to make the right clinical decisions for patients who are in crisis, and that decision may lead — for this very, very small subset of people who are experiencing concurrent disorders, who are a risk to themselves and to others — to their eligibility for involuntary treatment.

As we've discussed in this House before, there are two designated facilities being established right now. The first, at Surrey Pretrial, has ten beds there for people who are in the corrections centre. Second, a designated facility at Alouette has another 20 beds for people.

This is an important first step, and work continues with Dr. Vigo in this and looking for future sites, for example, up north. That's probably the next priority — to provide involuntary treatment services like this in the northern part of our province.

Jeremy Valeriote: In this budget, \$500 million was allocated for new funding for addictions and treatment recovery programs. From this, can the minister explain which portion is for treatment aftercare, and what does it look like for those when they emerge from voluntary care?

[8:25 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question.

This probably has been extensively canvassed in the dialogue that I had with the member for Skeena, so I will just do a really light touch, and then, if you don't mind, touch on *Hansard*.

Specifically, over the fiscal plan, the \$500 million that the member refers to, there is \$70 million that's allocated to sustain existing services, and that includes just over \$47 million in the fiscal plan to sustain Road to Recovery. I've talked quite a lot about the importance of Road to Recovery and having that seamless system of care that connects people to the right services to meet their needs, all the way from withdrawal management through to treatment and recovery and aftercare supports.

I have spoken a lot with the member for Skeena around the importance of that seamless care system to avoid people falling through the gaps, the in-between, moving from withdrawal management into treatment, moving from treatment into aftercare, making sure that people have the supports they need at the stage that they are at in their journey to healing.

The budget includes \$15.75 million in funding for aftercare regional community clinicians. It includes

\$10.936 million to expand community recovery centres. We have three recovery community centres operational in Vancouver Coastal Health right now on the North Shore in Vancouver and on the Sunshine Coast, and work is underway to expand this so that there is at least one in each health authority.

This budget also includes \$102 million for Indigenous treatment, recovery and aftercare. I do want to spend a moment on this because of just how important Indigenous treatment, recovery and aftercare is in terms of supporting Indigenous people specifically who are struggling with substance use, mental health and concurrent disorders. These are Indigenous-led projects that are designed to offer cultural and land-based healing programming as part of a supportive recovery and rehabilitative continuum of care.

Some examples include Orca Lelum, the youth treatment centre. It's a first of its kind in British Columbia and offers a ten-week cultural treatment program for youth. The Tsakwa'lutan Healing Centre on Quadra Island, which will be opening soon, offers treatment and supportive recovery programming that integrates the withdrawal management services that are offered by Island Health in Campbell River. And the northwest legacy project, a project we've been speaking about in the House with the Northern First Nations Alliance, will include a new cultural treatment facility in the North.

The Indigenous fund also has included a grant to the Métis Nation B.C. to deliver on elements of their culturally distinct mental health and wellness programming and funding to the First Nations Health Authority to enhance their healing house program.

Jeremy Valeriotte: In the ministry's service plan, there is a stated goal of increasing access to opioid agonist therapy, which I will refer to as OAT. How many people are currently accessing OAT? How are these numbers being tracked?

[8:30 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: In December 2024, 23,414 clients received OAT prescribed by 2,029 OAT providers across B.C.

Jeremy Valeriotte: How many people would the minister like to see receiving OAT in the next year, and what are the targets for the next four years?

[8:35 p.m.]

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question.

Two things. I'm just going to talk a little bit about the member's question around what are the goals with respect to the number of people who are being prescribed OAT, but I also want to talk just briefly, about the difference be-

tween being prescribed OAT and staying on OAT, so OAT retention rates.

First of all, I think it probably goes without saying that we want to ensure that any person who needs and wants access to opioid agonist therapy has that access and is able to be provided with it. We have undertaken a number of efforts to expand access to OAT.

In fact, we're the first jurisdiction in Canada to enable registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses to diagnose opioid use disorder and to prescribe life-saving opioid agonist treatment. This is a transition into a permanent, certified practice. We worked with the College of Nurses and Midwives on this as part of that sustained commitment to expanding access to OAT in B.C.

We also launched the opioid treatment access line, and that allows people anywhere in the province to be able to call and get same-day care and a prescription for OAT medications. This is particularly important for people who are living in remote and rural areas. It's important for people who may be living with the fear of stigma and need to reach out, and having a confidential conversation on the telephone is the best way for them to do this.

This work really aligns with our bigger provincial goals around increasing the available workforce for substance use care, connecting people with sources of care and increasing that initiation and retention in treatment. Ultimately, of course, it is about separating people from a toxic drug supply.

I read the number of people who are, as of December 2024, currently prescribed OAT. Of course, we're going to continue to ensure that anybody who wants access has access, but it's also important to monitor OAT retention rates and the ability of a person to stay on OAT.

Despite the benefits of OAT for people who use opioids, we have seen that retention rates have decreased over time. In '23-24, the percentage of people on OAT who have been retained for 12 months was 44.4 percent, and that's a slight decrease from the year before, where it was 44.9 percent.

The barriers to OAT access and retention are very multi-factorial. They are interrelated, and they really span across the health system. There are barriers to treatment access. People have mobility challenges. They may encounter lack of prescribers or pharmacies nearby. Medication availability can be a factor.

A fragmented system of care — we've canvassed this extensively during estimates around the need to build a seamless continuum of care for people so they are not dropped through the gaps. Stigma and aspects of OAT provision that really limit people's ability or willingness to continue engaging in treatment — these are all factors that can impact retention.

The ministry's service plan does set goals for OAT retention, and they are outlined: 44 percent for '25-26, 45 percent and growing in years beyond that.

I really appreciate the question from the member.

[8:40 p.m.]

Rob Botterell: In the southern Gulf Islands, there's a lot of work being done right now to improve access to primary care. In rural areas, generally, there's a need for flexibility because there are such unique circumstances in remote areas or rural areas of the province.

In the southern Gulf Islands, when doctors are, say, on Saturna Island or on Pender Island and are needed on another island, the current policy is that they're required to take the least-cost form of transportation. The impact of that is that they take B.C. Ferries, which is great for B.C. Ferries, gets ridership up, but it also means that you could spend half a day getting between islands that are actually very close together.

The question is: would there be consideration given to adopting a more flexible approach which would involve water taxis as a way of ensuring the doctor can spend more time serving and helping residents of the islands with their primary health care needs as opposed to playing Wordle on the B.C. Ferries?

Hon. Josie Osborne: Well, as much as many of us like to play Wordle in our spare time, I know we want to make sure that doctors are spending the most time possible with their patients. I really appreciate the question.

I'm not aware of anything in the physician compensation framework that requires a least-cost form of transportation to be used. It may be a health authority policy. I'm going to suggest to the member that we follow up to look specifically into this case and get an answer for the member.

Jeremy Valeriote: Back to our regular programming after that cameo.

Many communities don't have access to life-saving services like supervised consumption sites or overdose prevention sites. I note that in Squamish, the overdose prevention site is in some peril due to real estate exchange.

[8:45 p.m.]

What is the ministry's plan to expand overdose prevention services to communities in need and/or to increase the operating hours for overdose prevention sites to allow more supervised drug use outside of the current limited hours available?

Hon. Josie Osborne: Thank you to the member for the question. I appreciate having an opportunity to talk about the importance of overdose prevention sites and services as one of the tools that are needed to address the toxic drug crisis and the importance of services like these in literally saving lives.

These services are often the first point of access for people to the health care system. They are places where people can connect and receive information and learn about the

supports, treatment and recovery services that are available to them. They also enable people to use drugs in a place that is monitored, where life-saving naloxone is present and also where, sometimes, drug-checking services are part of it, but drug-checking services being part of harm reduction services overall. They are part of this seamless continuum of care that we need.

In order for people to access treatment and recovery, they need to be alive. Overdose prevention sites keep people alive. Over the last six years, over 12,000 death events have been averted through overdose prevention sites. We know that the people using them, the people working in them, the people in communities around them need to be safe, as well, that proper oversight and monitoring is required, and that's why we are developing minimum service standards to ensure that this oversight is in place.

[8:50 p.m.]

With this, we continue to support OPS. Budget 2025 provides \$48.7 million to support existing harm reduction initiatives at OPS throughout the province, support drug checking, support naloxone kit distribution. That includes \$10 million annually over three years to support OPS.

With the release of the minimum service standards, health authorities will also have the guidance that they need and will make their decisions about the services that they will be providing within health authorities or at their sites.

Again, I just really want to emphasize how committed we are to building and expanding a seamless system of care for people who are experiencing mental health and addictions issues. Keeping people alive is the first step in connecting them to the system of care that they need for their healing journey.

With that, I move that the committee rise and report progress and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The Chair: The committee is adjourned.

The committee rose at 8:51 p.m.

The House resumed at 8:51 p.m.

[The Speaker in the chair.]

Mable Elmore: Committee of Supply, Section B, reports progress of the estimates of the Ministry of Health and asks leave to sit again.

Leave granted.

Nina Krieger: Committee of Supply, Section A, reports resolution and completion of the estimates of the Ministry of Environment and Parks and reports progress on the Ministry of Forests and asks leave to sit again.

Leave granted.

Hon. Josie Osborne moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

The Speaker: This House stands adjourned until ten o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Proceedings in the Douglas Fir Room

The House in Committee, Section A.

The committee met at 2:42 p.m.

[George Anderson in the chair.]

Committee of Supply

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND PARKS (continued)

The Chair: Good afternoon, Members. I call Committee of Supply, Section A, to order. We are meeting today to continue the consideration of the budget estimates of the Ministry of Environment and Parks.

On Vote 24: ministry operations, \$162,410,000
(continued).

Trevor Halford: I want to thank the minister and the minister's staff for engaging today.

I just wanted to talk about public reporting and consultation. There are a few outstanding plans. I understand that some of them may have shifted ministries. We just want to get an update on the status of those individual plans. If they have shifted ministries, then we can defer some of those questions to the respective ministries.

This one I don't think would have, the B.C. Parks future strategy — get an update on that plan. And then an update of the climate adaptation strategy. Those are the first two to start.

[2:45 p.m.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member for the question.

For the B.C. Parks future strategy, this was a product of the previous government. I can confirm that since 2017, we have invested in maintenance uplifts, continued in recreation expansion programs and also have made a commitment to inclusion.

For the climate adaptation strategy, that is an across-

government strategy which is being led by the Environment and Climate Solutions ministry.

Trevor Halford: Sorry, did the minister want to follow up on that again just before I ask my next question?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Yeah, sorry. That was Energy and Climate Solutions Ministry.

Trevor Halford: On the B.C. Parks future, I may have just missed that. What is the current status of that report?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member.

For the B.C. Parks strategy, the current status of that, it was a one-time strategy that has helped inform us of ongoing initiatives that we are continuing today. We don't anticipate developing another strategy.

[2:50 p.m.]

Trevor Halford: Thank you to the minister for that answer. I just want to switch back to the EAO, and I want to talk about compliance.

Not sure if staff need to change out for a second there. I'll continue on that.

In the service plan, previously we've talked about targets and compliance targets. In terms of the EAO and the targets that have been set out, can the minister list the targets that have not been met that have been listed by this ministry?

[2:55 p.m.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: We've looked through the service plan. We don't have any targets that are directly in the service plan, but we do have a number of strategies that are in the service plan related to compliance oversight under objective 3.2. For example, last year we did do approximately 50 inspections on project specific compliance.

Trevor Halford: That kind of alludes to my point that if we're not able to have specific targets when it comes to compliance, we've now....

Yesterday we came to the conclusion that we've seen a reduction in staff at the EAO. Prior to that, we had 118 FTEs. Today, as of right now, there are 111 FTEs.

My question to the minister: is that going to result in lower inspections, on-site inspections? Is it going to be a diminishment of targets in terms of compliance?

Forecast that on to the fact that we now have wind farms that are having to forgo or getting to forgo an EAO process. Is that a result of the lower staff as well? Is that how the ministry is justifying having a lower FTE count at the EAO, because now wind farms are exempted from the process?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member for the question.

As I stated yesterday, the funding that we have received for the EAO has increased, year over year. We have been already working closely with the other ministries to look for efficiencies in permitting but also looking at different areas where we can streamline processes.

[3:00 p.m.]

Inspections have not diminished. They do fluctuate year over year, due to the complexity of each project. There has been no change in the compliance staff from last year, and we also don't anticipate the staffing to change for this year.

Trevor Halford: Can the minister give an update of where PRGT is in the EAO process as of right now?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member for the question.

The environmental assessment office will soon be reviewing their reports about the substantial start, at which point it will then be referred to the decision-maker for a decision.

Trevor Halford: My information.... I think that was put forward by the proponent, TC Energy, around either middle or end of October, so we're a few months into that. I know previous.... I think there was a mine where there was a definition of substantial start, and that was done.

I guess there's not a legislative time frame in terms of when that decision is going to be made. I understand there's not a true definition of "substantial start." I am assuming that that is kind of a project-by-project basis, but I assume there's probably a policy in terms of what substantial start is.

Interjections.

The Chair: Members, I'd ask that you be respectful of the other members trying to ask questions. Thank you. Continue.

Trevor Halford: With that, and then in terms of substantial start, what criteria is being met for that specific project? We're talking about a multi-billion-dollar project at a time we're talking about trying to promote our own.... In this case, it would be natural gas coming in. Obviously, there's First Nations support. I'm sure there's some First Nations opposition to that as well.

[3:05 p.m.]

In terms of that criteria, how is that communicated to the proponent? Substantial start — is it different per project? Is there kind of, under that policy, a one-size-fits-all, "this is what you need to complete"? If so, is there an actual timeline that the minister or the EAO try and keep to, in

terms of when that application is made and when the proponent actually will receive a decision?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you for the question.

Determining that the project is substantially started is done on a case-by-case basis. There is an environmental assessment office policy, and it's also being informed by jurisprudence and administrative fairness principles. The process includes information received by impacted First Nations.

On-site evaluation is completed by the environmental assessment office compliance and enforcement officers and information that is provided by the proponent.

There is no timeline for the decision.

[3:10 p.m.]

Trevor Halford: I think in the past, we've seen the mine that I spoke of.... I think that was roughly about six months between the time the application was made and when the decision came. Again, when can we, roughly, expect a decision from the EAO or the minister in terms of the substantial start on the Prince Rupert gas transmission project?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member.

As I have said, the report is currently being finalized. Once it is submitted to the decision-maker, then the decision will be made.

Trevor Halford: In this case, for PRGT, who will be the decision-maker?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: In the legislation, it is the minister or the delegated chief executive assessment officer. That has not been determined yet.

[3:15 p.m.]

Trevor Halford: What would, I guess, predicate the minister on abdicating that authority to the EAO and not being the signatory on PRGT, in terms of its "substantial start" definition? Under what circumstances would the minister delegate that authority to the EAO for this particular project?

[3:20 p.m.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: In the legislation, it states that the minister is the decision-maker, and it is my discretion on whether or not to delegate this.

Trevor Halford: I understand that once a project receives its environmental assessment approval, there are compliance checks that happen while they're in construction, and even post-construction.

A very simple question to the minister. Given that their

decision has been made now to exempt some wind farms for that, will there be compliance checks during construction of those projects and after completion of construction of the projects?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member.

Once these projects are exempted, the regulations are now outside of my ministry. What I can tell you is that we are committed to sustaining our high environmental values, and whatever regulatory process is determined will absolutely reflect those values.

Trevor Halford: I wasn't intending on asking a follow-up, but I will take the chance to do that.

The Chair: You're welcome.

Trevor Halford: Thank you.

My understanding is that through the construction phase of these projects.... These are big projects. We've seen, and gone through, Tumbler Ridge or anywhere. If you go to California — I won't be doing that anytime soon, but when you go out there — you can see the wind farms out there. They're huge.

Is the minister saying that there are going to be no compliance checks, nothing to make sure that environmental standards are being met during that construction? That's what I just heard the minister say now.

Is the minister saying post-construction...? I know there are concerns about birds and other things. There are set regulations here, but the minister just said that there's no compliance, no enforcement. So it's kind of the Wild West for construction and post-construction.

[3:25 p.m.]

Does the EAO, Ministry of Environment have no oversight whatsoever on these wind farms?

[Susie Chant in the chair.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: I'm sorry that the member was left with that impression. There will be a robust environmental regime, as there is for every single major project in this province.

If the member wishes to follow up to ask questions, I would recommend that the questions be directed to the Ministry of Energy and Climate Solutions. They have the responsibility for the B.C. Energy Regulator.

Jeremy Valeriote: I will assure the minister that not my entire hour of questions will be about the Prince Rupert gas transmission line, but I will start off with an easy one, so that I can decide where to go from here.

Would the minister be able to tell me who is the statu-

tory decision-maker on the substantial-start decision for PRGT?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: The question was asked earlier. The legislation does determine that I am the statutory decision-maker, and it's at my discretion if I choose to delegate.

[3:30 p.m.]

Jeremy Valeriote: Apologies for the repeat question. Next time I'll be here earlier.

Can the minister tell me: how does the government intend on addressing nations that have rejected or no longer want to be bound by impact-and-benefits agreements with the province regarding PRGT? What is the planned approach with nations that have openly rejected the project?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member for the question.

The province takes its obligation to consult with First Nations very seriously. The environmental assessment office has been engaging with First Nations with overlapping interests to gather additional information from them relevant to the substantial start determination.

Impact-benefit agreements, which are government-to-government, are negotiated by the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. If the member has further questions regarding those agreements, he would need to follow up with that ministry.

Jeremy Valeriote: Is PRGT allowed to continue construction after the environmental assessment certificate expired on November 25 of last year but before the minister or a delegate makes the substantial start determination?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member.

I can confirm that there has been no active construction since prior to November 25, 2024, and it is our understanding, based on communication with the environmental assessment office, that the proponent has no plans to undertake any construction prior to the substantial start decision.

Jeremy Valeriote: Thank you to the minister.

Does the government plan on having any public process on the substantial start decision — public consultation or engagement?

[3:35 p.m.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member.

The substantial start determination is an administrative decision. It is based on the assessment of material evi-

dence from the project site and from project documentation, as well as relevant information from First Nations.

As an administrative decision, public comment periods are not held during a substantial start determination process. However, evidence provided by non-governmental organizations and members of the public who wrote to the environmental assessment office to provide additional information regarding the substantial start determination will be included in the EAO's report to the decision-maker.

Jeremy Valeriote: I have a question about Ksi Lisims. Can the minister tell me what role the ministry or environmental assessment office has in substantiating the project's asserted global climate benefits?

[3:40 p.m.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member.

The role of the environmental assessment office is to assess the potential environmental, economic, social, cultural and health effects of major projects proposed in British Columbia. The assessed impacts on climate can be found in the assessment report, and we are happy to offer a briefing to the member on the report.

Jeremy Valeriote: One last question related to the EAO. The budget estimates suggest about a \$270,000 increase to the EAO, about 1.6 percent, so roughly inflation. Given the direction in the minister's mandate letter to develop measures to expedite authorizations, can the minister tell me how the EAO can expedite without increasing its budget or, presumably, staff complement?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member.

Currently, we are completing cross-ministry work, and one of the key strategies that we are employing is to move to concurrent permitting instead of consecutive permitting. This can reduce timelines up to one year or more.

Jeremy Valeriote: I'm going to ask a couple of questions about air quality.

Does the ministry plan on examining the current state of regulation of outdoor air quality and the effectiveness of the existing regulations to protect British Columbians from current air quality-related health risks?

[3:45 p.m.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member for the question.

In the current fiscal year, ministry staff are evaluating the effectiveness of recordkeeping requirements under the Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation.

In addition to the regulation, it's important to mention that the ministry has a robust monitoring and reporting

system to protect British Columbians from air quality-related health risks, including a system of air quality advisories and a Smoky Skies Bulletin to inform British Columbians when air quality is degraded.

Ministry staff also support partners in communities and local government to identify steps that can be taken locally to improve air quality.

B.C. has an extensive air quality monitoring network, which provides real-time air quality data, and the Air Quality Health Index, which can be found by googling "air quality health index" online.

Jeremy Valeriote: Thank you to the minister. I've used the monitoring network several times, usually in the summer during wildfire season. It is quite effective.

I appreciate that the recordkeeping and monitoring advisories are there. I will just try again to find out if the ministry has any plans to update the regulations that set advisory limits around outdoor air quality, particularly in response to wildfire smoke.

[3:50 p.m.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member for the question.

For British Columbia, we adhere to the federal Canadian ambient air quality standards. We have no plans on developing our regulations, as we adhere to the federal ones. However, while wildfire emissions are difficult to manage, the ministry and partners have a robust warning system to warn British Columbians when poor air quality is expected.

The ministry works with multiple partners, including health authorities and the B.C. Centre for Disease Control, to ensure all British Columbians have access to air quality and health information and advice during times of high wildfire smoke. We set up temporary sites with the Ministry of Health to make sure that the temporary stations are there to be monitoring the smoke.

[3:55 p.m.]

Jeremy Valeriote: With regards to parks and parks access, provincial spending for the maintenance of parks and trails has not kept up with the need for years. Despite volunteer groups organizing to assist with maintaining parks and trails, it's been a struggle to find a long-term solution.

Will the minister explain the ministry's plan to fund and support the maintenance of our vast parks and trails so that British Columbians can continue to enjoy the beauty of our province for years to come?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member.

We know that there is a high demand for campsites, es-

pecially as more people choose to live in B.C. every year and continue to travel to our campsites.

We are committed to strengthening our incredible parks and recreation sites that draw visitors from across the country and around the world. That's why this government has invested over \$45 million in expanding campgrounds, including campsites in Chief Provincial Park, Golden Ears, Chilliwack Lake, Cultus Lake and Garibaldi.

There has been \$21.59 million invested over five years for the recreation site strategy, as well as \$23.8 million in base capital, \$1.2 million for accessibility, \$7.1 million in maintenance and \$3.34 million in maintenance for Rec Sites and Trails.

Jeremy Valeriote: As the minister knows, the rapid population growth in the Squamish Valley has put pressure on local parks. I appreciate that Stawamus Chief and Garibaldi Park, that the minister just mentioned, are both in my riding and have benefited from those expansions.

In the Squamish Valley, however, overtourism has threatened the peaceful enjoyment of the Squamish Nation's members' territory.

[4:00 p.m.]

I note in the estimates commitment for a park enhancement fund, and I appreciate the expansion and other strategies. If I understand correctly, there previously was a parks acquisition fund which has come to the end of its program life. I'm wondering, from the minister, whether there's any prospect of reinitiating that. I understand there was a possibility of acquiring land in the Squamish valley that fell through, but I'm hoping that that, subject to budgetary constraints, may come back.

Are there any plans to resurrect that acquisition fund?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: The member is correct; we did have a one-time uplift for park acquisitions. We do maintain \$2 million in the budget for land acquisitions, but we also do continue to work in partnership with the B.C. Parks Foundation and other conservation organizations, as well as other partners on future land acquisitions.

Jeremy Valeriote: Thank you for that. That's encouraging.

On a similar vein, with regard to conservation officers, I visited a remote community on the side of Lillooet Lake, with a rec site nearby. They've recounted to me that, over the last two summers — well, at least one summer — with a fire ban, there were campers with huge bonfires, and that they'd called the conservation officer service. The closest conservation officer was three hours away, and the RCMP wouldn't respond.

We've had several grizzly bears come through both Whistler and Squamish, and the discussion of late has

been on the scarcity of conservation officers. I don't believe there are any resource management officers — if I've got my terminology correct. There are five officers between West Vancouver and north of Pemberton to N'Quatqua.

Are there any steps being taken to bolster the conservation officer service and increase the number of conservation officers to keep up with the demand of calls?

[4:05 p.m.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member for the question. This is an important one.

The conservation officer service is a professional law enforcement agency. They really do handle a lot of the human-wildlife conflicts, so we do understand the importance of having them in communities, especially in rural and remote communities such as I live in.

For the conservation officer.... We did increase the number of officers last year. We included ten more officers, and we are up to 167 now.

The conservation officer service.... They look at several factors when they're determining where conservation officers are posted, including officer safety; call volume; zone coverage; geographic location; call demand for public safety and enforcement concerns; population size; level of industrial, commercial and recreational activity; number of existing officers within the area; and emerging environmental trends and partnerships.

We do look at the needs within the communities, and then we do try to look for the areas that we can provide that coverage.

Jeremy Valeriote: I will just flip back to the question about parks acquisition.

The residents in the same community made the observation that if the rec site where the ignoring of the fire ban was taking place were to become a park, perhaps there would more resources allocated to it.

In addition to parks enhancement and parks acquisition, has there been any consideration given to converting any rec sites, now that they're all within the same ministry, to parks?

[4:10 p.m.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: The member brings up an excellent point. We recently went through a reorganization, as many know, and Rec Sites and Trails were moved from the Ministry of Forests into the Ministry of Environment and Parks.

Absolutely, we are always looking for more parks and more ways to enhance campsites and to build more. We're definitely going to be looking at some suitable rec sites that we could contemplate, and it's something that we'll continue to look for.

Jeremy Valeriote: I'd like to ask a question about Indigenous protected and conserved areas.

In the 2025 budget, the government reiterated their commitment to protecting 30 percent of B.C. terrestrial areas by 2030. Can the minister give a status update on recognizing IPCAs in the province and explain how much they will contribute to the province's commitment of 30 by 30?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: The role of my ministry is to manage the parks once they are established.

The IPCAs are a part of the Ministry of Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship, under the broader land use planning mandate, and I suggest that you canvass the minister responsible for that.

Jeremy Valeriote: I'm still learning the lay of the land.

I have a question about the circular economy and solid waste, since I've done some work in this area. I note that per-capita solid waste disposal targets are fairly modest.

It's my understanding that there are some federal regulations around single-use plastics. My question around that: if those were to change, can the minister comment on whether B.C. would stay the course on single-use plastic regulation and minimization?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member for the question.

At this point, we have no intention of reversing our course on single-use plastics, and we want to continue to support the circular economy.

[4:15 p.m.]

Jeremy Valeriote: About 12 years ago I was involved with extended producer responsibility related to packaging, Multi-Material B.C. at the time. The reason I was engaged in that and interested in it was the possibility of increasing EPR fees for hard-to-recycle materials. Last I heard — I'm a little bit out of date — that process hasn't necessarily taken place.

I'm wondering where the ministry is on moving towards punitive EPR fee, mostly for packaging that is more damaging to the environment, harder to recycle and more hazardous in landfills.

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: The EPR five-year action plan outlined the pathway to identifying a policy approach to address non-residential packaging in 2025 and beyond. Our ministry released a discussion paper on non-residential packaging and engaged on the topic between April and July of 2024. An engagement summary was recently published on March 25, 2025.

We're currently identifying and prioritizing the policy approaches and considering the feedback that we received from the engagement.

Jeremy Valeriote: In my last couple of minutes, I've got one or two more questions. I'll flip back to PRGT. I think I have time.

The minister probably knows there is some evidence suggesting that B.C. LNG is facing a global market in decline and already facing a glut of LNG supply. Given the risk that some of these projects — specifically PRGT, Ksi Lisims — become economically non-viable and present the risk of stranded assets, does the province have a mechanism to absorb liability and risk from the Nisga'a Nation or other nations that have been promised economic benefits from these projects?

The Chair: At this time, I'm going to call the committee on recess for five minutes. I ask that everybody be back in their seats in five minutes' time, please.

The committee recessed from 4:19 p.m. to 4:24 p.m.

[Susie Chant in the chair.]

The Chair: I call the Committee of Supply, Section A, Ministry of Environment and Parks, back to order. We are currently considering the budget estimates of the Ministry of Environment and Parks.

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member for the question.

This question would fall under the Ministry of Energy and Climate Solutions, so I would say that the member should canvass that ministry.

[4:25 p.m.]

Jeremy Valeriote: Can it possibly be in the public interest to let PRGT be built, after so much delay, without an updated assessment of the impacts of the project on all the communities along the route, and with no approved terminus?

[George Anderson in the chair.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member.

The environmental assessment certificate was granted after years-long, comprehensive environmental assessment, and it took into consideration all of the mitigating measures. The substantial start determination is an administrative decision. It is based on the assessment of material evidence from the project site and from project documentation, as well as relevant information from First Nations.

In addition, the EAO, also, is currently carrying out assessments of two amendment applications, where changes to the project are proposed.

Jeremy Valeriote: Last question. I will just flip back to extended producer responsibility.

I've seen firsthand in a number of smaller communities the kind of tragic consequences of our consumer society, and that is mattresses in landfills.

With apologies for not having examined the action plan, I'm just wondering if the minister or staff can tell me if there's a deadline there for bringing mattresses under an EPR program and seeing them properly recycled.

[4:30 p.m.]

The Chair: Members, I request that individuals who have their devices on mute them so that there isn't additional noise in the background. Thank you.

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member.

The action plan outlines the Ministry of Environment and B.C. Parks proposal to expand the recycling regulation to include such things as mattresses. At this time, the ministry and the government were still considering how to proceed or when to proceed with that.

Jeremy Valeriote: Thank you to the minister and to staff for thoughtful answers. That concludes my questions.

The Chair: Are there any further questions?
Recognizing the member for Vancouver-Quilchena.

Dallas Brodie: Madam Minister, my first question is: what were the total expenditures associated with the closures of the Joffre Lakes parks last year and in the year previous? Please include in your answer, if possible, a breakdown of lost revenue from park fees, the cost of ministry enforcement and all expenditures related to engagement, negotiations or other discussions with local Indigenous bands in relation to Joffre Lakes Park for last year and the year previous.

[4:35 p.m.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you for the question.

Notwithstanding that these are estimates for 2025-26, the expenditures from past years.... This is not what we're here to discuss today. We simply don't have that information broken down.

I'm happy to consult with staff and provide that to you at a later date.

Dallas Brodie: Madam Minister, can you please provide the projections for this year?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Could the member please provide more information about her question? Projections for what, please?

Dallas Brodie: Madam Minister, the projections for

basically the same things — if the Joffre Lakes Park is going to be closed again, the expenditures associated with that closure, like the breakdown for revenue from park fees. The same questions I had — revenue from park fees, the cost of ministry enforcement of that closure and expenditures related to negotiation or engagement with First Nations in relation to the Joffre Lakes Park closure. So that would be.... What are the estimated costs for this year and 2026 then?

[4:40 p.m.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: The Joffre Lakes Park has one back-country campground. The actual closure dates that would be in effect for this upcoming season are still being finalized. The only revenue from that is the one campground and is approximately \$20,000. Total cost of the closure is unlikely to exceed \$20,000.

Dallas Brodie: What about the other expenses I asked about in terms of the...? Is there any enforcement required, going forward, to maintaining that closure, or is that the entire expenditure for dealing with this one park that has been closed off?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: For Joffre Lakes, we have in place a day use pass system for that park, and there will be no significant incremental costs for closures.

The Chair: Are there any further questions?

Seeing none, I ask the minister if they would like to make any closing remarks.

[4:45 p.m.]

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: First of all, I would really like to thank all of my staff that have been here with me over the past two days.

I want to thank all of the staff that have put in all the work that they do outside of here and for the support that they give me. The public service is an important part of the government and public service work that we do, and they should be applauded for the work that they do, each and every day, on behalf of British Columbians.

I want to thank the opposition and the Green members for their questions and for the time that we've been able to spend talking about my ministry. I'm incredibly impressed by what we have been able to accomplish, and I'm excited to build upon this work in my role as B.C.'s Environment Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, and all members. Seeing no further questions, I will call the vote.

Vote 24: ministry operations, \$162,410,000 — approved.

Vote 25: environmental assessment office, \$17,343,000 — approved.

The Chair: Thank you, Members. We shall now take a recess, for the next ministry, of five minutes.

The committee recessed from 4:47 p.m. to 4:52 p.m.

[Susie Chant in the chair.]

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF FORESTS

The Chair: Okay, I call Committee of Supply, Section A, back to order. We are meeting today to consider the budget estimates of the Ministry of Forests.

On Vote 30: ministry operations, \$412,584,000.

The Chair: Minister, do you have any opening remarks?

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Sure do.

Thanks very much for the opportunity to be able to be here to debate the estimates of the Ministry of Forests.

Welcome to my critic, the MLA across the way. I look forward to the next few hours, having the opportunity to be able to engage on some really important issues and opportunities associated with forestry right across British Columbia.

It was a few months ago that I had the honour of sitting across from the Premier and asking for this job. It's been quite a whirlwind experience getting a chance to be able to visit communities right across this province, to talk about the challenges and also the opportunities ahead and how we can work together to restore confidence in the sector; stand up for workers and families in forest-dependent communities each and every day; and of course, make sure that we're fulfilling our commitments to the declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and a whole host of other things that we've been working on ever since we formed government back in 2017.

Of course, I'm not doing it alone. I want to recognize the people that I have here in the room today and those that are joining virtually from all over British Columbia.

I've got, to my left, Ian Meier, acting deputy minister; to my right, Sonia Martins, assistant deputy minister and financial officer; Melissa Sanderson, ADM of timber range and economics; Rob Schweitzer, ADM of B.C. wildfire service; Jamie Jeffreys, ADM of the south region; Mike Hykaway, ADM of the north region; Jessica Coster, acting assistant deputy minister of the coast region.

[4:55 p.m.]

Matt Austin, ADM of the integrated resource operations division; Jillian Rousselle, ADM of the forest resiliency and archaeology division; and Shane Berg, my favourite chief forester here in the province of British Columbia.

Also joining virtually from all over the place we have Janna Jessee, Al Powelson, Al Bennett, Peter Jacobsen, Danielle Cuthbertson, Norah White, Albert Nussbaum,

Julie MacDougall, Gustavo Oliveira, Ted White, Lori Borth, Jevan Hanchard, Karrilyn Vince, Perry Grilz, Mark Walker, Jen Reid, Russ Laroche, Josh Pressey, Lesley Fettes, Alan Johnsrude, Sharon Hadway, Kurtis Isfeld, Cliff Chapman, David Greer, Breanne Hill, Dave Fleming, Gordon Asselin.

Apologies to you, Gordon, if I butchered your last name.

I'll keep my comments brief because I know we got lots of questions ahead of us. We've got a big crew here in the forest service ready to answer the questions ahead.

The Chair: Recognizing the member for Kamloops-North Thompson.

Would you like to make any opening remarks?

Ward Stamer: No, that's fine, Madam Chair. I'd just like to appreciate the Forest Minister and all his staff being available for this. I believe we have six hours in our estimate budgets. We're going to be covering a lot of ground.

I can give you a quick summary so that we have an idea of what we're going to be covering. We're going to be talking about the U.S. tariffs and jobs. We'll be talking about anti-dumping duties. We, of course, will be talking about the B.C. Timber Sales review. We'll be talking about allowable cuts and harvesting. We'll be talking about mill closures. We'll be talking about things like forest access, forest service roads — you know, all those kinds of things that revolve around the forest industry. I'd like to get right into it, if I may.

When we talk about tariffs and forest jobs, the government has mentioned that the tariffs may result in a recession similar to 2008. That was the Premier speaking. We know that B.C. is responsible for 50 percent of the softwood lumber exports. And looking at the numbers, 2021, it seemed we had about 55,700 direct jobs in our industry — with the spin-offs, probably 100,000 jobs. Current data now states that we've probably lost 10,000 jobs in three years, which is a significant amount.

So a couple of questions I have to the minister: does the ministry have a plan, going forward, if these tariffs last for the foreseeable future; and what are those plans, in regards to making sure that we don't have any more mill closures and reduction in the workforce?

[5:00 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Thanks very much to the member opposite for the first question.

I think at the outset, as the member opposite mentions software lumber duties, it's important for me as the Minister of Forests to be able to once again condemn the actions taken by the United States, by the Trump administration.

As the member will know, this has been a long-standing issue for a number of years. I often joke that it's been going on longer than I've been alive. It's certainly been a

learning experience over the course of the last number of months, because it's not been the normal process.

We expected our countervailing preliminary duty rates, typically, to be in May. They came earlier, which I think speaks to the focus the President has put on our lumber sector, and on tariffs as a whole, as finding ways to be able to decimate other industries.

Also, I think it's important for us to recognize that softwood lumber duties are devastating to British Columbians, as are all tariffs to Canadians. This is bad news for Americans as well, many who are just looking to rebuild their homes from devastating wildfires, from hurricanes in North Carolina.

I had an opportunity to be in California speaking directly to lawmakers about the decisions their President is taking. I had an opportunity to be able to meet with Dan Dunmoyer, who is the head of the California Building Industries Association, the equivalent of a homebuilders association, and really make the case that I needed Dan and others to step up and make the case to the President.

To the member across the way, when I became the minister, the first action I took was to send a letter to my federal counterparts making sure that they were aware that they needed to do everything in their power (a) to take this issue seriously and (b) to ensure that they were coming to the table with supports, that they were coming to the table willing to work with British Columbia and other provinces — like Ontario, Quebec and Alberta and the east coast — on solutions. What we can do to get to the table, and what can we do to be able to prepare for the challenges?

As it relates to the member's question, we've been advocating to the federal government, really, for three key pieces.

One is specifically making sure that the Prime Minister makes this a priority. I think the member across the way will appreciate that it's a big deal when the Prime Minister is talking about softwood. It's why the Premier, in his first face-to-face meeting with the Prime Minister, raised softwood as a top priority for British Columbia.

Secondly, we're looking for a loan guarantee program to be able to support this industry through the challenges ahead and keeping operations going.

Thirdly, a couple of years ago the federal government made the decision to cut funding for trade diversification, which makes absolutely no sense to me. I don't think it makes much sense to anyone, if you go out and talk to British Columbians, why the federal government would cut trade diversification dollars at a time when we should be investing more in trade diversification. Those cuts went to organizations like Canada Wood, B.C. Wood, our Crown agency Forestry Innovation Investment, and really are a backward step.

As it relates to the overall challenges this sector is facing, as the member knows, we are not just dealing with tariffs and duties. We are dealing with the end of the bee-

tle-kill harvest. We are dealing with wildfires. I assume we'll get an opportunity to chat about wildfires, at some point, over the next few hours. In 2023, worst wildfire season on record, we lost 20 years' worth of harvestable fibre just in that one year.

That compounded with, certainly, other challenges we face has led to some challenging years. Not just in the last three years, not in the last five years; I would say in the last decade, two decades as well. We've seen mill closures and curtailments that have hurt communities.

I've taken a number of steps on this side of the House in terms of making sure that we're standing up for forestry sector workers. Just about a week ago I announced the establishment of a forests worker bureau, built on the principles of the job protection commissioner in the 1990s. We've got a manufacturing jobs fund, with significant announcements made all across the province, including in the member's own constituency.

I recognize that we face big challenges. It's why we have a Softwood Lumber Advisory Council formed to be able to help provide me advice and guidance. It's represented by workers, by industry and a whole host of other individuals, including First Nations leaders like Dallas Smith, the chair of the Nanwakolas Council, to help advise me on the steps we need to take as a government, as a ministry, to ensure that we're meeting this moment and providing support to workers and to forest-dependent communities as well.

Ward Stamer: I thank the minister for his answer.

When we talk about the tariffs and potential tariffs.... Again, there are two separate conversations when we're talking about the tariffs. We have the ongoing softwood lumber duties that have been going on since 2015, as the minister has alluded to.

[5:05 p.m.]

And yes, that announcement last Saturday is just reinforcing what we already knew that was coming down the pipe. The initial projection was around 15 percent, and now it's going to be 20 percent, with a number of about 34½.

But as the as the minister alluded to, we had mill closures way before we had any threats of tariffs or any other economic uncertainties that are going on amongst us. And that's what I wanted to bring to the minister's attention when we start looking at some of the revenue numbers and a direct correlation between the amount of jobs that we had in our industry even back in 2021, which is only three years ago.... You're looking at the numbers of a \$5.9 billion GDP and a revenue stream of \$1.9 billion directly to our provincial coffers, not including income tax and sales tax and the carbon tax at that time.

But in three short years, without tariffs, that number has dropped to 32. We're trying to figure out how this all works out, when we've heard in January that both the Pre-

mier and the minister guaranteed a drive for 45 or whatever the saying is now. We're just trying to find how that works out into the math because, again, in the budget of 2025 that we're actually going to be debating, the budget line items are 30, 30 and 29 for subsequent years. It isn't 45. It isn't 52.

I have some fairly specific questions when it comes to numbers so that we can try to figure out exactly where we are in the budget estimates, including some of the changes that are coming up that were announced last week by the minister in regards to BCTS. We'll get to that as we get through our process.

I had a couple of questions to the minister. Now we're in April, so now we've gone past Q1. Where are we at with these targets in harvest levels? If last year we only did 32, and we can ask the question with BCTS that they only did 12.2 percent of what it was supposed to be...? My question would have been: was it three million cubic metres last year? Was it more? Was it less? I'd like to know that number.

Having said that, where are we at now today in Q1 in our harvest levels? Do we have a realistic chance of hitting 45 this year, or have we already lost that opportunity because of what's been able to transpire in the last three months?

[5:10 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Thanks to the member opposite for the question. Lots to dive into there. Maybe just at the outset, I'll just mention for the folks listening at home that these softwood lumber duties are staggering.

[5:15 p.m.]

The preliminary rates that we're now aware of.... The member opposite will probably know these numbers by heart by now. AR5, the final rates for most were 14.40, slightly higher for Canfor at 16.58 percent, a little bit higher for Tolko at 17.27 percent.

When we look at the preliminary rates for countervailing and anti-dumping, that's when you have the significant increase that we're contending with: Canfor, 46.48 percent; everyone else, except West Fraser.... I'll come back to West Fraser. Everyone else is 34.45 percent, and then, of course, West Fraser is a little bit lower. It's another one of the respondents, similar to Canfor, at 26.05 percent.

Certainly, if the member doesn't have the exact numbers, I'm happy to provide them, in terms of the breakdown between countervailing and the anti-dumping duty rates as well.

I think the member rightfully has pointed out the significant impact that the forest sector has had on British Columbia for the last 100 years and will have for the next 100 years. We are not going to let Donald Trump destroy our forest sector. We are not going to let Americans take away paycheques from hard-working British Columbians

who are doing their level best to get ahead each and every day.

I think it's important, not just for me as the Minister of Forests, not just for the Premier but for all members of the House, and I would encourage the member opposite, to condemn the increase of these softwood lumber duties, the continued threat of tariffs on all of our wood products and, of course, the section 232 investigation pertaining to national security that is ongoing right now. I'm happy to continue the conversation in regards to that.

Getting into the second aspect of the member's question, the annual allowable cut right now is 61.6 million cubic metres for the year of 2025. I think it's important for the member opposite to know that we've had a significant decline. In 2008, it was 87 million. To have dropped from a high of 87 million in 2008 to 61.6 million here in 2025, that is going to have an impact on the forest sector here in British Columbia.

We've certainly seen that over the last number of years, I would say over the last two decades and even longer. There are, really, three key reasons for that, but there could be a number that I'm sure we can debate and discuss.

One is the pine beetle harvest that is coming to an end. There are overall forest health challenges, like insects, that are certainly causing challenges for our forests in all parts of British Columbia.

Then, of course, there are wildfires as well, and the impact that those has had on our land base over the last number of years.

Again, I just want to reiterate, as the member opposite said, this is a major job-producer in our province, especially in rural communities and forest-dependent communities. I remember being in Fort St. James and meeting with folks just after spending some time at their new sawmill, the Hampton Lumber Mill that opened up last year, chatting with people and seeing not just those that are directly employed in the sector, whether they're working in a mill, whether they're working in the bush, whether they're working in administration supporting directly the sector.

I think, as the member rightfully has pointed out.... I'm not going to debate his numbers, because I think they're correct. We're looking at about 100,000 direct and indirect jobs. This is a major sector of our economy. It brings in revenue to government, and it feeds families, helps build up the services and the infrastructure our province has had and will continue to have.

The member mentions the mandate. I think he's referencing the mandate that I've gotten from the Premier to ensure that we're building a sustainable timber-harvesting land base that gets us to a harvest of 45 million cubic metres. For the member opposite, we had roughly 31 million cubic metres harvested last year, and as part of that, roughly 4.2 million came from B.C. Timber Sales.

For the member opposite, I would say a couple of things. One is that my mandate is my mandate for my time as

minister. You know, the challenges we face in forestry are not going to be fixed overnight. This is going to take hard work.

[5:20 p.m.]

There are a number of steps that were taken, that I'm happy to guide the member through as it relates to FLP tables and a whole host of other things, to be able to create the certainty and predictability that industry is looking for, while also contending with the challenges that we have.

The end of the pine beetle harvest, wildfires, continued forest health challenges.... That work is going to take time, and it's work that the forest service, the ministry, is committed to doing not just in silos but with the entire sector. It's one of the reasons why I was at the COFI talking about this important work.

I'll just end with saying that pertaining to the member's question around harvest levels for this year, all of that information comes through scaling, and we just don't have that information at this time. But happy to provide it to the member when we have it, which very well could be later this month or into May.

Ward Stamer: Thank you to the minister for his response.

Just to back it up a little bit, I think that the mention at the convention was a guarantee of 45 this year, not over the length of the mandate of the minister's tenure, but we can discuss that at a later date.

I think that the impression that most of the people in the room took from that initial discussion was that if we have an allowable cut at 61, regardless of what's happened in the past, and if we do have a sustainable forest industry, we should be able to hit 45, knowing that that's three-quarters of the cut of what has been identified as what's available.

That leads me to a couple other things, if we want to continue on the tariff side of things — that our party has put an idea to the government in regards to these tariffs and potential additional duties that could be coming down the pipe.

I'd like thoughts on what the minister thinks on our thermal coal example of putting a tax on thermal coal of the U.S. deliveries that go through the border and come through our port and then are exported to Southeast Asia. We understand that's about 180 million metric tonnes of coal. That could be a tax that is something that could be identified and put on provincially, not a federal responsibility, even though the softwood lumber agreement is a federal responsibility.

Does the minister believe that that would be an effective tool in getting the Americans back to the table when it comes to softwood lumber agreement and even a threat of such?

The second part is: does the minister support an op-

portunity to discuss and negotiate with the Americans, knowing that we have \$10 billion right now in that escrow account that's been sitting there since 2015-2016 in his building, and all the Americans have to do is appeal any ruling that comes along and that money still stays there? Does the minister believe that that is a negotiating tool that we could be using to get the Americans and President Trump back to the negotiating table on the softwood lumber agreement?

[5:25 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Thanks to the member opposite for the questions.

On the first part, the member opposite has my mandate letter. There are a number of items there that the Premier has given to me to work on. The task of securing that sustainable timber-harvesting land base that allows for a harvest of 45 million cubic metres is going to be a mandate objective that we're going to be working very hard on.

The Premier, as the member opposite may have been aware.... I'm not sure if he was there for the Premier's speech at COFI, but the Premier reiterated that there's a deputy ministers committee, that my deputy sits on, that is working very hard on a number of projects, 18 projects. I'm pleased to share with the member that this project of getting to 45 million cubic metres is the 19th project.

It's really important to recognize that the work of the Ministry of Forests is integrated all across government. This is not something being done solely in this ministry. I would say that the member will know well, working in the forest sector for a number of years, that this mandate can't be done alone. This is not something that simply falls upon government and myself. This is going to be something the entire sector needs to work towards.

This is something that I've spoken to COFI about, the Truck Loggers Association, the Interior Logging Association. We've got FLP tables set up across the province having discussions around certainty and predictability. First Nations communities are at these tables having this.

I joked at the COFI table: "Well, this is a big challenge before me." This is really British Columbia's challenge. And I welcome the entire sector to join me at tables, including the member opposite, on how we can reach this out, how we can ensure that we're creating that certainty and predictability and meeting the moment and addressing those challenges.

Going back to tariffs, I think the member opposite will agree with me in terms of his comments around this being a federal responsibility, in terms of the role the federal government plays. Obviously, we want to support the federal government, to the best of our abilities, in providing the information they need to continue to make the case.

I can let the member know, as much as I can understand completely.... I've heard across the province people's frustrations around rising softwood lumber duties and the

threats that the President continues to make each and every day, whether it's the Trump tariff or the section 232 investigation.

One thing that I think we all should be proud of is that Canada has continuously won every time we've appealed. We've been very successful in our efforts, and that's something that, I think, is really important as we do this work — making sure that we're doing that.

[5:30 p.m.]

As it pertains to the member's question around the idea of the thermal coal, the member might not be aware. I'm not sure whose idea, who should take credit for it in the opposition benches, bringing it forward.

[Jessie Sunner in the chair.]

Maybe it was the Leader of the Opposition, but Christy Clark brought forward a similar idea back in the day — so different party or same party, who knows? I think it's important to once again say that when the Leader of the Opposition shared this with the Premier, the Premier shared this with the federal government. This really is a federal government responsibility, and they have authority over the proposal as it pertains to thermal coal.

As it relates to negotiations, I want to share with the member — I know that he was at the truck loggers convention — that I reached out to the U.S. Lumber Coalition to ask for a meeting. We actually had a meeting scheduled, the date and time picked out, and they cancelled it at the last minute, which I think was really unfortunate for a body that proclaims to advocate for its sector.

They were in Vancouver; they could have met with me. I'm not sure if they've met with a Forests Minister before. It might have been a historic meeting, an opportunity for two opposing sides to come together and have a conversation, but it was unfortunate that that couldn't land. I have reached out subsequently and put the offer on the table that whenever they're ready to chat, I'm happy to do so.

As the member will know well working in this sector, the reason I mentioned the U.S. Lumber Coalition is that in many ways, they seem to call the shots in the U.S. That's why I had made it a priority. As it relates to the negotiations, I would say, and I would reiterate the comments in my first answer, that it is so critically important for the federal government to make this a priority. I hope the member and I can agree on this.

I don't think the federal government has made this a top priority. We certainly made it a priority on our side. It's why, again, I sent a letter to my federal counterparts. I asked for meetings; I was able to have those meetings. It's why the Premier reiterated to the Prime Minister, again, in the first face-to-face meeting between the Premier and Prime Minister Carney, that this has to be a top priority.

When we are talking about the auto sector in Ontario, it just seems that because it's in Ontario, billions of dollars are thrown on the table. I think it's important for me, and

I hope the member will join me in this advocacy, in saying that auto workers in Ontario matter, but so do our forestry workers. They matter just as much. If you ask me — I'm a bit biased — they matter more, because that's who we're fighting for. That's who the member and I are fighting for each and every day in the work that we're doing as a minister and, certainly, as a critic.

I've assembled a Softwood Lumber Advisory Council that's represented by workers, the three major unions that make up the forest sector. I have industry leads, like the former president and CEO of the Council of Forest Industries, Linda Coady. I've got Dallas Smith, the chair of the Nanwakolas Council, someone who is quite integrally involved in forestry on the coast and, I would say, is a force to be reckoned with in the advocacy he has been doing not just on forestry but a whole host of files.

As it relates to the work that I'm going to have over the course of the next number of days, weeks and months, I'm going to continue engaging with my Softwood Lumber Advisory Council. There are good people on there, with great ideas.

I understand the member may have had an opportunity to meet with some of them, maybe at COFI, and met with the Steelworkers to talk a little bit about their ideas as well. I welcome the member to continue reaching out to any of those members, providing his advice and guidance to them, and listening to them as well.

We're hoping that once this federal election is over, the federal government, whoever is the Prime Minister, will make sure that this is a top priority for them. How I will be leading that conversation in British Columbia is by engaging with my counterparts, as I said, to take on the role of chair of the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers.

I can let the member opposite know that when I become chair, this is going to be my top priority. I'm going to be engaging and have been engaging with my counterparts in Alberta and other provinces, making sure that we're working together on this very big challenge.

[5:35 p.m.]

Ward Stamer: I thank the minister for his answers on that.

Staying with tariffs again, just looking through my notes here, the minister mentioned a couple, like the Softwood Lumber Advisory Council. I believe that there was a preliminary result on January 25, and I look forward to hearing what they've come up with in the last couple of months.

Also, the B.C. Lumber Trade Council said in a statement that the decision to increase the anti-dumping duties on Canadian softwood lumber is unjustified and will harm forestry workers and communities in Canada.

How does the minister plan to support B.C. forestry against these protectionist tariffs? The minister talked earlier about the B.C. manufacturing jobs fund. We know

that that fund has been operating for many years. Those are taxpayer dollars. I believe the number is up to \$97 million. That has incentivized our forest industry producers to invest over \$650 million of their own money, used as leverage. Unfortunately, November 15, 2024, was the last intake in that fund. That fund is now closed.

So a couple of questions that I will be asking the minister on that portion of the file: is there going to be an extension? Is there going to be a reopening of the B.C. manufacturing jobs fund in 2025 to help assist in these investments that our industry desperately needs?

The second part of the question: what other measures is the minister planning on doing to provide for stricken forest communities? As I mentioned, mills had already closed before tariffs. We know that the increase in duties is not going to be welcome. When we get to August, and it's at 34, 35 or 40 percent, there's a pretty good chance that there will be additional curtailments or closures. That's a fact.

My other question to the minister on the same topic is: has he considered freezing our stumpage rates? Last year, at 32 million cubic metres, we brought in \$501 million in direct revenue, and this year in the budget, it's pegged at 30 million cubic metres and \$639 million. That's an increase of \$138 million, on less volume, and it says right in the document that it's going to be a direct result of higher stumpage rates.

I think the minister would agree with me that we know that we're the highest-cost producer in North America. We don't need an increase in our stumpage rates. What is the minister able to offer today in being able to try to help not only stabilize this economy but in making sure that our costs don't go out of control and we have more mills closed down?

[5:40 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Thanks to the member opposite for the questions and comments.

I agree with him fully in terms of the impacts that these tariffs are having and, again, would welcome the opportunity to see him and members of the opposition condemn President Trump as it relates to these increasing duties, the threat of tariffs, the section 232 investigation. I think it's important for all British Columbians to see us united in condemning President Trump for these actions and the threat that he is posing on our forestry sector.

I agree with the member opposite. The B.C. manufacturing jobs fund has been a huge success. It's something that I had an opportunity to work on as a staffer. The Minister of Finance has done incredible work leading it. When she was the Minister of Jobs, it was launched, in February of 2023. As the member may be aware, to date it has committed nearly \$146 million towards 132 projects.

I think this is a key piece that has unlocked over \$1 billion in other private and public investments, creating and protecting thousands of jobs and strengthening manufac-

turing supply chains. While it has been open to all manufacturing sectors, obviously there has been a clear focus as it relates to the forest sector and, really, the work that I think we can all be doing to getting the most value out of the log.

It's one thing that my constituents raise as a priority: reducing raw log exports, making sure that we're getting every use of that fibre and creating world-class wood products. I think of Kalesnikoff Lumber in the Nelson-Slocan area. I'm going to be visiting Ken Kalesnikoff in the weeks ahead. It was one of the projects that we funded.

Before I get to that, I'll just share with the member today that \$97.3 million has been committed to 73 forest sector projects, leading to 3,500 forestry jobs created and protected. I'll share with the member opposite a number of projects: Massive Canada Building Systems, a \$10 million commitment, in Williams Lake. There's A-1 Trusses, \$9.5 million, in Langley.

Tolko Industries — I had an opportunity to meet with Tolko not too long ago — \$8 million in Heffley Creek. There was Kruger Kamloops, \$5 million, in Kamloops, as members will know well; S and R Sawmills Ltd., \$4 million, in Langley; PowerWood Corp., \$3.4 million, in Agassiz. The Power family has been doing great work.

There's Richmond Plywood Corp. Ltd., \$2.3 million. This is a company that I'm getting to know. I haven't had a chance to get to Richmond yet, but the \$2.3 million investment led to, if I'm not mistaken, close to a \$20 million investment in total from that company. The family and group there have just been doing an absolutely outstanding job.

[5:45 p.m.]

I had an opportunity to visit my first plywood mill in Salmon Arm. It's actually where we announced some dollars for a new kiln for the manufacturing jobs fund. What was really exciting was to see the excitement of the workers and how fast the kiln was working.

I'm sure the member opposite has probably been in a plywood mill once or twice over the years; I hadn't. Boy, was that an experience — highly recommended if anyone hasn't been in a plywood mill. It was such fast-paced. I joked that if politics doesn't work out, maybe I can go work in a plywood mill. It was quite something, and I think the member opposite would agree, something that more British Columbians and Canadians should know about as it relates to the hard-working men and women who work in those facilities.

A whole host of others. There's Downie Timber, \$825,000, in Revelstoke. That is the largest employer in Revelstoke so a pretty significant investment from our government there. Advanced Lumber Remanufacturing at \$800,000, in Surrey.

Gilbert Smith Forest Products Ltd., just under \$1.1 million, in Barriere. The member opposite will know it well. I think he should be very proud, not just as a critic but

as the MLA for Kamloops–North Thompson that he's got an outstanding company in his constituency that does incredible work.

I think I was there for almost two hours. I really enjoyed the opportunity to be able to meet with the team there to tour the mill they've got and really talk about a number of things. One is their relationship with the Indigenous communities, in particular the Simpcw Nation.

If I get an opportunity, I'm going to say Chief Lampreau's name over and over again — world-class human being and someone who, well, clearly I look up to, because I think he is doing outstanding work and is someone who I'm really looking forward to continuing to work with on a number of projects in the weeks, months ahead. But just the partnership they had with Gilbert Forest Products, a long-standing family company business in that region, was fantastic.

Again, to the member opposite, lots of investments. If he's interested in learning more about the B.C. manufacturing jobs fund as it pertains to the future, I would encourage him to take those questions to the Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation, because the actual program itself lives, the line item lives within that ministry. I'm sure the minister will welcome the questions that he may have with regards to renewal in the future of that program.

The member opposite mentioned the B.C. Lumber Trade Council. The executive director, the lead for the council, Kurt Niquidet, is someone whom I've been speaking with quite regularly. The member opposite — maybe he's had an opportunity to be able to engage with him as well.

Kurt is certainly working very hard these days, trying to address concerns in the media pertaining to the softwood lumber duties and also representing a number of members of COFI and others in terms of the advocacy, not just here in the province but the federal government as well. Kurt and I chat regularly. We've got prescheduled monthly meetings. But as the member will know, what comes out of the President's mouth means that he and I chat much more regularly than just once a month.

Our focus and our work is going to be on the continued advocacy of the federal government, ensuring that there are loan guarantee programs, bonding support, liquidity, trade diversification dollars. The commitment the Premier has made is making sure that we are getting the leadership from the federal government on this trade dispute challenge as it pertains to the softwood, not just the softwood lumber duties but the Trump tariff as well.

Again, we have not gotten the support we need from the federal government on the softwood lumber duties over the last number of years. So here is an opportunity for us to work together in a bipartisan way to be able to continue that advocacy.

But again, I think it's important for us to get that ad-

vocacy and then, of course, do what we need to. I can share with the member that we're having some really great conversations at my Softwood Lumber Advisory Council around the steps we can take to be able to protect the sector and make sure that during these challenging times, we can keep people working.

That's really the message that I've heard loud and clear. I'm sure he's probably heard from workers like Scott Lunney, Gavin McGarrigle and Geoff Dawe. Their members want to ensure that they can work. They don't want to go on EI. They don't want worker supports. They'll obviously need worker supports if their employers are not continuing to operate, but that's their top priority. Those are the issues that they're raising with me, not just at the council but the workers that I'm meeting on the ground as well.

[5:50 p.m.]

As it relates to stumpage rates, I'm happy to dive into some questions from the member opposite on stumpage. They've certainly thrown out some stats as it relates to it.

One thing I would share with the member opposite is that my predecessor, Minister Bruce Ralston, did some work not too long ago on a stumpage responsive project that led to the ministry moving from a quarterly system to a monthly responsive system. This is something that industry and the entire sector has been calling on for quite some time. So that is something that I've heard loud and clear that industry supports.

I think it's important for me to share with the member opposite that stumpage rates adjust to market conditions. While the budget, as the Minister of Finance has said a number of times, is built in the moment we live today, we don't necessarily know what market conditions are going to look like two months from now, six months from now, a year from now. Our market pricing system, stumpage rates, are built to market conditions.

Ward Stamer: I thank the minister for his reply to the questions.

Let's talk a little bit about what the industry has been asking for. First of all, they've been asking for a return up to those more historical 45 million or 50 million cubic metres of wood. Time and time again, the number one thing that we hear is certainty of supply.

The minister referenced the COFI annual report that just came out this month, so I'd like to spend a little bit of time now in talking about some of the things that they have determined and asked me, through this process, on some answers, particularly when the minister is talking about investment.

And yes, thank you for that information that Jobs and Innovation is now responsible for that fund.

I asked specifically if there were any new programs that were coming up, and the minister said.... Obviously there weren't, because he didn't mention any for the forest industry.

When we look at investment numbers, the B.C. Pulp and Paper Coalition came out with their report back in 2023, identifying \$10 billion in investment that they thought was necessary to keep their industry going in British Columbia. They specifically identified \$2.9 billion that has to be invested now.

So my question to the minister is: what mechanisms does this government have and what programs does this government have for 2025, when it relates to the pulp and paper industry? When we're trying to determine not only the certainty of supply but also any other opportunities for investment in these industries, what is the government offering in ways of...? Whether it's grants, whether it's subsidies, whether it's other opportunities other than the manufacturing fund grant, is there anything else that the government can provide?

[5:55 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: I've got lots of papers in front of me. I'm already making a mess, but there's lots to talk about.

First of all, I really appreciate the kinds of themes that the member has. It makes my life a lot easier in terms of how he groups questions. So to other opposition members: take note, this guy knows what he's doing.

Maybe just to start on forest sector industry investments. As we have faced challenges these last number of years with the end of the pine beetle kill, wildfires.... Again, it's a staggering number — 2023, worst wildfire season on record, 20 years' worth of harvestable fibre eliminated just like that. To be able to see investments in the province of British Columbia is really important. These are investments that companies are making, large and small, many of which the forest service is a part of in terms of supporting, providing advice and guidance as well.

In 2025, as an example, Stella-Jones, which focuses mostly on pressure-treated-wood product manufacturing such as utility poles and rail ties, has confirmed that it's going to be establishing an operation in the tournament capital centre of the world, Kamloops. That's a Quebec-based company, again, in the final stages of setting up a peeling facility in Mission Flats. That's just in January 2025.

Kruger, in 2024, made a pretty significant investment, approximately \$22.5 million in funding to commission a new pressure diffusion washer with an AI-powered control system, the first technology of its kind in Canada. This is something that we worked together through the manufacturing jobs fund and investments from the federal government.

[6:00 p.m.]

Richmond Plywood Corp. unveiled its new \$17.4 million Con-Vey Argos panel repair system, funded in part by a \$6.7 million investment from the federal government and also \$2.3 million investment from the B.C. manufacturing jobs fund. This is again value-added at its best.

The Kitsumkalum First Nations in Terrace took over

the old Skeena Sawmills and Skeena Bioenergy plant, getting all the assets for just over \$14 million. This I'm going to remember for a long time. This nation, the Kitsumkalum First Nations, showed leadership not just for themselves but for that entire region. When that previous investment didn't work out and the property owners foreclosed and went bankrupt, Kitsumkalum stepped up and supported not themselves in terms of making that investment but supported that entire community.

I want to thank the Chief and the council for their leadership, the vision they're showing, the mayor up in Terrace and so many others. It's a fairly significant investment. We're excited to be able to work with them.

Kalesnikoff Mass Timber. We announced not too long ago, alongside them, the construction of a third mass timber facility in the West Kootenays, with an investment of \$34 million. It's pretty significant.

West Fraser replaced one of their three dryers at the Williams Lake plywood facility, which cost over \$5 million. I could go on and on: Western Forest Products, \$35 million investment and two continuous dry kilns.

The reason I mentioned just some of these — again, I could go on and on; I've got lots of pages here — is that there are investments happening in our forest sector. There are companies that are stepping up and, even in tough times, making an investment in British Columbia. I would say not just investing in British Columbia, the province; they're investing in their workers. They're creating job opportunities for their workers. They're protecting jobs for their workers. I think it's important to be able to recognize that.

As it relates to the member's comments pertaining to the pulp and paper sector, a very important sector here in our province.... We've had an opportunity to be able to meet with many different companies, Kruger. RiverCity Fibre the member opposite will know well, which works quite closely alongside Kruger in terms of supporting the plant in Kamloops. I met with Domtar recently. So many others.... Mercer — I'm looking forward to visiting their plant in the Kootenays in the weeks and months ahead.

I think the member and I could both agree that the pulp and paper sector is an integral part of our forest sector and the overall supply chain that we're trying to build that supports thousands of families in every corner of this province. Sawmills rely on pulp companies buying wood chips to maintain their operations. They go hand in hand.

Pulp companies have reported that they face five million cubic metres of economical fibre shortfall in future years. We've made a commitment to work with them to be able to address those challenges.

I want to share with the member that the pulp fibre supply task force, which was assembled between my ministry and.... My assistant deputy minister, Melissa Sander-son, sits on that task force as the lead for the forest service,

alongside Joe Nemeth. I'm not sure if the member opposite has had an opportunity to engage with Joe yet.

This is comprised, again, of senior pulp sector leadership alongside ministry staff. They had an ambitious goal of three million cubic metres of residual fibre and low-value timber in 2023 and 2024, and they set their 2025 target for three million cubic metres.

In the past years, because of the hard work of the sores service and the pulp sector, we've met our targets. That's good news. It shows that when we put the work in, when we work together.... I think if there's one thing that I want to accomplish in my time as Minister of Forests.... It is so important that we work together on these big challenges. Again, I want to commend Joe and his entire team, Melissa and the team here in the forest service for the work they've been doing.

A lot of this work has been driven by investments that our government has made. We've implemented two key task force recommendations. We provided \$80 million to the Forest Enhancement Society of British Columbia to increase the utilization of low-value fibre until the end of fiscal year 2027. We also increased pulp sales from the B.C. Timber Sales program to support the utilization of residual fibre and burnt timber as well.

I'll just touch on the Forest Enhancement Society of B.C. If the member opposite is interested in learning more about this organization, I'm happy to provide him with a briefing and more information.

[6:05 p.m.]

It's a great organization that does great work all across this province — incredible projects. I could spend six hours talking about just the projects themselves. The member opposite probably wouldn't appreciate that, so I won't. But what I will say is that this is an organization that has been a proven partner time and time again in delivering projects on the ground that benefit communities, benefit workers and really put the health of our forests at the forefront.

I want to recognize Dave Peterson, who's the chair; Trish Dohan; John Massier; Ken Day; Mike P. Kelly; my acting deputy minister, Ian Meier; and our outgoing assistant deputy minister for the coast region, Sarah Fraser; who have served as the board for the last year.

With an investment of \$20 million per year from the province of British Columbia over the next two years — year 1 was 2024-25 — the Forest Enhancement Society of B.C., FESBC, is going to be able to continue to fund projects to conduct wildfire prevention, planning and fuel mitigation treatments near higher-risk communities and be able to support critical infrastructure. The funding is also going to be able to support projects to increase the use of low-value residual fibre left on site after logging that would otherwise be burned in slash piles.

The member opposite is from rural B.C. I think he will understand more than most people the frustration that

people have with seeing slash piles being burned. A top priority for me is finding ways to be able to address that. We're doing some work within the ministry. I've engaged with the member's colleague, the member for Cariboo-Chilcotin. I know it's always been a priority for him, not just in this term but for a number of years, going back to his time even before he became an MLA.

I look forward to any ideas and solutions that the member opposite has as they pertain to that, because this is really important work. Any time I drive through rural B.C., I see less slash piles than I did six, seven years ago when I was first a staffer in this ministry, so I think we have been making some progress in regard to that. Certainly, the funding that we receive from the Forest Enhancement Society of B.C. plays a key role in that.

Other stuff that we have done, as well, I just want to recognize again. I've touched on the B.C. manufacturing jobs fund. The ministry also provided \$1.5 million a year, fiscal '24-25, for the First Nations-led biohub projects, lignin and cellulose research projects that are going to help the pulp sector increase the incremental fibre and get more value out of that fibre as well.

This is a huge opportunity when we look at the bioeconomy operation here in British Columbia. Europe is leading the way in this. I want to catch up to them in terms of the work. The chief forester is leading a great team focused on this. The ministry has also been doing work over the last number of years in terms of developing policies to reduce waste and improve access to residual fibre, like the coast fibre recovery zones that have taken place.

I think in the last year, through FESBC, we have taken 70,000.... I'll get the exact number for the member. I don't want to get this number wrong, but it's a significant amount of logging trucks' worth of fibre out of the bush to pulp facilities, to biomass facilities. That's certainly very important, and the coast fibre recovery zones have certainly helped in reducing raw log exports as well.

I would also add, because this was a very detailed question from the member, that there has been a significant amount of work being done in the forest service as it pertains to overall support of the forest sector and also some of the work that we're doing on commercial thinning. The member was at COFI and heard some of my comments in my speech as regards to that.

I understand.... I wasn't at COFI the previous year, but this was a big priority that was talked about quite a bit. So I'll share with the member that Joe Nemeth and the pulp and paper sector coalition is actually actively working with our team on developing guidelines and policies as it pertains to commercial thinning.

As I announced last week, on Friday, at COFI, we've got four pilots in business areas all across the province through the B.C. Timber Sales review. I will get a chance to dive into that in a little bit. Part of that and all of that work is making sure that we're supporting our pulp and

paper sector while also making sure that we're getting fibre to our sawmills, primary manufacturers and to secondary manufacturers as well.

Thanks to the member opposite for the question.

[6:10 p.m.]

Ward Stamer: Thanks to the minister.

We went over a lot of information in a very short period of time from the questions that were asked. I appreciate the minister for trying to put a whole package together, because there's a bunch of different things that the minister touched upon. I appreciate him talking about some of the ongoing investment that especially our value-added sector is continuing to do to try to keep themselves in business.

He also mentioned FESBC, and I would like the opportunity to talk about that at a later time as we go through the presentation and some of the different things that come from that, whether it's biofuel, biomass, some of the things that they're doing on the land base, particularly when it comes to wildfire mitigation and commercial thinning.

The one thing that the minister didn't touch on, and this is the one that keeps coming back and forth, is that when we look at the COFI report and all the other reports that we've been compiling over the last two and three years, the number one item of concern is certainty of supply. That's the number one item that is causing the most amount of lack of investment and the opportunities in this forest industry.

Even when we look at the numbers of the AAC of 61, and we have a drive to 45, and we only had 32 last year.... The reality is we're not getting enough fibre to our facilities in enough time.

I've got a couple of fairly specific questions to the minister in regards to permitting. One of them is.... There was a mention the other day — I believe it was in COFI — of the fact that the government is speeding up the process with cutting permits from an average of 45 days to 25 days. Well, I can ask a question: what is the total time in that permitting process?

The Premier mentioned that isn't a factor or isn't a factor that is calculated. I would argue that is the most important part of the whole equation. It's not the end of the time. It's the whole time in developing these permits. We've been told time and time again that these permits are taking way too long.

These are in timber supply agreements. These are in total harvest land-based plans. All of a sudden, there are new plans that are coming up that are affecting the overall operating areas. It seems like, for whatever reason, nobody wants to get to the bottom of it and try to determine what is causing this problem.

Now, we can offer up some of the suggestions in that the approval process is getting too long and too onerous.

We can look at what's on the books right now when it comes to laws and how we go through the process. But I'd like the minister to tell me: what are we going to do to try to simplify this process? Instead of stretching it out as long as it's taking now, anywhere between three and four years, why aren't we able to look at ways of changing that whole process to simplify the process? That's number one.

The second part of that question is.... When you look at investment, and back to the COFI report, it says right here that in attractiveness for investment, B.C. has the lowest rating of all the other peer groups. That's Europe. That's Brazil. That's the United States. So there's a significant correlation between the certainty of supply, our taxation — which is uncompetitive; we're down at the lowest rate of 1.7 — and also all the other factors that are coming into play, including the duties.

That's part of it. We were able to survive at 14 percent. Now, of course, when it gets up to another 20 percent, that's going to be a significant hit, and we're not entirely sure how that's going to work out. In the meantime, we still need these facilities to continue to keep operating.

So my question to the minister is: what efficiencies is he able to achieve in the next 30 to 60 to 90 days to be able to speed up this process, which has been on the docket for the last two to three years?

[6:15 p.m. - 6:20 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Thanks to the member opposite for the questions as they pertain to permitting. This was certainly a timely topic at COFI last weekend and something that's been discussed, I think, for quite some time.

Certainly the member opposite will know that the Premier has made this a priority across government. That's why we have a deputy ministers committee responsible for speeding up permitting, finding ways.... We've got a number of projects, and getting that sustainable timber-harvesting land base is one of those major projects. I'm looking forward to working with my colleagues across government in regard to that.

The member opposite talks a bit about the time as it pertains to submitting a permit. What he referenced were internal goals that the ministry has with regard to 40 days, and how as minister I've directed the deputy minister to set a new goal of 25 days, which the Premier talked about at COFI.

I just want, again, to clarify that in the data that we track, we only track the time from when the permit is submitted to when it is approved. The member has noted the work that happens prior to a permit being submitted, but we're certainly finding ways to be able to find efficiencies within that period. We're excited to be able to work with industry on that. We are working with COFI, with other partners, loggers, contractors and also First Nations around creating efficiencies, streamlining the process.

In one particular case — the member may be aware,

because it was touched on in my speech at COFI — we're actually bundling archaeology and cutting permits in the Skeena area as it relates to First Nations consultation. If it's successful, which I expect it will be, we'll look to roll that out across the province at all of our offices. Those are the types of innovative measures that we're taking on, on this side, to be able to address the opportunities ahead.

The other thing I want to chat a bit about, as it relates to the work around certainty and predictability, is the great work that has been happening for some time now and that I get the opportunity to be a part of, as Minister of Forests, with regard to forest landscape planning tables.

FLPs have been a top priority for our government. Premier Horgan first announced the concept of FLPs at a COFI convention some number of years ago. The Premier has reiterated the importance of this, right up until his speech last week.

FLPs continue to remain a key priority for my ministry and, really, I think, are a vital pathway to certainty and resiliency in British Columbia's forest sector, which will certainly benefit communities all across the province — on the coast, in the Interior, in the North. FLPs identify where and how, if the member is not aware, forest management activities can occur.

What I love about FLPs is the opportunity to be able to bring people together — First Nations, industry, workers, the entire sector — at these tables to be able to have these types of conversations. Again, this is the type of work that needs to happen. It's aligned with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.

[6:25 p.m.]

This is not a ministry that wants to go backwards, where we're fighting people. We're doing meaningful consultation. We're engaging with people in a respectful way, at the table. I'm really proud of the work that our teams are doing, not just from the ministry side, from the forest service side but at tables all across the province.

I've made it a priority to actually go and participate in FLP tables. I felt it was really important, as a minister, for me to be able to talk about FLPs. I should really have a better understanding of what the work is that happens on the ground. I've visited four FLP tables over the course of that.... Well, three and one that is just in the initialization period.

There have been incredible conversations. There are so many good people at these tables. I think of a young man who was at the Quesnel table, who has been doing work in forestry for a shorter period of time but just brings such a great youthful perspective to forestry and support of the nation that he works for.

I just want to reiterate how important it is for First Nations to be at these tables, to be working with government leading these conversations. When the member opposite talks about certainty and predictability, that's how we accomplish that, by working together.

We cannot go backwards to a time where we push people aside, where there is division. FLP tables are the best way to address that today. There are 15 forest landscape planning tables underway at various stages with more than 90 First Nations that are participating in these FLP tables. Forest landscape planning tables represent almost 46 percent of the land base here in British Columbia.

Again, I just want to reiterate how thankful I am to everyone — in particular, as well, to industry — for the work that they've been doing at these tables. I've engaged with industry reps at every single one. I had dinner with a group at the lakes resiliency hall, and the same group have been doing incredible work.

I think of a guy named Miles. We have a bit of a joke. I gave him my cell phone number. The advice that we get when we become elected is to not hand out your cell phone number, but he had a bit of a joke, because he said: "You're number 13, lucky number 13." I'm the 13th Forests Minister he's dealt with.

I think Miles is probably going to be in his mid to late 70s, but I think of the commitment that Miles and his colleagues have doing this work at the table, and it was a real joy for me to be there just for a short period of time. I think it was with the lakes resiliency one for about three hours, getting the opportunity to see our incredible staff helping facilitate these conversations and to see the leadership shown by industry, by First Nations and so many others.

Again, when we were looking at creating certainty and predictability, this is how we do that work, and I'm excited to be able to continue that work as the Minister of Forests.

Ward Stamer: Thanks to the minister for his comments.

Part of the reason why I asked the question about certainty of supply, and I appreciate the minister talking about these FLPs, is I can argue that there hasn't been the level of consultation that many of us would hope has been going on.

As everyone knows, some of these new FLPs were initiated last spring only between the B.C. government and First Nations. There wasn't anybody else in that original framework. The minister can correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm pretty sure I'm right.

From that, there have also been additional plans that have been released, including a joint agreement plan that was just released on February 28 of this year. It includes the Ministry of Forests and numerous First Nations, but nobody else. Industry was not consulted. I don't believe community forests were consulted.

So there are significant challenges with those agreements, when you look at timber harvesting land bases of reductions of anywhere between 10 to 13 percent, increase in old growth protected areas. We have the shrinking land base with all these constraints.

My question to the minister is: how are we supposed to be able to drive to 45, or even pretend that we have a

sustainable forest plan or forest industry in this province, if we continually keep changing the goal posts and not having the level of consultation that I believe everyone in this province deserves? Maybe the minister can elaborate a little bit more on these because, quite frankly, we haven't seen the level of consultation.

[6:30 p.m.]

We've basically been seeing changes in our access to a timber supply agreement area, and now we need back that certainty of supply. We all believe that we don't have that. So maybe the minister can clarify a little bit more on what the plans are in 2025 when it comes to land use management plans.

When we have these joint agreements that are put out, where is that level of consultation? Even though there's a draft across it, and I can get a copy for everybody if they'd like to see it, there are some things in there that I would argue are unstatutory decisions, and they're things that we really need to be able to discuss.

Hon. Ravi Parmar: I think it would just be helpful for us if the member could speak to what exact plan he was referring to when he was relaying his question.

Ward Stamer: I will get a copy for the minister from what I'm referring to as a joint agreement plan between Ministry of Forests and a significant number of First Nations in and around my riding. I believe that it was released March 14.

I would certainly like to be able to come back — if we can't do that today, we could certainly do it tomorrow — because I do have some significant questions in regard to some of the assumptions that are made in that document and how we move forward on those questions.

Having discussed a little bit about certainty of supply, and knowing that we have some significant challenges in our industries, and knowing, as we mentioned earlier about the pulp and paper industry, how critical it is for us to be able to maintain our primary manufacturing facilities, because without them we won't have a pulp and paper industry, and we certainly won't have our value added at the same time....

The minister mentioned a little bit about FESBC, and that brings me to a new topic. That was what keyed my interest last week when we were at COFI, a dramatic change in what BCTS's mandate is in regards to additional forest stewardship and wildfire mitigation and a shift away from traditionally being a way of bringing fibre to the market, the original mandate of 20 percent of the available harvest to market.

Our stumpage system is based on that new system and on the auction process. We can argue whether it's a fair auction or not because of the way the system works, but that's what we have today.

So my question is, to the minister: can they provide us

with up-to-date data, even though it's a moment in time, on how this is going to change not only the harvest levels in BCTS...? Because last year there was only 12.2 of the harvest, instead of the 20 percent that it normally is, and I think in the last previous two or three years, it was below the 20 percent.

What is the minister's plan, going forward, with BCTS, if they're going to start getting into things that the B.C. wildfire service is doing or emergency preparedness is doing or FESBC is doing? How do we determine from this year's budget how much they're going to spend? What work are they planning to do in 2025?

[6:35 p.m. - 6:40 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: I will start maybe just.... We may touch on this later, as the member wasn't able to provide the document, but FLPs, forest landscape planning tables, start with a government-to-government engagement. But I just want to be very clear that industry, technical representatives and other stakeholders — which include community forests, local governments, and workers, labour — are at those tables.

They are not individuals that are consulted; they are at the table having these conversations. Again, it's why we've invested so much in FLPs, in terms of dollars and resources, and why they're a top priority for us.

I will just highlight.... The member across the way touched on the B.C. Timber Sales review that I'm leading with an incredible team within the forest service and also an incredible task force. I've got the likes of a former minister, former MLA from the B.C. Liberals, George Abbott. I've got Lenny Joe from the First Nations Forestry Council, their CEO, alongside another great local government advocate, Brian Frenkel, who the member may know well, certainly his leader will know well, as a councillor in Vanderhoof.

It was really important for me to be able to pick three, what I would say, outstanding British Columbians, people who are focused on communities, focused on the opportunities ahead, and help advise me and guide me on the future of B.C. Timber Sales. This was a direction that the Premier put in my mandate letter, something that we campaigned on in the last election and something that I think was quite welcomed by the Council of Forest Industries, the Interior Logging Association and a whole host of other stakeholders.

There are a number of goals as it pertains to the BCTS review, but as the member touched on in his question, the piece that I spoke to in my remarks at the Council of Forest Industries Convention last week in Prince George was specifically around the challenge that we have in terms of wildfires and how this really needs an all-of-government approach.

The member named a couple of different agencies — FESBC, B.C. wildfire service, Ministry of Forests. I want

the member to know that all of those organizations are working together. In fact, FESBC.... While it technically is an outside agency, Jason Fisher, the executive director, is closely working with our team. And the B.C. wildfire service is part of the Ministry of Forests.

There is an opportunity for us to be able to harness and lean in on building and expanding the role that B.C. Timber Sales has in complementing the work that the B.C. wildfire service has been doing for the last number of years in terms of risk reduction.

All of this comes back to the member's earlier comments and questions pertaining to getting fibre to where it needs to go. When I spoke and I talked about the role of B.C. Timber Sales and expanding that, I heard from a lot of folks afterwards at COFI, as I spent some extra time in Prince George, how much they appreciated that, mostly because....

Here was an example where at the previous COFI convention, commercial thinning, partial harvesting, selective logging, alongside overall wildfire mitigation work was talked about and was — to my understanding, because I wasn't there — a pretty singular focus of the 2024 COFI convention. And here was an opportunity, as part of the BCTS review, where we were able to take what were, I understand, great panels, great conversations, and actually start laying out a vision and plan for that.

Ward Stamer: Thanks to the minister for the answer.

It's still a little bit short on specifics, because if BCTS is going to be getting more into the stewardship program, and even if we start looking at some of the opportunities with fuel mitigation, commercial thinning, one of the drawbacks on that is a lot of that commercial thinning will be immature trees.

[6:45 p.m.]

It could be thinning in some of the plantations. There may be merchantable timber, but it's not going to be the same as the mix that we have right now.

So my question is: is there going to be a shift in the deliveries of the fibre that BCTS typically is bringing to auction in the areas that they have today? If there's going to be a percentage that's going to be added or taken out because of these thinning projects, what are the targets on that?

More specifically, where is the money going to come from to administer this program? That was kind of my original question around BCTS and whether....

FESBC, we know, is a separate funded program. My question was going to be asked on FESBC — if there's more than a one-year commitment. The minister said there are two years, but I'm not sure if that was for this year and next year or last year and this year. So I'd like a little bit more clarification on the FESBC side of things.

I would like to know: if there have been any preliminary numbers determined, what is this going to cost? If there's going to be additional work that's going to be out-

side of the scope of what BCTS originally has been doing.... Again, when you look at what their budget was last year, and they only basically produced just over 50 percent of what they normally would do in work, in the scale of what was actually offered for sale....

I'm not criticizing what the organization and the people in it did. I'm just pointing to the fact that we only got half of what we normally would get out of that program or out of that service. Going forward, are we going to be getting up to that 20 percent of the harvestable levels? If we aren't, are we going to be subsidizing with some of these other works that have been mentioned? Are we still going to be able to hit 20 percent and do this additional work?

I'm still not quite clear on how this is going to be delivered to the people of B.C., if there's going to be a change in focus in what BCTS does.

[6:50 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: I'll just touch on a few things as they pertain to the member's questions.

First of all, the review is incomplete for B.C. Timber Sales. There is a window of, certainly, a few more months, but what I provided at COFI were some of the preliminary thoughts and perspectives that the task force, myself and the forest service have been working on.

That's what led to the announcement around those four pilots in those four areas that are looking at commercial thinning, partial harvesting, selective logging and also wildfire mitigation work, cultural burning, prescribed fires — that sort of thing.

As part of the work, it's a real focus that I have as the Minister of Forest to make sure that we're leveraging B.C. Timber Sales to do more, get more access to fibre and, as we talk about getting more access to fibre, also making sure we're getting more value from our forests, from our fibre. As part of that, I would also add that we have to look at the full profile of the trees.

[6:55 p.m.]

I think the member and I can agree that we have a very sustainable forest sector here in British Columbia, but there is an opportunity for us to be able to get more boots on the ground, more people working in the bush stewarding our forests.

This is something I heard from Chief Lampreau, Chief Leween from the Cheslatta First Nation. I think of the Syilx First Nations, in particular the Westbank First Nation, who I engaged with — all who were developing these long-term plans. I learned from the nations where I call home — the Sc'ianew, Beecher Bay; the T'Sou-ke; the paa?eiid?atx — that we often, in this building, get stuck thinking in four-year cycles.

In forestry, you can't do that. You can't have a five-year plan, a ten-year plan. You need a 100-year plan. You need to think seven generations ahead. That's why we're doing

this work as it pertains to looking at the full profile of the forest.

As part of that, I would say that.... I'm sure the member is aware of thinning and commercial thinning and the role that that can play. But for the folks at home that may not be aware, may have not caught my speech at COFI, thinning is the cutting of individual trees from a stand to maintain or improve the health of remaining trees by providing space and resources for growth, like sunlight, water and nutrients. Commercial thinning refers to an intermediate harvest, where merchantable volume is removed earlier than the final harvest.

I would say this is a key part of the work that we've been doing over the last number of years as part of the old-growth strategic review and the action plan and, again, looking at the overall health of our forests.

The member will know that there are other jurisdictions that have been doing a good job in this. Our chief forester has been engaging with other jurisdictions, and he's leading a working group on commercial thinning that includes First Nations leadership, industry and a whole host of others. It's a big priority, and I'm quite excited about it.

To the second part of the member's question as it relates to the Forest Enhancement Society of British Columbia, I'll share with him, just to be clear: \$20 million this year; \$20 million next year; and then 2027-2028, \$20 million. So \$20 million over the next three years.

The Chair: Members, we will take a five-minute recess now. So please return at 7:02. Thank you.

The committee recessed from 6:57 p.m. to 7:04 p.m.

[Jessie Sunner in the chair.]

The Chair: Okay, Members. I call the Committee of Supply, Section A, back to order. We are currently considering the budget estimates of the Ministry of Forests.

Ward Stamer: Let's ask a couple of specific questions in regard to part of the \$58 million operating portion of the budget when it comes to road maintenance, rehabilitation and those kinds of questions.

[7:05 p.m.]

I have a couple of specific questions, and if we don't get the numbers right back, that's fine, because it's going to lead into a couple of opportunities for my colleagues to be able to ask questions in regard to access.

First off, can you tell me how many roads were permanently deactivated under the ministry's responsibility, BCTS and MOF? Can you tell me how many bridges were permanently removed under the same criteria, BCTS and Ministry of Forests? Can you tell me how many roads are going to be permanently deactivated, planned in 2025? Bridges as well.

To add to that, I would just like to add a comment, in as much as we're hearing an awful lot of push-back from the public right now on roads that have been used and maintained over generations, quite frankly. And now we're finding through successive Forests Ministers....

I brought it to Minister Conroy's attention, Minister Ralston's attention when I was a municipal leader, now Minister Parmar. Our belief was that even minimal maintenance standards were not being addressed on many of our roads that are owned by the public. That has caused deterioration of those roads. Their comment was: "We don't have any money." But that's not the answer. The answer is that you have a responsibility.

Now what we're finding is that these access roads that are being used not only for industry.... They may not be today. It might be two, three, five years in the future, because it's depending on what timber supply is still left in those areas. But when we start talking about wildfires, we start talking about timing of access to get to those wildfires, those lightning strikes. We talk about other opportunities the public enjoys, whether it's hiking, biking, fishing, camping, hunting, all these other kinds of things.

We're hearing it from all over the province, not just in the southern Interior or the North or even down in the Hope area, down towards the Lower Mainland. We're hearing it everywhere.

I'd like to know if there's a cohesive plan, going forward? What's actually going on? Or is it just reactionary to the fact that we haven't been spending enough money, the ministry hasn't been spending enough money on maintaining these roads, and now we're in an environmental situation where they would much rather deactivate them than maintain them?

I'd like an explanation, and I'd also like a list of kilometres and bridges that have been pulled last year and anything that is planned for this year.

[7:10 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Maybe just at the outset, resource roads, as the member will know well, do really provide a key and critical linkage for people that live in rural communities and for industry, as well as, the member noted, the public for access to recreation opportunities. It sounds like we'll get an opportunity to be able to dive into that.

The Ministry of Forests is responsible for maintaining approximately 60,000 kilometres of FSRs, forest service roads, throughout British Columbia. Certainly, I want the member to know we're committed to ensuring that these roads are designed, built and maintained and, when ready, deactivated as safely and effectively as possible.

I would say to some of the comments that the member made.... That provides me an opportunity to be able to thank the work that the ministry is doing, the forest service is doing and, in particular, engineers and those that work in the ministry that are responsible for this.

We do have a legal obligation to deactivate certain roads based off of inspections that happen. To the member's particular question around the number of roads or bridges that will be deactivated in 2025, we don't have a specific answer. You could have an inspection tomorrow that could lead to a conversation or a deactivation. Again, we have a professional reliance model and trust the hard-working staff within the forest service that look at that.

[7:15 p.m.]

But I would say that to the premise of where the member is going, and I presume where we'll go into with some of these questions.... We are always looking at ways to maintain public access to roads while ensuring there's public safety. That's our legal obligation as the Ministry of Forests, and we're always ready, prepared, to be able to have those conversations.

Of the 60,000 kilometres of forest service roads, roughly 12,000 are roads and sections of roads that we are actively maintaining. A lot of FSRs are sometimes just left to erode once they're no longer used by industry and are eventually deactivated. There are 28,000 that are district manager FSRs. There are 20,000 that are BCTS FSRs as well.

I would say, to the broader question around funding, that it has been a big priority for our government to ensure that we have the resources to be able to do this work. Recent budget uplifts to the engineering program over the last several years have resulted in an annual increase of \$13 million in funding being allocated to the forest service road maintenance. This funding is being targeted and will help mitigate the effects of industry rationalization.

However, there will be, certainly, some comments pertaining to how the ministry handles those dollars. Additionally, the forest employment program, through the engineering branch, has invested an additional \$7.4 million into forest service road maintenance over the last several years. That was a program that the member may be aware of that was brought in to be able to support logging contractors to be able to do this work during challenging years.

I think the only other piece that I would add, in addition to those dollars, is that if the member opposite and his colleagues ever have conversations or questions, I welcome them. They can certainly reach out to my office on specific examples. We've got staff all over this province that are willing and ready to be able to support their queries, their questions, if any of their constituents bring these forward. It sounds like we might get a chance to dive into some of those.

Ward Stamer: I'd like the opportunity for members of my caucus to ask questions — I believe MLAs for Kelowna-Mission and Boundary-Similkameen. If I can allow that to happen, then I would please allow the opportunity for the member to stand.

Gavin Dew: I know that we're all very concerned, particularly in light of recent conversations around the carbon tax, about reducing emissions. I would note, as a preface, that Canada produces about two to three times the emissions each year from wildfires as we do from all of human industrial activity. We accounted in 2023 for about 23 percent of global wildfire emissions, which was quite an outsized share.

In that context, I cast my mind back to the 2017 CASA that this government signed with the Greens, specifically to the Emerging Economy Task Force and even more specifically to a pilot launched in 2018 under a program called not the new normal, which was a pilot project using AI and machine learning to better predict the paths of wildfires so that we could save our scarce resources and be able to deploy those resources faster and better to address wildfires earlier.

Unfortunately, that pilot was cancelled by this government. I will ask again, to this minister, a question that I asked to the Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness, who referred the question to this minister.

I'm confused as to why she did that, because I'm actually looking at her mandate letter. Her mandate letter says that she is to ensure her ministry "continues to advance work that allows for the efficient and effective delivery of emergency services to British Columbians everywhere in the province, in times of crisis, by leveraging cost-effective technology innovations." So the Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness either was unable to answer the question, unfamiliar with her portfolio or unwilling to answer the question.

I would ask the minister whether he would agree that the unfortunate and untimely cancellation of this particular pilot initiative, the breaking of this commitment to the Green Party, set back the government of British Columbia's ability to become more innovative, more fast and more nimble in addressing wildfires.

[7:20 p.m. - 7:25 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Thanks to the member opposite for the question and the opportunity I think I've now been provided to be able to talk about the incredible work that the B.C. wildfire service is doing each and every day all year round.

One thing that I'm proud of is our government made the strategic decision to make the B.C. wildfire service full year, all year round. I had an opportunity to be in Merritt, a place that's going to be quite busy next week as boot camps begin, and see the results of strategic budget decisions to be able to make the B.C. wildfire service full year, all year round.

I appreciate the member's questions around technology and innovation. I'm not familiar with the not the new normal program that the member is referring to, so if he has more details on that that, he could share as it pertains to

the number of years. Happy to do that. But I was just chatting with my team, and we're not familiar with it.

As it relates to technology and artificial intelligence and overall innovation in the B.C. wildfire service, I think it should be recognized, and I think there should be a sense of pride in we have here in British Columbia and at the level of innovation that's happening in the B.C. wildfire service.

At the outset, I was in California a number of weeks ago. One of the reasons I was down there was not just to do with tariffs but was to be able to help ensure that we continue strengthening our relationships between the British Columbia wildfire service and Cal Fire. I can tell you how much those relationships are valued, how much work is happening to be able to strengthen those relationships.

British Columbians know all too well the devastating impacts of wildfires in our communities, and California knows that. I've got to tell you, it was such a moving experience to be able to sit across from Joe Tyler, the chief down there. I had my deputy alongside me who's worked in the wildfire service. These were not conversations that pertain to just two separate jurisdictions; these were friendships, long-standing friendships.

Again, I just want to commend the work that the entire B.C. wildfire service has been doing the last number of years. There's a sense of pride that I have as the minister responsible for the wildfire service. When California called looking for our help, our folks.... Not only did they step up and head down, but unlike other agencies, they were on the ground helping within minutes of arriving. They didn't have to go through fulsome briefings and orientations because their relationships were already there. There's a sense of pride.

So if we have tough wildfire seasons, I know that California and Cal Fire are going to be there to support us as well. That was the commitment that the chief provided to us, and I'm looking forward to continuing that engagement and that relationship.

Going back to the member's questions and comments pertaining to technology and innovation in the B.C. wildfire service, I'll just touch on a couple pieces that I think should be noted.

One is B.C. wildfire service is invested and is expanding the use of new fire-predictive technologies to support fire growth modelling. This ensures that our incident management teams have the information they need to be able to make informed decisions, projecting fire behaviour on the land base, which really does allow us to be able to increase preparedness and provide quicker responses to fires.

B.C. wildfire service — the member will have some sense of pride from his local post-secondary institution — is partnering with UBCO to create a camera network

for 2025, which will support earlier detection and ongoing monitoring of wildfires.

I want to thank UBC Okanagan for the work they're doing in partnership with us in regards to this.

We've got great partnerships with institutions, post-secondary institutions like UBCO. I think of the partnership we have with Thompson Rivers University, which I hope I get an opportunity to talk about as well.

One other thing that I'll mention is AI is starting to be used in inferring drones to better detect, map and notify B.C. Wildfire staff and crews of hotspots on existing fires. And this is really good information for our staff who are making these really tough decisions in terms of sending resources where they need to be.

Also, this is good information that ensures that we're able to better share what's going on, the land base, with British Columbians, encourage people with wildfire season already starting and certainly preparing for whatever the 2025 wildfire season brings.

If you haven't already, download the B.C. wildfire service app. You can get it on your Android device or your iPhone.

I just want to commend the B.C. wildfire service for the work they've been doing based off of the feedback they've received from British Columbians on making sure there's a world-quality app that I know so many British Columbians rely on each and every day during wildfire seasons.

[7:30 p.m.]

Gavin Dew: There was a lot there. Very little of that related to the question.

I will come back to try to get the minister to actually answer the question. In fact, I'll phrase it as a five-part question that he can answer in writing later, since it would appear that he's not able to cast his mind back to a few years ago when that particular program was initiated and then cancelled.

I'll just ask him to answer these five questions. In writing later is totally fine. It sounds like the minister is nodding and agreeing that he will answer these five questions.

Question 1, would the minister agree that the cancellation of this pilot project was a broken promise to the Green Party?

Question 2, would the minister agree that cancelling that pilot project — which emerged from the Emerging Economy Task Force and the innovation commission, launched as part of the 2017 CASA commitments — delayed the implementation of the kinds of technologies that he is talking about in addressing wildfires?

Question 3, I'm sure he'll have no problem whatsoever in addressing it. Would the minister agree that delaying implementation — which cost significant dollars fighting wildfires, particularly in seasons like 2023 — increased GHG emissions and increased damage to communities? If he wants to quantify that, he can go ahead, but I'll settle

for a simple: would he agree that cancelling the project led to those outcomes?

Given that I have just flagged that the minister for emergency response actually refused to answer a question in estimates which relates directly to the language in her mandate letter, written by the Premier, who's sitting right over there....

Since the Premier has just entered the room, I will read back to him the mandate letter, which is that he asked the minister to ensure her ministry "continues to advance work that allows for the efficient and effective delivery of emergency services to British Columbians everywhere in the province, in times of crisis, by leveraging cost-effective technology innovations." That is specifically in the mandate letter of the minister for emergency response, yet she refused to answer any question to do with this in recent estimates.

Question 4, would the minister agree that his fellow minister has outright denied her own mandate letter and failed to answer a question?

And just because I want to put a constructive note onto the end of this, since the minister referenced my local post-secondary institution, UBC Okanagan, and obviously will be looking for a way to save face and make up for the failure of his government to implement these technologies, will the minister commit to funding the proposed Okanagan wildfire lab at UBC Okanagan, as per the proposal advanced by the university?

The Chair: Just a reminder to members that you're not to reference whether members are present in the House or, in this case, in the committee or not. Thank you.

Hon. Ravi Parmar: The member talked about how I didn't answer his questions. Clearly, he didn't listen to anything I just said.

I hope that he has a sense of pride, because I think British Columbians have a sense of pride, in the world-class work that our B.C. wildfire service is doing. I just named a number of examples in which the B.C. wildfire service is investing and expanding its use of growth modelling to better inform the decisions it's making, 24-7, during wildfire season.

I talked about the partnership we have with UBC Okanagan. We will continue to find other ways to be able to support the work of B.C. universities and colleges on this work, because it helps us as well, and it helps better inform the work that we need to do on innovation as it pertains to the B.C. wildfire service.

I've mentioned AI as it relates to drones, again making sure that we're able to make better decisions, but I'll mention a couple of other things for the benefit of the member.

AI is being piloted in B.C. wildfire service weather forecasting. This enhanced weather information will be transformative for wildfire agencies, enabling proactive risk

management for better preparedness, more effective real-time response to active fires, with improved resource allocation and the development of what, I think, is going to be really important in the work that we have in the years ahead as we continue to prepare for upcoming wildfire seasons: robust long-term strategies to minimize wildfire impacts. That ties back to the overall resiliency work that the critic and I have been talking about for the last number of hours.

[7:35 p.m.]

B.C. wildfire service is also monitoring other artificial intelligence projects related to wildfire and weather, with some showing promising results in accuracy and operational applicability. Overall, I would say that AI is playing a positive role and, increasingly, a significant role, in enhancing the accuracy, the speed and the efficiency of the work that the B.C. wildfire service is doing.

I had an opportunity, because I had House duty, to be able to listen to some of the questions the member posed. I would encourage him to go and look at the mandate letter for the Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness. I would encourage him to go and read the books, because the B.C. wildfire service is the responsibility of the Minister of Forests. If he has more questions, I welcome them.

Gavin Dew: I do believe I just read out the relevant section of the mandate letter, which is pretty darn specifically connected here. I realize that the minister probably isn't very happy about being unable to answer this question.

I do hope that as he affirmed, he will, in fact, answer those five questions in writing. Is that correct? Is that affirmed?

Yeah, great. Super.

I'll take it to an easier question, a dramatically easier question. The Friends of the South Slopes Society, or FOSS, is a volunteer-driven organization that advocates for and provides access to connected and well-maintained recreation areas across the south slopes of Kelowna and the Kettle Valley Railway by constructing and maintaining public facilities, trails and signs and working with government partners to protect and expand natural areas.

They have strong partnerships with B.C. Parks and, by all accounts, an excellent working relationship with the great staff in that ministry and, indeed, in this ministry. They have recently informed me that they are working with staff in the Ministry of Forests to secure permission for FOSS to improve and maintain a section of a quite substantially used forest service road in order to enhance access to parking for trail users, and they wish to do this at their cost.

The scope of work is quite limited, and there is no funding asked from government. However, the machinery of government can move slowly and can be confusing to groups attempting to partner with government. I'd really

like to help them get this one done before the summer season is underway in earnest, both for local trail users and for tourists.

Can the minister please confirm that he is supportive of this kind of commonsense approach, with no cost to government, and whether he will direct his ministry teams to expedite this decision?

[7:40 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Thanks to the member opposite for the question.

A couple things that I would say at the outset is I'm always prepared and willing to be able to have conversations with FOSS, with himself and other organizations. This sounds quite interesting. I'm certainly interested in learning more, so maybe the member could provide me some more details.

He mentioned trails, and, as the member knows, Rec Sites and Trails used to exist in the Ministry of Forests and have actually moved over to the Ministry of Environment and Parks. He mentioned B.C. Parks being a part of that conversation, but in order to be able to provide, I think, a more fulsome answer, I'd need more specifics.

But what I'll end with is by saying that as we talk about this work, it's really important to acknowledge that there is a professional responsibility, a financial responsibility of the province to ensure, and a liability to ensure, that professional engineers are involved in this work. And we certainly have a great team within the forest service that can help advise and give guidance.

If the member opposite wants to maybe provide some of that information, I can make sure that the forest service team in that area reaches out and starts those conversations if they haven't already started.

Gavin Dew: Thank you. I appreciate the answer.

This is definitely just as it relates to the FSR. They're fully recognized in the scope of the other areas. I'll follow up with the minister later in writing, and I appreciate that.

I'll now turn it over to my colleague.

Donegal Wilson: Staying on the same theme around recreation and road access, while we do appreciate that Rec Sites and Trails is no longer within your ministry, just about every access to a park or recreation site in the province does involve a forestry road to get there.

What specific budget has the province allocated in this fiscal year for the maintenance and repair of forestry roads to provide access to recreation sites, trails and B.C. parks?

[7:45 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Thanks to the member opposite for the question and her participation in these estimates.

Maybe just at a high level: the work that the forest ser-

vice does is supporting the work of industry and also a whole host of things. There's a great amount of work that the ministry is doing in partnership all across government in the integrated land base that we have, not just for recreation but for getting to First Nations rural communities, to remote communities and, of course, supporting the work of industry as well.

I would say at a core pillar, when we're looking at dollars, safety is our top priority as we do our work. So specifically, to the member's question, in our capital budget, the integrated resource operations division has \$20.3 million set aside and B.C. Timber Sales has \$47.83 million set aside for roads.

Again, I just want to reiterate that these are dollars not for rec sites or for recreation. Rather, this is for that entire integrated approach, with safety obviously being a key priority — supports industry, supports remote communities, supports remote First Nations and a whole host of other things as well.

Donegal Wilson: While I understand there is budget, I would love to know the actual priority list of where that money goes, because coming from the recreation sector in a previous hat, I can tell you that recreation is the bottom of the list. So I believe that this government's process....

I know that's not necessarily yours, but it is within FRPA, so it does live within your ministry.

These First Nations and volunteer organizations are spending countless hours to establish these recreation sites and trails. It now takes up to five years to get a new recreation site actually approved, let alone built. It's built with volunteer money. At the end of the day, that road to that trail is not protected or included in these budgets, and that's really disappointing.

B.C.'s tourism economy and the foundation of "Super, natural British Columbia" rests heavily on the contributions of volunteers and non-profit recreation groups. These organizations contribute thousands of hours annually to develop and maintain these outdoor recreation opportunities. They're building infrastructure used by both residents and tourists.

While the province is investing significantly in promoting B.C.'s tourism experience, why does it continue to download responsibilities onto these groups without providing adequate financial support?

As an example, the McBride Big Country Snowmobile club is sustaining an entire winter tourism economy in their community. The province has not allocated the funds to replace a key bridge, jeopardizing not only club operations but the local economy of McBride. My office continues to receive urgent emails from businesses and residents who need snowmobile access restored.

I asked this of the Ministry of Environment yesterday and was brought here to the Ministry of Forests. I was told this bridge is yours. We need this bridge fixed, and I'm

hoping it can be included in that \$20.3 million that you've referenced.

[7:50 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Thanks very much to the member opposite for the question.

I just want to clarify that the engineers within the forest service provide engineering services to Rec Sites and Trails, so the trails that the member opposite is referring to are trails that live within the Ministry of Environment and Parks.

I'm not going to send the member back to the Ministry of Environment and Parks, but what I will share with the member is that I had a great meeting, at the end of COFI last week, with the mayor of McBride. I had an opportunity to be able to establish my relationship with him, and I heard from him the impact that this is having on his community.

It was the Ministry of Forests engineers that made the difficult decision to remove the bridges that the member is talking about, for obvious reasons as it pertains to safety. These are professional individuals. I'm sure the member will agree that.... I'm not an engineer. I'm not going to try to be an engineer. These are professionals that make these decisions.

The commitment that I made to the mayor of McBride was for him to come, virtually or to Victoria, to be able to have a conversation around: where do we go from here? This is obviously going to be a conversation that involves the Minister of Environment and Parks, but I'm also happy to share with the member that the forest service is happy to be a part of those conversations as well.

I recognize that this is a fairly significant.... The mayor shared with me, I think, one of the most popular snowmobiling access points, not just in British Columbia but the entire country.

I shared with the mayor that we're more than willing to be able to have conversations. From what it sounds like, the mayor has got some interesting ideas to be able to potentially address and mitigate those concerns.

I understand for the previous season there was some work done between the Ministry of Environment and Parks to be able to mitigate some of those challenges as well.

Thanks very much to the member for the question.

Donegal Wilson: The question wasn't whether the bridge needed to be replaced. It's definitely a safety hazard and does need to be replaced. I didn't hear a clear commitment that that was going to happen this summer. Snowmobile season, for some of us, isn't very far away. The reality is that that bridge is going to take some significant time.

I feel that the mayor of McBride shouldn't have to come down to tell the story. The story has been entered into the

record. You're aware of the story, and I would like to see some commitment to that bridge for the community of McBride and the businesses it depends on.

Their forestry sector is no more. They need to diversify, and this is their opportunity.

Hon. Ravi Parmar: I agree with the member. I met with the mayor of McBride. He expressed his concerns, the challenges. I made a commitment to him that I would work alongside my colleague, the Minister of Environment and Parks.

To clarify, once again, this is a Rec Sites and Trails.... Rec Sites and Trails doesn't exist in the Ministry of Forests. We have engineers that provide services to Rec Sites and Trails, and I am happy to work with the mayor to be able to address those challenges and work towards finding some long-term solutions.

The mayor could certainly come down here. I'm more than happy to pay a visit to him and McBride as well.

[7:55 p.m.]

Donegal Wilson: Thank you for that, and I will pass it back to Kamloops-North Thompson.

Ward Stamer: Let's pick up a little bit more on B.C. wildfire service, if we can. I agree with the minister that we are incredibly fortunate and thankful for the women and men that work in our B.C. wildfire service. I've been on the fire line many times. It's not a good job. It's not a fun job, but it's an important job.

This leads me back to a conversation that I had just a few hours ago with members of the minister's staff. I have a couple of questions, specific questions with our B.C. wildfire service pertaining to this spring.

All indications, from what I've seen and what I've heard, and maybe the minister can back me up on this, is that our spring is looking to be drier than it normally should be. If we have a very quick memory of what happened in 2023, the similarities are striking, inasmuch as we could be in exactly the same scenario as we had in 2023. I think everyone in this room would agree how disastrous that was, not only for the province but for the people that live here.

So I have a couple of specific questions to the minister in regards to B.C. wildfire service and initial response.

The first one is: why did the B.C. wildfire service transfer the initial response team from Chetwynd to Dawson Creek? There was a statement made that the crew is only 20 minutes away from Chetwynd by helicopter. My question to the minister is: how many helicopters are stationed in Dawson Creek, and if they're not stationed in Dawson Creek, what is the nearest helicopter in that area?

The second question that I have, and I brought this to the minister's attention last week when we were in the House, is to do with the incident attack crew that used to be in Clearwater.

Just for a couple of points of clarity. Kamloops to Valemount is 322 kilometres, and Clearwater to Valemount is 200 kilometres. I would think that's a fairly large forested area for us to be trying to protect in a fire season. I'm asking the question: why does it seem that the district of Clearwater is recognizing the need for an initial attack crew in their community to protect their area of the North Thompson Valley, yet the B.C. wildfire service does not?

My question to the minister is: now that it looks like our spring is dry, is there an opportunity for the B.C. wildfire service to look at other opportunities in Chetwynd and Dawson Creek and also for Clearwater and any other areas that may be potentially impacted by a dry and hazardous fire season?

[8:00 p.m.]

[Nina Krieger in the chair.]

The Chair: Recognizing the Minister or Forests.

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Thank you, Madam Chair. I didn't see you there. Welcome to this fun debate and discussion we're having.

[8:05 p.m.]

This is a serious topic. I thank the member opposite for raising it.

I want him and his colleagues to know that as a coastal MLA, I haven't fully appreciated — in my time, as someone raised in Langford, living in southern Vancouver Island — the impacts that wildfires have on rural communities, the Interior or the northern part of the province, and also the coast as well. I remember being the MLA for Sooke a couple of years ago and the impact of the Old Man Lake Fire, and that was an eye-opener for me.

So maybe just at a high level, I want to make a commitment to the members across the way that as we are heading into the wildfire season, as we are in the wildfire season, a full commitment from myself and the B.C. wildfire service team to ensure that there are updates, there are briefings, that we provide the information.

I think there's been a very good practice, no matter who is in power, to ensure that all members, whether they're government, opposition, Third Party, even independents, have the information they need. At the end of the day, you folks are going to be the ones, the members across the way, getting calls from your constituents, and it's really important for us to be able to provide that information.

I know in the past, the Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness and the Minister of Forests, responsible for the B.C. wildfire service, worked together in some cases to provide daily calls, daily updates.

What I'll leave as a commitment is that in the weeks ahead, I'll engage with my counterpart, the Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness, around developing a strategy to provide briefings and just set a bit

of a schedule in terms of making sure that members across the way, also members of the government caucus, get the information they need; also provide some opportunity for them to be able to better understand the supports that the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness provides; the work that the B.C. wildfire service provides as well.

I would also add, maybe just at the outset, that we'll be providing some modelling updates and some updates as it pertains to preparing for the 2025 wildfire season. I want the member to know that every single year, we are preparing for the worst-case scenario. We have no choice but not to. The team in the wildfire service is doing that work right now. Again, we'll be happy to provide more details, as it's obviously a very fluid situation — always preparing for the worst-case scenario.

As it pertains to the B.C. wildfire service, we are on track to be fully prepared for the 2025 wildfire season and the freshet season as well. As I touched on, the B.C. wildfire service works with Emergency Management and Climate Readiness, with local governments and First Nations in preparation for wildfire season, and it's really important for me to be able to share that we've always had a continued focus on key relationships, key partnerships and building capacity and preparedness in response.

I would add the B.C. Cattlemen's Association as an example of that. I met with the president of the B.C. Cattlemen's Association a couple of weeks ago when I was in Kamloops and talked a bit about, you know, from his perspective, the relationship between B.C. wildfire service and the B.C. Cattlemen's Association. We're starting from a position of strength. I think there are always opportunities to be able to grow that across industry and local governments as well.

I also want to recognize, as I have, the disproportionate impact that wildfires have on local governments, especially where the member represents in the Interior and the North. It's always helpful to hear ideas and perspectives from local government leaders, community leaders on how best we can work together. I'm really proud of the work that the B.C. wildfire service has been doing for the last number of years, in particular the last couple of years, and just making sure that they're rooted on the ground, hearing those concerns and providing that information as well.

Again, I encourage folks to download the B.C. Wildfire app that provides a lot of information. The B.C. wildfire service has set up the FireSmart pilot program for regional district cooperative community wildfire response. Organizations are coordinated through UBCM, which provides funding to regional districts in B.C. to increase community resiliency and help build a cooperative pathway for wildfire response by undertaking training and purchasing PPE for local community members in areas that do not fall within a structural fire protection jurisdiction area.

I'll also share with the member that B.C. wildfire service is continuing to expand the use of night vision goggle technology for aerial rotary night operations, including nighttime detection and tanking. B.C. wildfire service has expanded its long-term rotary wing aircraft for the 2025 wildfire season to ensure the availability and an increased response posture. This in addition to the aircrafts that are hired when required, based on hazard and response requirements.

[8:10 p.m.]

This is something that I'm really proud of in terms of the work of our government. B.C. wildfire service has grown its full-time staffing by 55 percent since 2021, to be able to better plan, prepare, respond and mitigate the impacts of wildfires — again, because of the work that we've done on this side of the House to be able to make the B.C. wildfire service full-time, all year round. It was why we were able to be in a position to be able to provide resources to our counterparts in Cal Fire.

I'll also add that I was in Merritt a couple of weeks ago announcing that the 2025 wildfire season broke a record in terms of the number of new recruits that wanted to join the B.C. wildfire service, over 1,700 applications by January 2025. I expect that there were some more that have come in, and boot camps are beginning in the next couple of weeks.

During the 2024 wildfire season, B.C. wildfire service also invested \$16 million to expand B.C. wildfire service's on-the-ground firefighting equipment. We acquired two additional mass water systems, we acquired additional structure protection units, and we also began the process of establishing a new equipment depot in Prince George, which I think the member opposite may have asked for an update on from Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness in the other estimates. Happy to provide an update on that if they're interested.

We also increased the number of First Nations partners for initial attacks, for Indigenous communities to respond to wildfires, and increased from 149 to 162 initial attack crews.

As it pertains to the member's question around the communities of Chetwynd and Clearwater and the specifics around Dawson Creek, I would say a couple of things. We don't have crews in every community. We have provincial resources. They are pre-positioned, and these are decisions not made by myself. These are decisions made by the B.C. wildfire service based on the intel and planning that happens — a great team that does really important work. So I would say resources, inclusive of crews, will be pre-positioned in communities with forward attack bases.

To really respond to, I think, the premise of the member's question, a couple of pieces. One is we are always going to be there to help communities impacted by wildfires. I want it to be very clear that we are not going to abandon any community. The B.C. wildfire service is world-class.

I mean that. They will be there to support communities wherever we need to be able to better support the challenges that we will be dealing with as it relates to wildfires.

Just to reiterate, these are provincial resources, so as we look at pre-positioning them, this is a decision made by the B.C. wildfire service. There may be a year, a few months from now, where, based off of the intel, the B.C. wildfire service may make the decision to actually pre-position an initial attack crew in Clearwater. It may make a decision to pre-position an initial attack crew in Chetwynd, in Clearwater. Those are decisions made. All of the resources we have are provincial resources. Where the fires happen, those are where the resources go.

I'll just say that one of the reasons I went to Clearwater, besides to talk about forestry in Barriere and throughout the region and to engage with the Simpcw Nation, was to specifically go and talk to the mayor of Clearwater, who's been quite vocal. And again, I fully understand and appreciate the challenges that his community faces as it relates to wildfires and wildfire service.

I brought along Jeff from our B.C. wildfire service team in Kamloops to be able to help support me in conversations, and it was a great conversation. The Simpcw Nation has an initial attack crew. The member opposite, I think, is well aware of that. They've been doing great work. We have a great partnership with them, and I welcome the opportunity for us to be able to work with the Clearwater volunteer firefighter department, with the mayor, to be able to help increase their capacity and to be able to work in tandem with them.

We have got a great working relationship. I have had a great working relationship with the mayor of Clearwater — actually, funny enough, with the mayor of Clearwater and Chetwynd. I met them at a UBCM probably six, seven years ago. They are outstanding representatives for their communities. I think the member and I will agree. I have, in many cases, chatted with them, sometimes weekly and biweekly, since I became minister.

Looking forward to ensuring that we have strong relationships and we continue to have strong relationships between the B.C. wildfire service, the Ministry of Forests and those communities.

[8:15 p.m.]

Larry Neufeld: As representative for Peace River South, I would like to let the minister know that the communities of Dawson Creek and Chetwynd are both in my riding.

I'd also like to let the minister know that having driven through that area many, many times, I can recount an experience whereby driving to a vacation property in Powder King, my wife and I drove past a very small pilot of smoke, or a very small amount. By the time we arrived in Powder King less than an hour later, the entire valley was on fire.

I can further let the minister know that there are no

helicopters permanently positioned in Dawson Creek. With the initial attack force being moved from Chetwynd to Dawson Creek — that would take over an hour's drive in one direction — that hour's drive, I would question.... At what point do we put lives at risk? That is my significant concern.

The Chair: Can you please repeat the question, Member?

Larry Neufeld: Will the minister consider reviewing the decision to move the initial attack force from Chetwynd to Dawson, and return it to Chetwynd?

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Thanks to the member opposite for the question.

I just want to reiterate: all of the resources we have are provincial resources. B.C. wildfire service makes decisions in preparation for every season. Being that these are provincial resources, there may be a year in the 2025 wildfire season where we decide, based off of the intel, based off of the modelling that we have, that it's best-positioned to have the resource in Chetwynd, or it may be the best decision to have it in Clearwater.

Again, these are provincial resources, and even if they are based to begin with in those communities, they may move as well. Again, it's really important. These are provincial resources.

Ward Stamer: Yeah, and just as a point of reference, too, to the minister, it was way back in the beginning of our fire season 2021 when I was fortunate enough to speak at the TNRD and specifically asked for full-time firefighters. So that request went back a long way for municipal leaders. I'm glad that the B.C. wildfire service decided to do that in the spring of 2022, and I think we've all benefited from it immensely.

If I may, let's switch over from B.C. wildfire service. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on that.

Can we get back to the BCTS? When we talk about certainty of supply, I'd like to offer up a couple of examples. What they relate to are some of the challenges that we have in our stumpage system. I think we talked about it earlier, about the challenges of the fact that we have the highest cost structure in North America. Part of that is our stumpage system and the system that we use to pay for the opportunity to harvest off of Crown land.

I just wanted to share this from one of the members of a First Nation group and just allow the minister to respond on some of the realities that are occurring in our BCTS system and see if there's anything that the minister can add to this.

In a provincial BCTS stumpage model.... We're just going to use some very simple numbers. Let's say a mill or a manufacturing facility offers \$100 a cubic metre to broker

for a BCTS block that has been purchased. The broker takes 5 percent, which is \$5. The logger takes \$60, which will be for doing the work and the transportation. That puts the BCTS bid at \$35.

When a First Nations forest company does it — and let's say they use their woodlot, as an example — the stumpage is \$35, because that's set as the example from BCTS. The logger takes the \$60 for the harvesting and the transportation. The broker takes \$5, the mill buys the wood for \$100, and the nation makes nothing.

As the nations are usually not the broker or the logger and they don't have mills to create profits, a change in the stumpage system is the only way to incentivize First Nations to harvest. They will not harvest trees if they cannot make any money. Therefore, many nations are not harvesting and have created the economic benefits associated with this for their people.

Obviously, allowing that fibre to flow back into our primary facilities.... Again, without the primary facilities, we don't have value-added in this province, because without making dimensional lumber, they are not able to make those secondary products that we need just as much as the primary products.

[8:20 p.m.]

In addition, if the current provincial stumpage system is not flexible to allow for different or innovative harvesting methods — i.e., partial harvesting or commercial thinning, especially when working in the wildland urban interface.... When we're working on a harvest on a reserve, the federal government dropped the stumpage in half to help offset the additional cost of partial-cut harvesting being used for the fire hazard abatement and ecological restoration.

My question to the minister is: is that an option that we can do, going forward, to help our First Nations and to be able to unlock more fibre to our mills and our manufacturing facilities?

[8:25 p.m.]

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Thanks very much to the member for the question. That was a detailed question. I will do my best, respecting the time that we have, not to provide too long of an answer because I know the member has got lots of other questions as well. I'm not as detailed. I don't take as much time as maybe some other ministers.

At the outset, thanks very much for bringing this forward. I've said this at every speaking engagement that I've had: every idea is on the table. I'm looking for solutions.

You speak to the example that you shared. If that happens to be an example where First Nations would be interested in sharing that, I can make sure that they're in touch with the pricing team, and we can have that conversation. At the end of the day, we want to ensure that we have a pricing system in place that doesn't have barriers, and

we're certainly open to making sure it is working as intended.

I'll share with the member that we have taken into account the cost of commercial thinning in the Interior. We don't have enough data on the coast, so that's work that's ongoing right now. We have taken into cost wildfire salvage. We're doing quite a bit of that work.

But on a broader perspective, what I'll also share is that one of the biggest components of work that we're doing with First Nations is revenue sharing.

This was a priority that was shared, as the member will know, at COFI, as well, which doubled revenue sharing with First Nations in 2022. I would say it's a key part of our work as part of the BCTS review. One of the reasons why I asked Lenny Joe, CEO of the First Nations Forestry Council, to be a part of this review is based off of the relationships and experiences that he has on the ground.

One of the overall goals as part of the BCTS review — the member may have seen the seven pillars that I had laid out — was making sure that BCTS was a partner of choice.

I would encourage the member if he hears of folks.... If the example that he shared is a nation that may be willing to come forward, it's important that we hear those ideas, and it's certainly important that we're listening to those and adapting as needed.

Ward Stamer: Thanks again to the minister for his response.

To add to that, when we talk about commercial thinning and we talk about fuel mitigation and trying to equate them in some of the same equations, I guess as a word.... When we use FESBC as an example, it's a very expensive model because it's about \$15,000 a hectare, as the minister is aware of.

I think, going forward, if we're going to be looking at opportunities to be able to increase what we can do on the land base, we're going to have to find cost savings, and that means more recovery from those opportunities, particularly with partial logging contractors, like I was before in my previous life.

To be able to integrate some of those opportunities, particularly this time of year when we know it's breakup.... But the only reason it's breakup is because anything over 1,000 metres is still too wet. The ground is still saturated. That's why we call it breakup, because we can't go back.

But there are opportunities in the lower areas, particularly in the interface, where we could probably be doing a bunch of this work with the existing workforce. The challenge will be — the minister will probably agree with me — that if we don't try to keep this industry alive in the short term, we won't have those contractors available in the long term.

So a question to the minister. When we talk about opportunities on the land base.... Up at COFI, there was another call by B.C. Community Forest to increase the op-

portunities and tenure throughout the province in all of our community forests that we have.

Now I'm going to give an opportunity to thank the Lower North Thompson Community Forest, which was formed after the fire in Barriere, in 2003, on the great work that they do. I'm not just patting myself on the back, because I was a director for a while. But they've done some amazing work with the ministry in being able to have a sustainable model of 20,000 cubic metres in an area.

[8:30 p.m.]

I can argue that, with their intense management — with their RPF, Mike Francis, and his assistants and all the great work that the directors have done — that is a sustainable model that we would like to be able to replicate through all the province. Yes, there are opportunities to possibly grow those community forests in B.C.

My question to the minister: if it seems like we're getting a shrinking land base, and we're trying to work on a sustainable plan, how are we going to be able to increase the opportunities for community forests, knowing that those products are going to be going to the same manufacturing facilities that share in the licence in the same operating area as the community forests are?

If we're going to be shrinking the total harvest land base on our major industries, how can we coexist with an increase to community forests, with an increase with the First Nations and with an increase and sustainability for our main forest industry partners?

Hon. Ravi Parmar: At the outset, maybe what I'll say is that I agree with the member that it is so important that we steward our land base, that we make.... I think we already, to an extent, here in British Columbia....

[8:35 p.m.]

I don't think we get recognition, certainly at a government level or, more importantly, the workers on the ground, of how much work is happening in sustainability, in stewarding that land base. If we can work together to deliver that message all across British Columbia, I'd be excited to do that.

There is also such a massive job opportunity here. I think many people think of forestry as just people working in mills. It is so much more than that. I have a vision for a forest sector that includes thousands of young people, not just working on planting trees, which is starting in the days and weeks ahead as we start our tree planting season, but going in and doing that commercial thing, going in and doing that partial harvesting and selective logging all over the land base.

As the member will know, during my COFI speech.... I believe quite strongly that when we look at areas of protection, we have to steward those lands as well. I flew over the territories of the Cheslatta First Nation and saw a nation that has been severely impacted by wildfires and floods over the last number of decades. In particular, the Chief

shared with me the continuous cover harvesting work that they want to do and how they want to work on that in areas like old growth management areas, making sure that we're doing this work.

I'll share with the member that we didn't create provincial parks just to see them burn down. We didn't protect old growth management areas just to see them burn down. So there is a massive, massive job opportunity here to be going in and doing this work. Obviously, the broader aspect of it is the job creation, and also the pricing that goes alongside it, because government can't always be subsidizing this work. We have to find a way to be able to make the pricing work as well.

I'm really excited about it, and if the member has ideas on how we can do this work, I welcome them. Again, I was in his community. There was a really good discussion happening in Barriere by Gilbert Forest Products on it, and Chief Lampreau engaged on it as well.

I'll jump into the second part of his question. The member is absolutely right. A key commitment in my mandate letter is expanding community forests. This is quite an exciting opportunity. Community forests do so much for British Columbians all across the province. Community forests pay for the infrastructure, pay for the services. So many communities have had an opportunity to talk to so many community forests.

I've also got a great working relationship with Jennifer Gunter, who is the lead of the B.C. Community Forest Association. The Ministry of Forests is working alongside the B.C. Community Forest Association on what an expansion looks like, some of the criteria. I know one key piece that Premier Horgan challenged the industry on was making sure there were more opportunities for First Nations tenure, not just First Nations woodlot and woodland licences but also opportunities for partnerships with community forests.

I think the member may be aware there are tons of examples where community forests that were just operated by local governments are now including First Nations as partners at that table, and everyone is sharing in the wealth — sharing in the wealth because those fibres are going to mills.

I want to give some shout-outs. One is to Vanderhoof. Their community forest, because of the leadership of the mayor and council, I think is playing a critical role in supporting Nechako Lumber in that community. Nechako Lumber has gone through challenges over the years, but the community forest has always been there to back them up. The community benefits from it by having Nechako Lumber providing good-paying jobs. I had an opportunity to tour that mill a couple of months ago.

There's another one. Burns Lake, which is one of the largest community forests in the entire province, is doing incredible work, doing incredible wildfire mitigation work. There are tons of examples. Frank Varga, who man-

ages that community forest, I think could probably teach Community Forests 101 on the work that needs to happen. Frank also sits on one of our FLP tables up at the lakes resiliency table.

What I'll end with is saying that this is an exciting part of the mandate. Community forests play a critical role in our province. I think there is an opportunity for the ministry and the forest service to be able to work with the existing community forests, those that want to look at expanding community forests, those that want a new community forest. We're going to be working in tandem across the province.

[8:40 p.m.]

Again, I really want to thank Jennifer and the team at the B.C. Community Forest Association for working in tandem with us to ensure that as we begin this work, as we work to fulfil my mandate, we're doing so by looking at the entire province as part of that.

I thank the member for the question. And again, I'll just reiterate on the first part. Stewarding our land base is something that First Nations, Indigenous peoples, have been doing since time immemorial, and it's time for us to step up and do the same.

There is good work happening there, and anything we can do as a ministry, as a forest service, to increase that, to create more good-paying jobs — again, not just planting trees but doing the commercial thinning, doing all of the wildfire mitigation work that is happening, that could be happening at an even larger pace — is something that excites me.

And again, if the member across the way has ideas on how we can revamp our efforts and do more of that, happy to do so.

Ward Stamer: I thank the minister for his response.

I'd like to pick up on what the minister just mentioned, and I'm wondering if we can expand a little bit on that. If we're going to be talking about sustainability and we're going to be talking about forest health....

Just a little while ago, we were talking about wildfires and the risks with those wildfires, and I believe the minister just mentioned park boundaries and old-growth management strategies. Is the minister suggesting that maybe we should be proactive, along with our First Nations partners, and remove some of this fuel risk and mitigating efforts in our parks and our old-growth management areas?

I mean, is he suggesting that we go and identify those hazardous areas in those areas that have been roped off? Should we be looking at removing those fuels and those trees in a proactive way so that the entire park doesn't burn down?

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Yes, and I think we....

Do we have time for a couple more questions?

The Chair: Noting the hour, I think we should probably wrap up. We have about two more minutes.

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Apologies to the Minister of Energy. I know he's having a good time.

I move that the committee rise and report resolution and completion of the estimates of the Ministry of En-

vironment and Parks and report progress on the Ministry of Forests and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The Chair: Thank you, Members. This committee stands adjourned.

The committee rose at 8:42 p.m.

HANSARD SERVICES

Director: D'Arcy McPherson
Administrative Coordinator: Shawna Turner
Financial Officer: Cheleen Lam

REPORTING SERVICES

Manager: Marianne Cronin

EDITORIAL

Team Leaders: Treava Kellington, Paula Lee, Sarah Mitenko, Glenn Wigmore
Editorial Teams: Janet Brazier, Jithin Chandrabose, Jalen Codrington, Richard Davies, Cameron Duder, Thistle Dunsmuir, Janet Eastwood, Jane Grainger, Betsy Gray, Iris Gray, Simon Haisell, Lori-Ann Hill, Bill Hrick, Alexandra Hursey, Alison Jacques, Allison Lewis, Claire Matthews, Anastasia Organ, Erik Pedersen, Danielle Seymour, Robyn Swanson, Heather Warren, Erin Weldon, Kim Westad

GALLEY

Team Leader: Barb Horricks
Galley Team: Quinn MacDonald

RESEARCH

Team Leader: Mike Beninger
Research Team: Hengshen Liu, Katherine Stewart

PUBLISHING SYSTEMS

Manager: Dan Kerr

INDEXING

Team Leader: Kim Christie
Indexing Team: Shannon Ash, Brooke Isherwood

SOFTWARE AND SYSTEMS

Publishing Systems Architect and Team Leader: Michael Joyce
Software and Systems Team: Alex Baer, Graham Caverhill, Pamela Holmes

BROADCASTING SERVICES

Manager: Andrew Henry

AUDIO

Audio Operations Supervisor: Simon de Laat
Console Operators: Amanda Heffelfinger, Dwight Schmidt, Danielle Suter

BROADCAST OPERATIONS

Senior Broadcast Operations Technician: Steve Gullickson
Broadcast Operations Technician: Ian Battle, Ryan Spedding, Steve Weisgerber

ENGINEERING

Senior Broadcast Technologist: Robert Froese
Broadcast Technologists: Ismael Ribeiro, Dave Gamble

INFRASTRUCTURE

Broadcast Infrastructure Architect and Team Leader: Roberto Arroyave
Broadcasting Systems and Integration Specialist: David Smith

Copyright © 2025 Legislative Assembly of British Columbia

Published by Hansard Services under the authority
of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

The Official Report of Debates (Hansard) and webcasts
of chamber proceedings are available at www.leg.bc.ca.

For inquiries contact Hansard Services
612 Government Street, Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4 | 250-387-3681 | hansardservices@leg.bc.ca