



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

Second Session, 43rd Parliament

**OFFICIAL REPORT
OF DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday, February 25, 2026
Afternoon Sitting
Issue No. 125**

THE HONOURABLE RAJ CHOUHAN, SPEAKER

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PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR

Her Honour the Honourable Wendy Cocchia, CM, OBC

Second Session, 43rd Parliament

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Honourable Raj Chouhan

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Attorney General and Deputy Premier	Hon. Niki Sharma, KC
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Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel.....	Seunghee Suzie Seo
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Clerk of Committees.....	Jennifer Arril
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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, Hon. 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, 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, 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, Hon. 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
Chan, Hon.	Richmond Centre	Milobar, Peter	Kamloops Centre
Chapman, Brent	Surrey South	Mok, Lawrence	Maple Ridge East
Clare, Sheldon	Prince George–North Cariboo	Neufeld, Korky	Abbotsford West
Davis, Pete	Kootenay Rockies	Neufeld, Larry	Peace River South
Day, Brennan	Courtenay–Comox	Paton, Ian	Delta South
Dew, Gavin	Kelowna–Mission	Rattée, Claire	Skeena
Dhaliwal, Mandeep	Surrey North	Rustad, John	Nechako Lakes
Doerkson, Lorne	Cariboo–Chilcotin	Stamer, Ward	Kamloops–North Thompson
Gasper, 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, A’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
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INDEPENDENT

Armstrong, Tara	Kelowna–Lake Country–Coldstream	Kealy, Jordan	Peace River North
Boulton, Amelia	Penticton–Summerland	Sturko, Elenore	Surrey–Cloverdale
Brodie, Dallas	Vancouver–Quilchena		

PARTY STANDINGS

Total seats – 93

BC NDP – 47 | Conservative Party of BC – 39 | BC Green Party – 2 | Independent – 5

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 McInnis
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–Burquitlam Hon. 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 Garry Begg
Surrey–Newton..... Hon. 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–FraserviewGeorge Chow
Vancouver–Hastings..... Hon. Niki Sharma, KC
Vancouver–Kensington Mable 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 LakeHon. Nina Krieger

W

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

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Hon. Adrian Dix
Amelia Boulton
David Williams
Hon. Niki Sharma
Jody Toor
Sunita Dhir
Macklin McCall

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2026

The House met at 1:33 p.m.

[The Speaker in the chair.]

Routine Business

Prayers and reflections: Rosalyn Bird.

[1:35 p.m.]

Introductions by Members

Janet Routledge: My Whip's assistant, my very capable Whip's assistant, has some special guests here today.

Please join me in welcoming her dad, Jeff Keenlside, and her grandma, Janis Murray.

Sunita Dhir: Today I would like to welcome in the House Mr. Bill Basra along with his wife, Mrs. Baldish Basra, from Vancouver. Bill is a long-time community advocate and the past president of Guru Ravidass Sabha in Burnaby.

Accompanying them is Mr. Gopal Lohia, who is my constituent and an active member in the community.

Along with these guests is a special group of Punjabi singers visiting from Punjab, India, along with their families.

Would the House please make them feel welcome.

Macklin McCall: I rise today to introduce two representatives from the National Police Federation, the certified bargaining agent representing the members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who serve communities across British Columbia under our provincial policing model.

Joining us is Chris Voller, a currently serving member of the RCMP and the director for the Pacific/north region of the National Police Federation. In 2021, Mr. Voller was appointed to the Order of Merit of the Police Forces. He has also been recognized by the International Association of Chiefs of Police as part of their 40 Under 40, and he is a recipient of the British Columbia Reconciliation Award. His recognition reflects not only professional excellence but leadership at a time when policing across our province faces increasing demands and expectations.

Also joining us is Colin Buschman, the western government relations adviser for the National Police Federation. Since 2021, Mr. Buschman has worked with government partners and stakeholders on issues directly affecting RCMP members and the sustainability of provincial policing.

The RCMP provide front-line policing in the vast majority of communities in British Columbia. Their members respond to emergencies, support disaster deploy-

ments, and uphold public safety in both rural and urban regions of our province.

The Conservative caucus is grateful to have the National Police Federation here today to discuss matters that affect their members and the strength of provincial policing in British Columbia.

I ask all members to join me in welcoming them to the Legislature.

Brent Chapman: I am proud to acknowledge a wonderful seniors living community in my constituency, Rosemary Heights Seniors Village. Their CEO, Graham Freeman, and general manager, Christian Bunz, are here with us in the chamber today. Rosemary Heights won the Workplace of the Year award last night at the B.C. Care Providers Association Care Awards ceremony.

The Workplace of the Year award recognizes BCCPA members in the seniors living and care sector who demonstrate exceptional staff engagement, recognition and positive workplace culture.

I would ask the House to join me in congratulating the team at Rosemary Heights for building a culture of trust, collaboration and moments that matter for the staff and, of course, the residents.

Darlene Rotchford: I'd like to make an introduction. Today I have Neil Parkinson-Dow, national coordinator of events and partnership of Public Service Pride Network. He's not just a constituent. He's also a member of one of three chambers of commerce in my riding.

As well, another proud chamber member, Brenda MacFarlane, financial consultant with IG Wealth Management.

Thank you for joining us in the House today.

Everyone make them feel welcome.

Brennan Day: I have a couple of introductions today.

I'd first like to introduce two guests joining us in the gallery: Mr. Scott Jackson, manager of advocacy; and Ms. Rebecca Frederick, director of community engagement with the Alzheimer Society of B.C.

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. provides vital support, education and advocacy for individuals and families affected by dementia across our province. Their work makes a meaningful difference in communities large and small and in the lives of British Columbians across this province.

I would also, since I just got notified about 20 minutes ago, like to introduce the six-pound, three-ounce beautiful baby girl, Amara Mackenzie Okagabwe-Day, who showed up right on time this morning. I could not be more proud of my amazing sister-in-law Aiko and my brother Ian and niece Kyra.

To all my amazing Nigerian in-laws who've flown across for this amazing event, big love from everybody here in B.C.

[1:40 p.m.]

Hon. Lisa Beare: I have two introductions today.

Joining us in the gallery right now are grades 6 and 7 students from Alouette Elementary, alongside their teacher Shirley Bice and some other guardians today.

Would the House please make them feel very welcome.

I also want to give a very warm welcome to the junior choir of Reynolds Secondary, who, this afternoon, during the lunch hour, performed an amazing song for us in the Hall of Honour to celebrate Pink Shirt Day.

Just a reminder to all of us in the House that it is Pink Shirt Day. We have kids in the House. Remember kindness, compassion and caring is the goal for the day and for always.

Misty Van Popta: In the House today, we have four members from the B.C. Care Providers Association. They are doing important work of advocacy and are the leading voice of B.C.'s seniors living, wellness and care sector. Today we have Lara Croll, Marc Kinna, Tiffany Trownson and Langley legend Mary Polak here in the chamber.

Will you please make them feel welcome.

Ward Stamer: My youngest daughter, Nicole, and husband, Connor, welcomed their second child and first son and grandson to the extended family, Kellen John Robert Dolighan, eight pounds, 15 ounces.

Please join me in congratulating Nicole, Connor and big sister Sophie.

A'a:liya Warbus: Today I'd like to take a moment to recognize my daughter Kesianne Warbus. She received Student of the Month from Kiwanis Club in Chilliwack. She is supported by Ms. Lisa Ego, who was a classmate of mine at Vedder Middle School.

She's thriving where she's at. She's being recognized for her hard work with the rest of the student body. I think it's so fitting today that we're talking about young people and kindness and compassion.

I just want to say to her: I think that you really exemplify that. I'm so proud.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

BILL M232 — LONG TERM CARE ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY ACT

Brennan Day presented a bill intituled Long Term Care Access and Transparency Act.

Brennan Day: I move that a bill intituled Long Term Care Access and Transparency Act, of which notice has been given in my name on the order paper, be introduced and read a first time now.

You cannot fix what you do not measure. This is the premise behind the Long Term Care Access and Trans-

parency Act. In British Columbia today, when it comes to long-term care, hospice beds and subsidized home supports, we are not measuring clearly, and we are certainly not reporting transparently.

This government has earned a reputation for secrecy. Families are left guessing how long their loved ones will wait, how many hospice beds are available or how long it takes to access home supports. The information is fragmented, inconsistent and too often buried.

This bill requires simple disclosure of data that should already be collected. It simply shines a light. Monthly reporting on long-term-care wait-lists, wait times, alternative level of care beds that are being taken up in hospitals, hospice capacity, deaths while waiting for care and access to home support wait-lists. If that data is not already being collected, we have a much bigger problem.

But transparency is only the first step. Currently in British Columbia, there is no meaningful public plan to address long-term-care capacity in this province. In fact, the most recent budget cancelled six long-term-care projects. Capacity is simply not keeping pace with our aging population.

This bill forces the government to publish and update annually a clear plan to address long-term-care beds, hospice capacity, wait-lists and care at home in full public view. This should be non-partisan. There is no reason to oppose transparency and a public plan unless the objective is to hide failure and be afraid of simple public accountability.

We will no longer accept decisions made in the dark that affect our most vulnerable population. Seniors deserve honesty, and this bill intends to give it to them.

To my colleagues of every political stripe: this bill is deserving of your support. Our parents and grandparents deserve absolutely nothing less.

[1:45 p.m.]

The Speaker: Members, the question is first reading of the bill.

Motion approved.

Brennan Day: I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Motion approved.

Members' Statements

SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

Susie Chant: I will start by acknowledging with gratitude that I'm speaking on the lands of the ləkʷəŋən People, specifically the Songhees and the xʷsepsəm.

When I'm at home in the riding of North Vancouver—

Seymour, I'm on the lands of the Skwxwú7mesh and səlil-wətał. I speak these names with honour and pride.

Today I would like to talk about and commend the extraordinary bravery of the Iranian people as they stand up for their dignity and their fundamental right to peaceful protest. Their courage in the face of repression has inspired people around the world, including many here in British Columbia who are deeply worried and troubled about their loved ones in Iran.

In British Columbia and in my community of North Vancouver, we are lucky to have a vibrant Iranian population, many of whom have shared stories about their families and the crushing fear that they feel.

I am proud that our Premier and Attorney General, as well as our federal government and governments across the world, condemn the killing of protesters, as well as the violence, arbitrary arrests and intimidation carried out by the Iranian regime against its own citizens.

The Iranian government has a responsibility to protect its population, not harm it. It must allow freedom of expression and peaceful assembly without fear of reprisal. The right to protest is fundamental, and no one should be threatened or punished for exercising it.

I stand firmly with the Iranian people, who continue to demonstrate remarkable courage as they call for justice and basic human rights. We mourn those who've been killed while peacefully protesting, and we call on the Iranian government to allow these demonstrations to continue without violence or intimidation.

PEACHLAND RECOGNITION AS KINDEST COMMUNITY

Macklin McCall: I rise today with great pride to recognize the community of Peachland for being named Canada's Kindest Community. Out of communities across this country, Peachland was selected for national recognition, backed by Coca-Cola and the Community Foundations of Canada. Along with that honour comes \$100,000 contributed to local support initiatives through the Central Okanagan Foundation.

Anyone who knows Peachland is not surprised by this recognition. Peachland is a small community with a very big heart. It is the kind of place where neighbours check on neighbours, where volunteers quietly carry the weight of community organizations without seeking recognition. In moments of challenge, including the wildfire seasons that test communities across the Okanagan, Peachland responds not with panic but with care, coordination and neighbourly support, where seniors are supported, food banks are stocked and community groups set up before anyone has to ask.

Kindness in Peachland is not a campaign. It is not a one-time act. It is simply how people live. I have seen it

firsthand at the Peachland Wellness Centre, through local service clubs, through volunteers who show up week after week to make sure no one is left behind.

What makes Peachland special is not just generosity in moments of difficulty. It is consistency. It is the steady everyday acts of care that build trust, belonging and resilience. That is why this recognition matters. It reflects who the people of Peachland truly are. It tells the rest of Canada something we in the Okanagan have long known, that the strength of a community is measured not only in growth or infrastructure but in how its people treat one another.

As a local MLA, I could not be more proud to represent this community.

To the residents, volunteers, families, small business owners and community leaders of Peachland: this honour belongs to you. You have shown the country that kindness is not weakness. It is strength, it is leadership, and it is the foundation of a community that looks after its own.

PINK SHIRT DAY

Amshen / Joan Phillip: Today I'm proud to mark Pink Shirt Day, recognizing students, educators, families and community members throughout B.C. who are standing together against bullying.

[1:50 p.m.]

Pink Shirt Day was created by the compassionate leadership of students in Nova Scotia in response to homophobic bullying and hate.

This year Pink Shirt Day comes at a difficult time. Recent acts of violence have shaken communities and left many people feeling grief and uncertainty. We must centre the humanity of all people. But we are seeing harmful, divisive rhetoric. Vulnerable communities, including members of the 2SLGBTQIA community and particularly our friends in the trans community.... We must stand against this hate.

Young people are watching. They learn how we act. Our schools and our communities must be places where every person feels safe being themselves without fear of bullying. That safety should not depend on who they are, how they identify or what they believe. Pink Shirt Day may have started in classrooms, but bullying exists everywhere. We contribute to the problem or the solution by how we act in this House, in our communities and in our homes.

Today students across the province are choosing kindness and solidarity. They are showing impressive leadership in their own schools and communities. We cannot allow our differences to lead to dehumanization or to be seen as a threat. We need to build a future for everyone, because our strength is found in unity and love. We can't let hate divide us.

BULLYING PREVENTION AND PRACTICE OF VALUES OF KINDNESS AND INCLUSION

Kristina Loewen: When my kids were in elementary school at Rose Valley, they had a special bench on the playground. It was a bench you could go to and sit on if you were feeling lonely. It was a signal to the other children that you were looking for someone to play with, someone to connect with.

I loved that for my children. I loved that one of my kids would go and watch for others to sit down and then go and befriend them. I loved it for the kids who felt sad, lonely or left out, because it took away the stigma and the sting. It made it socially acceptable to say: “Hey, I need a buddy. I’m not thriving today.”

But it did something else. It gave that child a voice. It gave them an opportunity to advocate for themselves and to ask for a friend. There were no victims. There were no bullies. There was only opportunity on both sides.

I think about that today, on a day when we talk about anti-bullying, and I wonder: where would you be on that playground? Where would I be? What if the playground is your caucus or this chamber? Would you dare to sit on that bench and show your vulnerability? Would you dare to cross the field and extend that friendship?

It is not lost on me, and I don’t believe it’s lost on any of you, that what happens in this chamber and the way that we treat each other is reflected in the greater community, in our province, in our families and amongst our neighbours. Every member in this chamber is elected. We are elected to make life better for British Columbians, and they are depending on us to do just that.

This is about perspective. It’s about putting ourselves in the shoes of others, recognizing that we never truly know the struggles someone else may be facing or the personal circumstances they may be carrying.

Every day members highlight beautiful stories of our ridings — stories of generosity, innovation and community. Every day we speak about kindness, inclusion and equality. But at times, we fail. We fail British Columbians when we do not model these same values here in this chamber, in the bathrooms, in the hallways, in the dining rooms and in our caucus rooms, even in how we follow parliamentary procedure.

So let us do better today. That is what British Columbians elected us to do, and their lives depend on it.

B.C. WINTER GAMES

Steve Morissette: I rise today to celebrate the 33rd B.C. Winter Games and the incredible opportunity they bring to our province, especially this year to the host communities of Trail and Rossland, with support from Castlegar and the Beaver Valley.

From today through March 1, the hills, rinks and gyms

of the area will showcase 15 sports and welcome as many as 1,700 athletes, coaches and officials from every corner of B.C., supported by the same number of local volunteers. [1:55 p.m.]

The B.C. Games are where dreams come alive. They are where young athletes discover what they are capable of and take their first steps toward provincial, national and even international competition. The games are extraordinary not just for the competition but for the personal and community growth they inspire. Young athletes learn resilience, teamwork, leadership and how to rise after setbacks — skills that build both stronger competitors and more confident young people.

Outside of the competition, the B.C. Games energize host communities. Volunteers step up, local businesses thrive, and hotels and restaurants welcome visitors from throughout the province. The result is meaningful rural economic impact and strengthened community bonds that showcase the very best of who we are.

That is why our government invests \$50 million annually in sport to provide safe and inclusive opportunities for more than 870,000 members of amateur sport organizations in British Columbia. When we host an event like the B.C. Winter Games, we’re investing in healthy, connected communities.

I ask all members of this House to join me in celebrating the B.C. Winter Games and cheering on all the athletes, coaches and volunteers. Let the games begin.

MEGAN ROKEBY-THOMAS

Harman Bhangu: This past Saturday, February 21, I had the honour of attending the memorial service for Megan Rokeby-Thomas. It is heartbreaking to stand here speaking about her.

One of my first major issues I worked on as an MLA was travelling to East Shore during the Kootenay Bay–Bal-four ferry strike. That was when I came to know Megan. Everywhere I went, people spoke about her, how she advocated for everyone, how she showed up for her community and how she wanted what was best for people.

She carried herself with a quiet strength and genuine care. That wasn’t just something she said; that is who she was. It felt, though, as the entire town and surrounding communities gathered, that people made the ferry crossing to the other side of the lake just to be there. That alone speaks volumes. Voices were lifted in songs. Stories were shared. It was not just a time of mourning but a celebration of life that clearly touched so many.

It was an honour to meet Megan’s husband, son Byron and Byron’s young family. The strength they carried through such a difficult day was deeply moving.

Small communities like East Shore thrive because of people like Megan, people who deeply care, who put others first and work tirelessly for their neighbours.

Megan will be deeply missed. Our thoughts are with her family, her friends and the entire East Shore community.

Oral Questions

GOVERNMENT GIFT CARD PROGRAMS AND SPENDING PRIORITIES

Peter Milobar: Yesterday we discovered that yet again, this Premier and this government is a government that says one thing and does another.

They say we need fiscal restraint. They say they're cutting out all unnecessary spending. They say they're going to send a message to the public service and the public that they're going to get things under control. Then an FOI reveals that gift cards are getting purchased not just from your local coffee shop but also from predominantly American companies like Amazon, Walmart and Starbucks, while the Premier touts a buy-B.C. policy.

There is absolutely zero accountability for this government's finances. In fact, I think people at home would have preferred to get a \$500 grocery gift card from this government, but that was withdrawn shortly after the election as well. Since 2022, when the member for Vancouver-Point Grey, the Premier, became the Premier, the government has spent, on purchase cards, \$6.3 million on Amazon alone.

A simple question to the minister: just how much money was actually spent on these gift cards by government?

Hon. Brenda Bailey: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. There are two things that are primarily the source of why these gift cards are used.

[2:00 p.m.]

The first one is that gift cards are sometimes used as recognition for folks working in the public service. There is a guideline that the gift card be no more than \$100, and they're used for recognition, often for long service or for a particular thing that someone in the public service has done.

The second way that gift cards are sometimes used.... When there has been, for example, a new website and we have volunteers from the community who are testing that website, the honorarium is sometimes a gift card.

It is true that sometimes these gift cards might be a coffee shop that is a Starbucks or a Tim Hortons, owned by an American company, but, of course, in small communities, many people are employed at these spots, so that's important to recognize.

It is true that this government is devoted to making sure we spend our taxpayer dollars wisely, but I do want to say that it is very, very clear to us that our public service works very hard to deliver services for British Columbians.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Shhh.

Hon. Brenda Bailey: A small recognition of the hard work that they do is not something that I'm embarrassed about. It is something that I'm proud of. These people do great work, and these are small recognitions.

The Speaker: Member, supplemental.

Peter Milobar: Wow. Tell that to the senior on fixed income that just had their taxes increased in this budget.

The question was actually how much was spent, and the minister wouldn't answer. Instead, she said "guidelines." But we know that certain people actually got \$200, not the \$100 guideline that the minister might want to indicate. So obviously, there are not tight rules, there is not tight control, and the minister doesn't even know how much is being spent on gift cards. That was the actual question.

So given that and given that there is a complete lack of oversight and understanding and hard-and-fast rules, will the minister commit today to cancelling the gift card giveaway scheme?

Hon. Brenda Bailey: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

Of course, these gift cards are used very appropriately to recognize members of the Public Service Agency who have gone above and beyond. It's normal to provide a small recognition for people. Most of these gift cards are in the \$15 range.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Member. Members.

Hon. Brenda Bailey: The member opposite asked for some numbers. I will share with the member what I understand.

The FOI FOI'd 15 different ministries and organizations. We're talking about \$15,000 over almost a two-year period. That's about \$1,000 per ministry or \$500 per year. It is true that there were, I think, two that were above the \$100 guideline, and I understand that the head of the public service is going to make that guideline a hard cap going forward.

The Speaker: Member, second supplemental.

Peter Milobar: So instead of a removal, we're just going to play with the guidelines.

Here's the thing. Questionable judgment needs to be questioned, and that's what the opposition is here for.

The city of Richmond used to give almost the exact same answers as this minister did when their gift cards

were discovered. Let's look at what happened there. Between January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2024, approximately \$450,000 of gift cards were actually discovered on a program that was first characterized as small, \$15 here and there, for staff inducement. Now here's the thing. That budget in that three-year period was about \$750 million at the city of Richmond.

The minister doesn't actually know. She hasn't bothered to ask, other than FOI documents that have been released to the media. She didn't pick up the phone to her own ministries to find out what the actual dollar figure is, knowing this would come up in media and in question period.

What we have found with these gift card schemes is that it's always bigger than first expected. There are always a lot of discrepancies. In the case of Richmond, they can't find \$300,000 worth of those \$450,000 worth of gift cards.

Why are this minister and this Premier deciding to hide and defend this gift card scheme instead of just bringing full transparency to it and removing the program altogether?

Hon. Brenda Bailey: Thank you to the member opposite. I do hear the member taking a very negative story and trying to attach it to a very different circumstance here.

Let me point out some really important areas of differentiation. Each one of these gift cards is attached to an individual person. The example the member gave opposite was bulk buying of gift cards that was very out of control. This is an extremely different circumstance. We have very clear ability to track every one of these gift cards.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Shhh.

Hon. Brenda Bailey: We know exactly who they were attached to, what they were for and what the amount of money was.

Claire Rattée: This Premier promised a \$1,000 grocery rebate. He promised that we would have educational assistants in every K-through-3 classroom. This Premier has promised a lot of things that he hasn't delivered on.

[2:05 p.m.]

Instead, we've learned that this government has spent tens of thousands of taxpayer dollars on gift cards for public service employees that are already making in excess of \$100,000 a year, far more in some cases, all while running a \$13 billion deficit. This comes on the heels of the Minister of Finance taking a \$44,000 taxpayer-funded trip to Boston last year that included thousands on limos and fine dining.

British Columbians are being told to tighten their belts.

Why does the same discipline never apply to this government?

Hon. Brenda Bailey: These gift cards are primarily in the \$15 range and are provided to people as a recognition of their service, mostly coffee gift cards. There are some gift cards that are in the \$100 range, the \$50 range, that are for recognition of long service.

Our Public Service Agency... We know they choose to work for our government usually because they care very much about delivering service. They could make more money elsewhere. It's reasonable for us to reward work of people who are serving British Columbians with such diligence.

The Speaker: Member, supplemental.

Claire Rattée: You know who didn't get a \$100 gift card, not even a \$15 gift card? The children with autism who had their funding cut in this year's budget. Or the people that are living on disability assistance that make \$18,000 a year work. They are surviving on \$18,000 a year. That's less than half the cost of that trip I just mentioned.

Other people that didn't get a gift card: seniors struggling to keep a roof over their heads or the small businesses that are already operating on razor-thin margins that are now being hit with new PST burdens.

A simple question to the Premier. Why did he prioritize gift cards for public servants over kids with autism?

Hon. Jodie Wickens: I want to really point out to the members opposite that our redesign for children and youth with support needs was necessary in our province — 475 million new dollars for children and youth with disabilities. This has never been done before in this province.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Shhh, Members.

Hon. Jodie Wickens: We know, and members across the way have gotten emails and had meetings with, families for whom the current system was not working. Thousands of children who never received support before are now going to receive support for the first time.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members. Members.

Hon. Jodie Wickens: A one-size-fits-all approach was not working for children and youth in our province. Experts told us that. Families told us that.

I want to point something out to the members opposite. When the Leader of the Opposition worked for the B.C. Liberal government in 2009, my ministry budget was cut

by \$469 million. That is nearly half a billion dollars that was cut to children and families. We are still making up for that today.

My ministry's budget has increased year over year over year.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Shhh.

Hon. Jodie Wickens: We know exactly what a B.C. Liberal, B.C. Conservative, OneBC, B.C. United government would do to children and families. They would cut services. They've done it before, and they would do it again.

PROTECTION OF OLD-GROWTH FORESTS

Rob Botterell: In 2023, this government announced \$1 billion in federal and provincial funding to conserve nature. Through tools like conservation financing, the government promised to ease the transition of local economies away from old-growth harvesting while respecting the sovereignty of First Nations.

We know old-growth forests are worth more standing. Independent analysis shows if we fully protect old growth in the Okanagan and Prince George areas, over the next 100 years we add \$43 billion more than if we cut the old growth down.

[2:10 p.m.]

But talk and log is alive and well in B.C., and it has nothing to do with Trump. It has nothing to do with trade wars or budget cuts.

My question to the Minister of Forests: is this government going to take any action to protect more old growth, or will we keep cutting until Big Lonely Doug is the only ancient tree in B.C.?

Hon. Ravi Parmar: What complete nonsense from the member across the aisle. On this side of the House, we have worked together with the Green Party. We launched an old growth strategic review that led to recommendations that we're implementing.

I think the member opposite should, in front of this House, make it known very clear. What side is he on? Does he want a strong, robust, sustainable forest sector, or does he want to go with his leader, who is very clearly putting out a message that she wants to shut down the forest sector?

I was honoured over the course of the year....

Interjections.

The Speaker: Shhh, Members.

Hon. Ravi Parmar: Keep wasting your time.

Forty-five thousand jobs, 100,000 jobs; B.C. Liberals, B.C. Conservatives.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members, wait for your turn.

Hon. Ravi Parmar: I was honoured to work with the member across the aisle over the course of the last year through a new review that was conducted in forestry. That review was just released a few weeks ago. And then the B.C. Greens left the CARGA agreement.

To the member opposite, I am always prepared to work with all sides to ensure that we can have a strong, robust and sustainable forest sector that includes protecting old growth, protecting our biodiversity. I am proud to be part of a government that is working to ensure that we can have a strong, robust and sustainable forest sector for the next 100 years, that ensures we're doing just that.

The Speaker: Member, supplemental.

Rob Botterell: I didn't hear anything from the minister across the way about protecting more old growth.

You know, maybe this should be "question and no answer period." Yesterday we witnessed the Energy Minister answer a food bank question by saying we just need to wait five or ten years for climate-killing LNG and mining revenues to solve all problems. I didn't know the Minister of Energy was an expert in food banks.

Today we have the Minister of Forests saying, "Don't worry; be happy about old growth," despite the forest panel we worked on together and he set up saying that the data we're relying on around old growth is bogus.

To the Minister of Forests, or maybe the Minister of Energy: will you continue the work of the round table on old growth protection you started and do the work to stop talking and get old growth protected?

Hon. Ravi Parmar: It's quite telling that the Conservatives are clapping to the answer to the Green Party. It's clear that the Green Party is more keen on focusing its attention on supporting the Conservative Party than supporting a progressive, stable government on the other side of the House.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Shhh. Shhh.

Members, the minister will conclude — but quickly.

Hon. Ravi Parmar: If the members opposite would stop heckling, I could provide an answer. In British Columbia, there are 11.1 million hectares of old forest, and of that, 8.9 million hectares are either protected, deferred or uneconomic to harvest.

In 2022, after the old-growth strategic review, we deferred harvesting of 2.6 million hectares of old forest. We are proud of the record on this side of the House, where not only have we protected those old forests but we are working with First Nations to ensure that we can build a strong, sustainable and robust forest sector for the next 100 years. That's what we're proud of on this side of the House.

[2:15 p.m.]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO VIOLENT THREATS AND EXTORTION CASES

Mandeep Dhaliwal: Everyone deserves to feel safe. It does not matter if you are Hindu, Christian, Jewish, Muslim or Sikh.

Hardeep Singh Nijjar, president of Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara Society, was murdered at a Sikh temple in Surrey, on June 18, 2023. Now, again, the police have issued a duty to warn to Moninder Singh, spokesperson of B.C. Gurdwaras Council. They had a threat to Moninder's life and his family. Now his and every family needs protection.

Why is this NDP government failing to protect B.C. families?

Hon. Nina Krieger: Thank you to the member opposite for the important question. The safety and protection of all individuals, all communities in B.C., is our absolute priority.

We are committed to ensuring that police have the tools and resources that they have to protect communities. We know that, south of the Fraser, extortion crimes in particular are wreaking havoc on communities in Surrey, Delta and Langley. We are continuing to take action, ensuring that police have all the tools that they need to target these criminals and bring them to justice, working with federal partners, as well, to close loopholes, to ensure that our communities are safe.

We'll continue to do this work, ensuring police have the tools that they need to keep vulnerable people safe.

The Speaker: Member, supplemental.

Mandeep Dhaliwal: Continue, continue. Nothing is continuing except shooting in Surrey.

Let's talk about numbers. In 2024, 13 cases of extortion. In 2025, 133 cases. That's a 1,000 percent increase in one year. And 53 cases of extortion only in Surrey in over one month. In my riding, every weekend people are protesting on the road.

When will this NDP government provide peace for Surrey residents?

Hon. Nina Krieger: Let me be clear that what is happening in Surrey and other communities where businesses

and families are being targeted by threats and violence is completely unacceptable. In B.C., when one person and one community is affected, we all feel it. Combatting extortion crimes that we're seeing in our province and that we're, indeed, seeing across Canada is the top priority for our government.

In addition to standing up the B.C. extortion task force, which is leading to arrests and removals from Canada, we are partnering wherever possible with the federal government. We have been urging the federal government to swiftly adopt Bill C-12 to close the immigration loopholes that are being exploited by criminals who are claiming refugee status after being arrested for extortion-related crimes. We know how frustrating this is for communities. We are continuing to urge the government federally to pass Bill C-12 as quickly as possible.

We've also been advocating the federal government for supports. These include additional officers, helicopter resources. We're certainly committed to ensuring that the police of jurisdiction in Surrey and the B.C. extortion task force have all the tools that they need to keep our communities safe.

RCMP STAFFING LEVELS AND FUNDING FOR POLICE SERVICES

Macklin McCall: This government overpromises and underdelivers.

In the 2023 budget, the government promised to hire an additional 256 provincially funded RCMP members. Since 2012, B.C.'s population has grown by nearly 30 per cent. That's 1.1 million people. Yet the allocation for RCMP officers has remained the same.

Can the minister tell us how many of the 256 promised police have been hired and the communities they have been deployed to?

Hon. Nina Krieger: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Certainly, as British Columbia continues to grow, the expectations and the work of front-line police continue to expand as well.

[2:20 p.m.]

That is why we made our historic investment of over \$230 million to meet the authorized strength of the RCMP to a total of 2,602 members. We have now, of the 256 vacancies, hired 251 members. The remaining five vacancies have now been filled, and those officers will be reporting for duty soon.

I'm certainly able to provide additional information about the communities where they have been deployed, but I will emphasize that those additional officers have targeted the needs of remote and rural communities. They've been used to bolster B.C. Highway Patrol. They've been used to enhance specialized enforcement units to target hate, human trafficking and extortion.

We'll continue to ensure that police have the resources that they need to meet the needs of changing communities and to keep communities safe.

The Speaker: Member has a supplemental.

Macklin McCall: Well, wages may have increased to match inflation, but the simple fact is the ask has always been to increase the amount of officers.

I asked how many of the 256 RCMP officers have actually been hired and in which communities. According to the government's own data, provincial policing numbers have remained stuck at 2,602 officers since 2012. These officers are stretched thin and pushed to their limit. Police deserve the resources they were promised. So do communities.

What is the actual number of RCMP officers deployed to B.C. communities today?

Hon. Nina Krieger: Thank you to the member opposite for the follow-up question. I'll reiterate that the authorized strength of the B.C. RCMP is 2,602 members. Of those are 256 vacancies; 251 officers are hired and on duty. The additional five officers have now been hired and will soon be reporting for duty.

This historic investment that we have made in supporting policing in communities across the province really is so important. We know that the opposition, when they were in power, did not increase police funding for 16 years, leaving deficits that we have committed to filling.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members, shhh.

Hon. Nina Krieger: In addition to the historic investment in increasing the number of RCMP officers, we've invested in police training, increasing the seats of the Justice Institute of B.C. by 50 percent, with more to come. It's to continue to do the work that we are clearly committed to doing to ensuring that the B.C. RCMP have the tools, the resources, the officers they need to keep our communities safe.

POLICE SERVICES IN SURREY

Bryan Tepper: So 2,602 14 years ago, and now it's still 2,602. There's no inflation there. There are no more officers. I'm not sure what they're answering, but it's certainly not the question there.

Also, the Surrey police chief requested a four-month transition delay into Cloverdale while Surrey battles the extortion crisis, citing lack of capacity and resources. This crisis has required the redeployment of over 40 Surrey police officers to specialized investigative units. The chief said: "The redeployment has significantly impacted our

staffing capacity." This reasonable request to delay the transition was denied by this government.

Knowing lives could be at risk, why did the minister deny the request to pause the expansion of the Surrey police service into Cloverdale?

Hon. Nina Krieger: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Public safety in Surrey is our ministry's and our government's top priority throughout the transition.

Now, we know this transition from the RCMP to the SPS is the largest transition in Canadian history, and that is why it is so crucial that all the parties are around the table. That includes the RCMP, the SPS, the province and the city.

[2:25 p.m.]

The plans to undertake the fourth district, Cloverdale, have been in the works for many, many months. This extensive planning has included all of the parties I just referenced. These plans have been submitted to our director of policing services, who's made the determination that the transition of district 4 can be completed safely.

As we have said from the beginning, our steadfast goal is to ensure that when anyone calls 911, help is there. We have a commitment from the B.C. RCMP to ensure that they will work closely with the SPS to ensure that there are no gaps to front-line services and police response.

BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR ACTION ON EXTORTION CRIMES

Jody Toor: This Solicitor General has the same talking points as the Premier. He has said: "I want you to know that this extortion issue is our most important public safety priority."

However, the budget allocates no new funding to combat the rampant extortion crisis in Surrey, another example of this government overpromising and underdelivering.

My question to the Premier is: if extortion is truly his top public safety priority, where is the money, or can this be added to the growing pile of the promises he never intends to keep?

Hon. Nina Krieger: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I'll reiterate that combatting extortion is the province's number one priority. We know that these crimes of extortion, causing such an impact in our own communities and in communities across the country, demand partnership between all levels of government.

That's why B.C. has acted in a very comprehensive way, standing up the B.C. extortion task force, ensuring that we're working with federal partners to access all of the resources that they can contribute. We've contributed over \$600,000 to a new forensic firearms lab to expedite

the processing of guns linked to extortion crimes. We are continuing to take action to combat extortion in collaboration with all partners.

I'll be happy to speak about other items in the budget related to public safety and how we are targeting and standing up programs that respond to the needs of community and help keep our communities safe.

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES AND ACTION ON EXTORTION CRIMES

Harman Bhangu: When affordability has become a crisis for a lot of British Columbians, what do we have from the others across the aisle? Gift cards being bought for staffers. Did they buy local? No. Whatever happened to "Elbows up"?

They say it's small recognition. Who's this small recognition intended for? What? Seniors pay more, families seeking care for their children with autism pay more, businesses pay more, just so NDP staffers get gift cards.

Minister of Forests talks about jobs, yet a record number of mills have been shut down under his watch.

Minister of Solicitor General, we don't need more town halls. We don't need more task forces. We don't need more press releases and photo ops. What we need is action for the residents of the Fraser Valley. Extortion has hit my riding. It has hit my colleague's riding.

Every day businesses email me. You know what they email me with? Living under fear with their business and name. That is shameful. In this House, we need to represent British Columbians in a better manner when their lives and businesses are at risk.

To the minister: when will you take real action and stop with the town halls, press releases and photo ops?

Hon. Nina Krieger: That did sound somewhat like a leadership speech, but in response to the question....

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members. Members, shhh.
Members, let's not repeat what we did yesterday.
Members, shhh.

Hon. Nina Krieger: I'll reiterate that what is happening in Surrey and Delta, in Langley and communities south of the Fraser is absolutely unacceptable. Targeting extortion is our number one public safety priority, reflected in the actions that we have taken and continue to take to ensure that police have every available tool to identify, arrest, prosecute extortionists and to remove extortionists from the country if necessary.

[2:30 p.m.]

We've identified loopholes in federal immigration systems that we know will be addressed by Bill C-12 that is now before the Senate. Our government has written to the

Public Safety Minister federally, to the standing Senate committee, urging the swift passage of Bill 12 to ensure that criminals are not exploiting our refugee system.

Recently we stood up a community advisory group to set up crucial communications between community members and law enforcement. I know that community members, businesses and families are scared. This matters deeply to our government, and we will keep taking actions until the extortion crisis comes to an end and our communities are safe.

[End of question period.]

Peter Milobar: I seek leave to move my motion:

[That pursuant to section 13 (2) of the *Auditor General Act*, the Legislative Assembly request that the Auditor General undertake an examination of the Government of British Columbia's gift card for public servants program examining any potential conflict of interest relating to program administrators providing themselves and their immediate colleagues with gift cards.]

Leave not granted.

Orders of the Day

Hon. Mike Farnworth: Continued debate on the budget.

[Lorne Doerkson in the chair.]

Budget Debate (continued)

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Members. We're going to call the chamber back to order. We'll ask you to take your conversations into the hallway.

We are going to continue debate on our budget.

Harman Bhangu: I wanted to talk about this budget in a way regular people talk when cameras aren't on — early mornings leaning against the truck before a shift starts, coffee getting cold, no speech writers, no applause lines, just a simple question. What's this going to cost us? Or later in the day at the kitchen table, an envelope open, a bill unfolded, a quiet shake of the head. Not anger, not ideology, just simple math.

I've spent most of my life in places where money is not theatrical. It is earned the hard way and spent carefully. When it's yours, you look at it differently. You think about the next month. You think about next year. You think about what happens if things go sideways. You measure it twice. You think about long term. You question the cost. You avoid the waste. And you do not gamble with it. You make sure it delivers value.

This is not what we are seeing in this budget. Govern-

ment is playing with everyone else's tax dollars. In my world, you do not get credit for announcing something. You get judged on whether you finish it — finish it on time, finish it on budget — and take responsibility when you do not. That is the lens I used to take a look at Budget 2026. Does it make life easier for working people? Does it make government bigger while families feel smaller?

Families do not debate budget plans. They do not talk about models. They do not talk about slow rollouts. They look at what is left after the bills are paid. Right now for far too many British Columbians, there is not much left.

Costs are not rising all at once. They are going up bit by bit. PST now shows up on power bills, transit, car insurance, phone bills and more. Every month another line item creeps up. You do not see it in press releases. You don't see it in your bank account. It is tax bracket shifts, paused indexing, small hikes, fees that never go back down. Government does not need a big, new tax. It lets inflation do the work.

[2:35 p.m.]

Seniors feel this the most. They paid their taxes, they followed the rules, they did everything society asked of them, and now they're being squeezed.

Speaking of infrastructure and delivery, delivery matters. This government loves to announce projects, but British Columbians are stuck in the middle of delays. Projects stretch longer, costs expand, timelines slide and accountability fades. And when a project takes longer and costs more, guess who pays for it.

Has anyone got an answer on the other side? Of course not, because they don't want to admit it's you, the taxpayer.

It's the small business owners behind construction barriers; commuters stuck in traffic, burning fuel; families paying for cost overruns they did not create. Working people do not get to say they're still in the planning phase. They have to pay on time. Governments should operate with the same discipline.

Now let's talk a little bit about health care in this budget and where it fails the seniors the most in their twilight years. Nowhere does delivery matter more than in health care. This budget talks about billions more in spending, but if delivery is broken, those numbers mean nothing. When you cannot access quality care, the system is failing. This is where the contract with society breaks.

You pay your taxes, you work hard, you do everything society asks of you, and in your twilight years of your life, when you need the system the most, it fails you. That is what this NDP government has done. They have failed seniors where it matters the most: their health, their dignity, their well-being.

Seniors built this province. They paid into the health care system. They upheld their end of the deal. And now they're left waiting in emergency rooms, waiting for long-term-care placements, waiting for surgeries. That is not

simply a funding issue. It's a delivery issue, and when delivery fails, government has failed.

I want to talk about child care, because not having the family's support, I wouldn't be able to stand here today. Child care has been a cornerstone of the NDP promise for ten years. My wife and I have two kids. Our lives run on routines filled with drop-offs, pickups, school bells and reliable care. When child care is available, you can focus at work. When it is not, everything feels strained. Your schedule becomes harder to manage. Your income feels less certain. Stress follows you home.

Stability matters, but too often, instability has come from shifting government promises. In 2017, the NDP government promised universal \$10-a-day child care. In 2020, the NDP shifted towards before- and after-school child care through Bill 8. In 2021, that direction shifted yet again. Federal funding was redirected to expand \$10-a-day child care for children aged zero to five instead.

In May 2024, the Premier announced a \$2 million pilot study for before- and after-school child care. Then during the 2024 election, the Premier promised \$500 million over two years to expand before- and after-school child care provincewide, \$500 million. These were not minor commitments. They were flagship promises.

Then in October 2025, the B.C. NDP recommitted to before- and after-school child care through Bill 19. B.C. Conservatives supported that legislation to ensure it passed with unanimous support. You know why? It's because B.C. Conservatives care about child care too, and in the budget of 2026, here is the result. That \$500 million promise becomes roughly \$25 million over three years for expanding child care on school grounds. And now the \$10-a-day plan itself has been cancelled.

[2:40 p.m.]

Families do not plan their lives around shifting announcements. They plan them around simple but important questions. Will there be a space for our child? Will that space still be there next year?

B.C. Conservatives believe in before- and after-school child care as a practical solution for families in need. It can be delivered on school grounds that already exist. It supports working parents immediately. It aligns with school day and parent work schedules.

Families with the greatest need deserve steady support. A space they can count on. A program that does not change every year. A promise that lasts past press releases. Instead, they have seen promises rewritten, funding scaled back and priorities shifted.

When deficits become structural and interest costs rise faster than the economy, government has less room to act. The services families rely on begin to feel uncertain. Child care should give families certainty, and this budget gives them pause.

I want to talk about something that is near and dear to me.

Deputy Speaker: Apologies to interrupt you, Member.

Hon Chan: I seek leave to do an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

Hon Chan: I would like to take a moment to welcome another group of students from Richmond Secondary School from the riding of Richmond Centre. They are just sitting up in the chamber.

We were fortunate enough to have several groups visit yesterday, and it is great to see more students joining us today. The group in the gallery right now is the second group for today from Richmond Secondary high school, and it is always encouraging to see young people take an interest in how our democracy works. Who knows, they might be the future leaders of our province.

Please join me in welcoming the students from Richmond Secondary School.

Deputy Speaker: Welcome to everybody in the chamber today.

Langley-Abbotsford, my apologies. Take it away.

Debate Continued

Harman Bhangu: Yes, those kids could be the future leaders. That's why we need to take their future seriously.

I'll get back to what I was going to say there, which is autism and early diagnosis and the outcomes that it can really help with when you have early diagnosis. I know that myself, having family affected — my nephew. When the cuts were brought back under this government, previously in years, they actually packed up their bags and moved to Saskatchewan.

This government has also announced major changes to autism funding. Early diagnosis is critical. Early support means earlier speech therapy, earlier behaviour support and better long-term results. I know this personally. I have a nephew with autism and a brother-in-law with autism, and I've seen how important early help is.

Under the new funding model, more children may qualify for support, but many families are now facing loss of direct funding that helped them choose the service their child needed. Families raising a child with autism already live in assessments, therapy appointments, school meetings and care routines. They are not asking for confusion. They are asking for certainty, consistency, stable funding and clear timelines.

When funding rules change in the middle of the process, when families are unsure what help will stay and what help will go, stress replaces stability. Delivery mat-

ters here because with autism, time matters, and when time is lost, progress can be lost with it.

In closing, British Columbians uphold their end of the deal. They work hard, they pay their taxes, they follow the rules, and government must uphold its end too. When you play with your own money, you treat it carefully. British Columbians deserve a government that treats their tax dollars the same way.

This budget fails on affordability. It fails on discipline. It fails on delivery. And on health care, it fails seniors when they need it the most. For those reasons, I cannot support Budget 2026.

[2:45 p.m.]

Hon. Jessie Sunner: Before I begin my remarks on the budget, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the unthinkable tragedy that has affected the community of Tumbler Ridge and each and every one of us here and across the province and country as a result.

Our hearts are with the families who are grieving, with the friends and neighbours whose lives have been irreversibly shaken and with the community that is navigating this unimaginable loss.

Amid this tragedy, heartbreaking loss, what we have seen in the days since is something profoundly Canadian — neighbours showing up for one another, first responders stepping forward with courage and compassion, local leaders offering steadiness and community members wrapping their arms around those who need it most.

To the people of Tumbler Ridge: you are not alone. This House stands with you. We will continue to support you in every way we can in the days, weeks, months and years ahead.

I am honoured to rise today in support of Budget 2026 in my role as Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills and as the proud MLA for Surrey-Newton.

I'd like to start by acknowledging the ʔəwəŋən Peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations upon whose lands we are gathered today.

Let me start with a simple truth. Budget 2026 is about people. It's about making life better for British Columbians, helping them build good careers, manage the cost of living and feel safe in their communities. It's about opportunity, the kind that doesn't just open a door but keeps it open for the next person. Because at the heart of this year's budget is a simple idea: that people deserve opportunity — opportunity to learn, opportunity to train and the opportunity to build a good life.

Our government continues to invest in post-secondary education and skills training so British Columbians can gain the skills and expertise that they need for the jobs and careers of today and the opportunities of tomorrow. Budget 2026 provides our ministry with a total budget of \$3.58 billion for 2026-2027. That's not just a number. It's

tuition covered. It's apprentices hired. It's a pathway to the middle class.

I have the privilege of seeing the work behind the numbers — the steadfast commitment to lifting people up, the partnerships with institutions and unions and the conversations with students forging their own path. I can tell you that behind every single dollar is a story: a student learning, getting one step closer to graduation; parents retraining for a career change; workers training for new opportunities as our economy evolves and strengthens.

This investment will give people the tools to succeed and give our province the workforce we need to grow our economy and become the economic engine of Canada. Over the next decade, B.C. expects more than one million job openings, and with 40 percent of Canada's priority projects happening right here in B.C., the stakes are high. This means opportunity is coming fast, and we intend to make sure that people right here in B.C. are first in line.

We need a skilled workforce ready to seize those opportunities, and we are acting on doing just that. My ministry and this government remain focused on investing in people, education and training to build economic resilience, to support the workforce needed for today and the opportunities of tomorrow.

Across the province, 18 priority major projects, including construction, clean energy, mining, critical minerals, infrastructure and advanced technology are moving forward, and we are making sure that British Columbians benefit. So 77 percent of the over one million job openings in B.C. over the next decade will require post-secondary education, trades training or skills upgrading. That's why we're working closely with post-secondary institutions, Indigenous partners, industry, businesses and unions to make sure training matches what the job market actually needs.

Programs such as the future skills grant and micro-credentials are designed to support priority sectors in high-opportunity jobs, technical occupations and skills needed for emerging technologies and a clean economy.

[2:50 p.m.]

I want to tell you about Marat Raimkhan. He used a StrongerBC future skills grant to complete a micro-credential at UVic in 2024. The essential soft skills training micro-credential he completed helped him secure a job at UVic in B.C. with good pay, benefits and pride in his work.

This budget stands for people like him. It stands for potential. It stands for paycheques earned through purpose. It stands for a B.C. that grows because its people grow and prosper.

That's why our government launched the Look West strategy, a jobs and economic strategy to make B.C. the powerhouse of Canada, to create good jobs and drive prosperity in every single corner of this province. Look West builds on the StrongerBC future-ready action plan, which helped over 100,000 people across our province

access skills training and supported 145,000 people with more affordable education while guiding 300,000 people towards post-secondary pathways. Those are our province's future workers.

I visited a trades-training centre in the Lower Mainland and met with a young apprentice from Surrey who told me that he was ready to give up because the wait-lists at institutions were far too long. Then an intake opened. Today he's building homes, earning a great wage and proud of the work that he's doing.

He said something I'll never forget. He told me: "I didn't just get access to a seat. I got access to a better opportunity for me and my family." This is who we work for.

In the last budget, the other side of the House voted against the \$107 million that our government provides to SkilledTradesBC to grow and support trades training. This is despite their commitment to increasing funding to SkilledTradesBC by \$70 million over two years in their 2024 platform.

I'm proud to say that our government will be investing \$241 million over three years, with \$54 million being invested this year to strengthen B.C.'s trades-training system in order to double funding to SkilledTradesBC by 2028-2029. This is a historic investment, the first of its kind in almost 20 years. This funding will increase per-seat funding for apprentice programs; address wait-lists for critical industrial trades; advance skilled-trades certification, beginning with crane operators; and ensure workers can move easily between industries as opportunities evolve.

I urge the other side to not vote against the historic funding to skilled trades in B.C. I urge them to vote in favour of the aspiring tradespeople in Kamloops, in Courtenay, in Langley, in Prince George, in Surrey and all across British Columbia, who simply want to pursue a meaningful career and build the future of our province.

This investment is not just about spending. It's building. It's building homes, building infrastructure, building clean energy projects, building careers and building communities. I urge the other side of the House to put aside partisan ideology, join us and do what voters sent us here to do — to work together, to solve problems and to make life better for British Columbians.

This \$241 million investment will ensure that B.C. has the talent needed to deliver our mutual economic priorities, from building more housing and major infrastructure projects to advancing innovation in clean energy and emerging technologies. This investment will allow us to create opportunities and deliver real results for people and businesses across the province through Look West, our government's jobs and economic growth strategy.

Through Budget 2026, our ministry is receiving an additional \$283 million over three years to support initiatives under the Look West strategy, including the historic \$241 million investment over three years to double B.C.'s trades-training system funding, as well as an investment

of \$42 million over three years by adding targeted, highly qualified professional training streams to existing short-term training programs in priority sectors.

This strategy will help B.C. lead the country in job creation, innovation and economic growth. At its core is something simple — making sure every community from the Pacific to the Rockies has the skilled workers needed to grow the economy and grow people's paycheques.

[2:55 p.m.]

Our government will continue to lead in investing in the jobs of the future.

Every year our ministry supports 4,000 more student spaces than we did in 2017, backed by \$77.7 million in annual funding. We've also provided Mitacs with \$50 million to support 10,000 internships over five years for students in priority sectors, such as clean energy, life sciences, emergency management, advanced timber and agritech. Through this funding, interns have helped grow businesses like Human in Motion Robotics, Spannovation, Inverted AI, IQbit and D-Wave.

Through our Look West strategy, B.C. is targeting AI and quantum computing as priority sectors for economic growth. Over the next ten years, our goal is to double the size of these sectors, grow tech employment to 400,000 jobs and increase their GDP contribution by 75 percent. We're investing in the electricity infrastructure needed for AI data centres, with B.C. Hydro launching a competitive process in 2026 to allocate power specifically for AI. We're fostering partnerships between universities and businesses to develop real-world AI applications, from drug discovery and cancer screening to geospatial analytics.

The Quantum Algorithms Institute — with members from UVic, SFU and UBC — is helping strengthen our capabilities in quantum computing and cybersecurity. We're preparing people for careers that haven't even been invented yet.

We know that a stronger B.C. starts by supporting the people who care for us and our loved ones in our times of need. That's why we're expanding training programs across our province. We need more doctors, nurses, paramedics, allied health professionals, midwives and health care assistants. We're training them in every region across our province, so everyone, no matter where you live, can access the care you need, where and when you need it.

Since 2017, over 66,000 graduates have been awarded credentials in health programs. This is an 11 percent increase in the number of health program graduates in priority areas. Every year our government provides more than \$250 million in targeted funding for health education programs to public post-secondary institutions throughout B.C. and has provided significant additional investments to respond directly to health workforce needs.

Deputy Speaker: Minister, sorry to interrupt.

Hon Chan: I would like to seek leave to do an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

Hon Chan: I would like to welcome the last group of students from Richmond Secondary School from my beautiful riding of Richmond Centre. Over 200 students from Richmond High were in the Legislative Assembly yesterday and today, and this is our last group.

These are the people of our next generation. Who knows? One of them might be our future Premier. It was great to take a photo with them and a selfie with one of the students a moment ago.

Please make them feel very welcome here.

Go, Colts!

Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, and welcome.

Debate Continued

Hon. Jessie Sunner: Training more health care workers, including doctors, to deliver services for British Columbians is one of our government's top priorities.

Since 2017, approximately 25 people have graduated with an M.D. right here in B.C. Now we are proudly building the first new medical school in western Canada in nearly 60 years. It is going to be in my home of Surrey. It is a \$496 million investment. The first class will start this year with 48 seats and will grow to approximately 120 seats.

While people in Surrey, south of the Fraser and across the Mainland are excited and proud of this achievement, some people question why this medical school wasn't built earlier. It's important that we all remember why. In 2021, the B.C. Liberals knew that B.C. had the worst medical-grad-to-population ratio in any province of our country with a medical school. In 2008 and 2009, the Fraser Health Authority and Simon Fraser University pushed the then-government to open a medical school in Surrey.

[3:00 p.m.]

Instead of saying yes to the medical school, the government of the day, including members across the aisle, kicked the can down the road and refused to build the medical school. If the government of that time saw the value of investing in people and delivering on building a medical school in Surrey 15 years ago, there is no telling where we might be today.

Now, there's a saying: "The best time to plant a tree was 15 years ago. The second-best time to plant that tree is right now." That is why our government is building the SFU School of Medicine right in Surrey.

I'm proud of this achievement. All British Columbians

should be proud of this achievement. This new medical school at SFU is a partnership between my ministry and the Ministries of Infrastructure and Health. My ministry and the Ministry of Health are supporting SFU with the operating and program components, while the Ministry of Infrastructure is supporting SFU on the capital components.

This took a tremendous amount of work between many partners, and by leading with our principles and putting people first, our government was able to move this from an idea to a business case to accreditation to shovels in the ground and future doctors in seats in four years, because we believe that this is the right thing for British Columbians.

In this budget, more than \$30 million will be allocated to fund the operations of SFU's School of Medicine in Surrey. I urge the other side of the House to not make the same mistake twice and to join us and vote for Surrey; vote for people south of the Fraser; vote for patient care; and vote for British Columbians getting the care they need, when and where they need it.

This work and funding from this budget also complements the work currently being done to increase the number of doctors we're training at UBC medical school at their four locations across Vancouver, Victoria, the Okanagan and Prince George.

Our government is also funding more than 730 new nursing seats at colleges and universities throughout B.C., like Camosun College, North Island College and Kwantlen Polytechnic University, adding to the approximately 2,000 existing nursing seats in the province. This includes 345 registered nursing seats, 72 registered psychiatric nursing seats, 120 nursing practitioner seats and 180 licensed practical nurse seats. Our government also funds 1,000 specialty nursing seats at BCIT every single year.

Since forming government in 2017, our government has more than tripled nurse practitioner seats, along with a 46 percent increase in practical nursing seats and a 24 percent increase in the bachelor of nursing seats. We're backing future nurses with seats, scholarships and ongoing support.

To meet the increasing demand for nurses, we have launched new supports and bursaries to make it easier for eligible internationally educated nurses to enter B.C.'s health care system so they can work in B.C. sooner, providing much-needed care to people around the province.

As part of a plan to retain and recruit new nurses into the health care system, government is investing \$52.5 million to provide at least \$2,000 in nursing student tuition grants to every nursing student enrolled in a public post-secondary institution between September 2023 and August 2026. These grants and supports aren't only money. They are support to help British Columbians pursue their dreams while keeping education affordable.

The province is also creating more opportunities for

health care assistants and nurses to advance in their careers through the development and expansion of nurse bridging programs throughout B.C.

We are taking action to support other essential roles as well within the health care system, including health care assistants and allied health professionals, who play a vital role in providing and delivering patient care. We're working with post-secondary institutions to expand health care assistant training as a part of the health care access program, which trains people to work in home and community care, acute care, long-term care and assisted-living facilities across the province.

As of August 2025, more than 10,531 people have been hired into HCAP's health care assistant partnership pathway, and 203 participants have been hired into the mental health and substance use pilot.

[3:05 p.m.]

This program is backed with investments in training of more than \$105 million since 2020, in addition to nearly \$19 million from the Ministry of Health for tuition and supplies for future health care workers.

Our government is also expanding training for allied health care professionals to deliver the health care services that people count on across B.C. In 2022, we announced 322 new allied health seats in targeted areas, expanding medical laboratory technology, pharmacy technician and social work seats across the province.

In 2023, Camosun College opened a new campus ultrasound clinic that allows students in the diagnostic medical sonography program to gain valuable, hands-on, practical experience while expanding access to valuable health care services in the community.

In the summer of 2024, we announced that KPU would begin offering the first degree program in traditional Chinese medicine in Canada.

In the fall of the same year, our government announced that more students would have the opportunity to train in the Fraser region for in-demand careers such as physical therapy, occupational therapy and midwifery at the state-of-the-art UBC facility located in Surrey. In addition, the province has invested more than \$10 million in bursaries and professional development funding to help train, retain and support allied health professionals.

In the summer of 2024, the province also announced more than \$30 million to enhance the high-performance computing infrastructure known as supercomputers to help advance research into cancer care at SFU and brain health at UVic.

In the spring of 2024, the province announced more than \$50 million to support infrastructure for 25 research projects at five public post-secondary institutions. This includes an innovative project at UBC to identify resilient features of our bodies' metabolism that could be targeted to fight common and debilitating diseases such as obesity, diabetes and obesity-driven cancers.

All of this work focuses on human health, including designing and building artificial internal organs and body parts such as hip joints; designing computer software to operate complex medical equipment, such as 3D X-ray machines; and developing new drug therapies.

Serving as the Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills is one of the greatest honours of my life. But I am equally humbled and privileged to have been elected by the people of Surrey-Newton to be their representative in this House.

This government understands that Surrey has been treated unfairly by previous governments. Since forming government in 2017, we've worked every day to fix that injustice, from removing unfair and punishing bridge tolls to removing MSP premiums for families.

When we talk about investing in people, we're not talking in abstracts. We're talking about real, meaningful investments. We're talking about new schools, new classrooms, new hospitals — real families and real lives made better across British Columbia, especially in my own community of Surrey.

Surrey has seen the impact of these investments. Just last week, on the Family Day long weekend, the new *stalōwasəm* Bridge fully opened, giving Surrey residents a smoother and safer way across the Fraser River. Best of all, Surrey finally gets a brand-new bridge with no tolls, just better commutes.

This year we also opened a brand-new school, École Snokomish Elementary, which opens its doors, filling its hallways with the sounds of kids laughing, learning and building friendships that will shape their lives. Not far away, in my own community of Newton, construction also began on a major addition to Tamanawis Secondary, giving thousands of students the space they need to learn and grow. We also announced a major expansion at Clayton Heights Secondary, with 1,000 new seats to relieve crowding and give every young person a chance and space to learn.

This isn't happening in isolation. Last fall alone more than 700 new student seats opened across Surrey, at Woodland Park Elementary, opening 400 new seats; Walnut Road Elementary, adding another 100 seats; and Theresa Clarke Elementary, adding 225 seats. These numbers are more than just numbers. They're students from across Surrey walking into bright classrooms, teachers welcoming new faces and parents breathing a little easier knowing their children will finally get the space that they deserve.

[3:10 p.m.]

We're not done yet. Right now construction crews are working on more than 2,300 new seats across our city — 500 new seats at Kwantlen Park Secondary, 150 new seats at Martha Currie Elementary, 425 new seats at Old Yale Road Elementary, 150 new seats at Latimer Road Elementary, 300 new seats at William Watson Elementary, 350

new seats at George Greenaway Elementary and 450 seats at Guildford Park Secondary.

Since 2017, we have built or approved more than 15,000 new student seats across Surrey. This is a meaningful investment. We're also investing in supports for students in post-secondary in Surrey. This fall we announced that over 350 new student beds and a dining hall are coming to Kwantlen Polytechnic University Surrey campus, marking the first on-campus public housing project at a public post-secondary institution in Surrey ever.

Across these projects, the message is clear. Surrey's kids matter. Their future matters. Their learning environment matters. But we're investing in more than just their classrooms. We're investing in the health and well-being of the entire community.

Recently Surrey Memorial Hospital opened a new state-of-the-art unit with two cardiac catheterization suites and two interventional radiology suites. These are the first cardiac cath labs south of the Fraser. For the first time ever, families in Surrey will be able to get the life-saving cardiac care that they need right in their communities. This is long overdue, and I'm proud that this is the government, and I am a part of the government, that delivered this for the people in my own home community.

We also opened the new Cloverdale Urgent and Primary Care Centre, offering year-round, seven-day access to urgent and primary care for people in Cloverdale and around Surrey.

We invested in the Guru Nanak Diversity Village, a new long-term-care facility with 125 beds, designed by the community, that will offer comfortable and culturally sensitive care for our seniors.

For young people, we opened the Foundry Surrey Central, offering counselling, health care, employment supports, all in different languages — in more than a dozen languages ranging from Punjabi, Malayalam, Spanish, Arabic, Cantonese, Tagalog.

We're also supporting young families. Over the summer and fall of 2025, Surrey welcomed dozens of new child care spaces across our communities. These will create safe, nurturing environments for the youngest learners in our community.

Alongside these new spaces at Strawberry Hill Hall, A.J. McClellan, Ocean Cliff and the Surrey Sport and Leisure Complex, we also opened more child care centres in Surrey that have joined the \$10-a-day program, including Al-Mustafa Junior Kindergarten, Communication Stars Specialized Childcare and the Fraser Heights recreation centre.

These actions our government is taking, these actions being funded through our government's budget, mean parents paying less, kids learning more and families finally getting a well-deserved break on costs. All of this — every classroom, every hospital suite, every long-term-care bed, every child care space — is part of a bigger story,

a story about a government that refuses to stand still, a government building with intention, a government choosing to invest not only in infrastructure but in people of all ages. When we say we're building a stronger British Columbia, this is what it looks like on the ground.

As minister, I can promise this. Our work is far from finished. We will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with our post-secondary institutions, with students, with industry, with communities, with everyone who believes that education is not just a system but a ladder to better opportunities for all, a ladder that can bring people higher than their circumstances, higher than their doubts, higher than the challenges in front of them.

As MLA, I carry that responsibility home with me every single day, because our government is building a future for British Columbia that is strong, steady and full of possibility, a future grounded in care, powered by innovation and strengthened by the perseverance of the people we serve.

[3:15 p.m.]

Budget 2026 reflects a simple, powerful belief. When we invest in people, we unlock opportunity. When opportunity expands, prosperity follows throughout our province, not just for the few but for every single person in every community across our province.

To my constituents in Surrey-Newton: thank you. Thank you for your trust. Thank you for your honesty, your resilience and your belief that progress is always possible. Thank you for letting me represent you in this House. It is the honour of my life.

To the students, staff, faculty across every post-secondary institution in British Columbia — those who teach, those who learn, those who support our dreams — thank you for walking this road with us. You are building a strong, inclusive future with your hands, your minds and your hearts.

This is our moment — our moment to keep pushing, keep building, keep believing in the extraordinary potential of this province and its people. I really hope the entire House will join us.

Jordan Kealy: I want to thank the minister for her kind words about Tumbler Ridge. That's close to home for my riding. That's actually very close to home. It's left me with a heavy heart since it's happened.

I've got a lot of friends there. I've introduced the mayor, Darryl Krakowka, to this House when he has been advocating for help for his community. You never expect that to happen. I think that the one thing that they would ask.... They appreciate the supports that have been given so far, and they would ask that they continue to happen and that they stay happening in the long term, because, in my region, we have been asking for them for a long time.

I thank you for your kind words.

Today I rise in opposition to this budget. I do so on behalf of the people of Peace River North, not from a spread-

sheet perspective but from a lived perspective, because budgets don't show up in people's lives as line items. They show up as whether you can find a doctor, whether your parent can get a long-term bed, whether your child has mental health supports, whether your roads are safe to drive and whether your community still has jobs.

As for Peace River North, this budget delivers more of the same — announcements without outcomes, promises without timelines, spending without accountability. Let's be frank here. People in the North are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for fairness. They are asking for basic service that urban British Columbians take for granted. They are asking to stop being treated like an afterthought.

Let's start with health care. Residents across Fort St. John, Fort Nelson, Taylor and Hudson's Hope live under the responsibility of Northern Health. I will say plainly that the system is breaking, if not already broken. Emergency departments close and run reduced hours. Families drive hours for basic care. Patients are sent out of area for conditions that should be treated locally. Cancer patients drive hundreds of kilometres for treatment. Mental health services are scarce. Specialist care often requires leaving the region entirely.

This budget talks about billions in health spending, but up north people don't experience funding envelopes. They experience outcomes. In fact, an FOI request obtained by SecondStreet.org found around 80 Northern Health patients who died on wait-lists from 2024 to 2025. Those were 80 people that were just waiting to get a specialist.

The outcomes are chronic doctor shortages, burnt-out nurses leaving, reliance on short-term locums, ambulance delays, families living in constant uncertainty.

There is no northern workforce strategy with enforceable targets in this budget, no rural retention framework, no housing plan for health care workers, no guarantee that new funding actually results in doctors and nurses showing up in our communities.

[3:20 p.m.]

It's just big numbers and press releases and broken promises. You cannot treat patients with press releases.

Let's talk about seniors. For years, Peace River North has been promised a long-term-care facility in Fort St. John, scoped to deliver 84 long-term-care beds and a 30-space adult day program. That project mattered because more than 70 seniors in our region are already waiting for care. Some are stuck in hospital beds. Some are waiting in unsafe home situations. Families are stretched thin, trying to fill the gaps.

And what does this budget do? It removes the start timelines for that facility. In plain language, the project is being placed on an indefinite hold. Our population is aging, demand is rising, and instead of accelerating capacity, this government has quietly taken the promise off schedule. That is not planning; that's abandonment.

My father-in-law is sitting in Peace Villa right now, and the only way that he got in there.... He was in the hospital, on the second floor, waiting for care. To be placed into that seniors care facility for acute care, he waited 9½ months. The only reason he actually got in there is because five people chose MAiD, and he managed to get past the wait-list to get into that facility.

Currently, on the second floor, there are over 15 people waiting to get into the existing facility. Outside, on the wait-list, there are over 50 people waiting. That's just what's existing. Where do we place those people if they can't get into that facility, if they can't afford to live in their home, if they can't defer their property taxes? Are we forcing them to live on the streets?

They're going to the food banks. People in my riding — 12 percent of them are using the food banks. We're at record-high numbers. Where's the practical solution? This government isn't looking at it.

I need to speak about mental health in Peace River North, especially for our children and youth. Up north, mental health supports are scarce. Families face long wait-lists. Travel is often required just to access basic care. Crisis services are limited. Preventable supports are almost non-existent in smaller communities. When something goes wrong in the North, there is often nowhere for the young people to go.

Before Tumbler Ridge, we had two youth commit suicide in my region, in Fort St. John, and they were within two weeks. One was an 11-year-old girl. The other one was a 13-year-old boy. When I talk about having a heavy heart about Tumbler Ridge, this was a gut punch right before it.

It made me realize that for rural schools.... It's really sad. When I was a kid, each school normally had a counsellor. For the rural schools now, one counsellor is allocated for 800 students. There are no supports. When families were looking for supports after those suicides, it was almost impossible to actually give them any real, good solutions.

Talk about Foundry. This is the main wraparound service that the province is focusing on. The only thing that Foundry is able to offer right now is online. How do you properly assess somebody online? How do you help a child if you can't actually see them face to face and know what they're going through?

We also saw that reality laid bare in Tumbler Ridge. It's not an isolated incident, but it's the visible consequence of years of underinvestment in youth mental health.

[3:25 p.m.]

That community had already been sounding the alarm. Local leaders, families and front-line workers had been warning the government that supports were inadequate, that kids were falling through the cracks, that early intervention programs were desperately needed. Instead of strengthening those services, this government moved to

shut down one of the few programs servicing vulnerable youth.

You've heard me in this House talking about it. It was the Saplings program. The funding for it, when it came to the care in the ER department, got cut. It was going to be cut for their outreach as well. Luckily, I've been told that it has been secured to continue for the next contract, for the outreach portion of it. But Dawson Creek and Tumbler Ridge do not have a Saplings program.

In Peace River, we don't even have a child psychiatrist. You think about kids dying and the effects on that, how it would affect everybody else. That whole town is going to have PTSD. We don't even have a single child psychiatrist for a region of 88,000 people, somebody that actually knows what they're doing with medications, if they need to be used.

I personally worked alongside community members in Peace River North to explain to this government how critical that program was for children who were struggling. We made the case. We pleaded for the continuity of care, because if those services disappear, children don't magically get better. They spiral. Mental health doesn't just collapse overnight. It deteriorates slowly, quietly, while communities beg for help.

This budget once again fails to provide a northern mental health delivery plan. There is no actual dedicated youth treatment hub for Peace River North, no regional crisis response team, no guarantee that new mental health funding actually lands in remote communities. Just provincewide announcements with no accountability for outcomes in the North.

Our children deserve better than that. They deserve early intervention. They deserve local supports. They deserve stability. And families deserve to know that when their child is in crisis, there is somewhere to turn. Right now, too often, there isn't.

This brings me back to the budget itself because this is exactly the problem. This government will stand up and point to the provincewide funding totals, but those numbers don't tell families in Fort St. John, Fort Nelson, Hudson's Hope and Taylor where their child can go tonight if they're in crisis. They don't tell parents how long they'll have to wait for counselling. They don't tell communities when treatment beds will open. They don't tell schools when supports will arrive. They just tell us how much money was announced.

That is the fundamental failure of this budget. It measures success in dollars committed, not lives improved. Up north, we don't need more press releases. We need doctors who stay. We need youth mental health programs that aren't threatened with closure. We need seniors beds that actually get built. We need roads and bridges that are safe to drive. We need schools that can hire and retain staff.

Instead, this budget offers generalized funding, shifting timelines and disappearing commitments, while Peace

River North is left competing with urban centres for the same limited resources. That is neglect, plain and simple.

[3:30 p.m.]

Infrastructure has been left to decay in Peace River North. I think of energy, forestry, agriculture, heavy haul. Everything depends on safe, reliable roads and bridges. Right now too many of them are falling apart. Highways are riddled with potholes and temporary patches, and a Taylor Bridge that has enough weld on it that could build us ferries.

The bridges are aging out. Industrial routes that move goods to market are deteriorating. Multiple hillsides are literally falling apart. Yet this budget contains no named transportation upgrades. No Taylor Bridge — another failed promise. No highway reconstruction. No targeted investment in the corridors that keep northern economies alive.

I hear the minister talk about a powerhouse. That's this region — 38 percent of the hydroelectric power, a big chunk of the LNG that goes to the coast, forestry, agriculture. It's great when the government can take the revenue from my region, but very little comes back.

It really can be a powerhouse. There are a lot of other projects that can be done that help pay to reduce the debt, make your deficit smaller. I'd love to be able to talk to you about them.

I'll move on to education. It tells the same story. Northern districts struggle to recruit teachers, education assistants, counsellors and support staff. Classrooms are stretched. Education funding does not keep pace with growing needs. Transportation costs are higher. Housing shortages make it hard to attract professionals. Parents fundraise for basic supports.

Yes, this budget announces education funding, but there is no rural differential, no northern recruitment strategy and no recognition that Peace River North faces fundamentally different conditions than urban districts. A provincewide increase means nothing when northern communities start behind and continue to fall further back.

In Peace River North, jobs are not just abstract economic indicators. They are family-supporting. They sustain schools, volunteer fire departments, minor hockey teams, local shops and municipal tax bases, and this government continues to undermine them.

Forestry is collapsing — mill closures, curtailments, layoffs, families forced to leave towns they've lived in for generations. The sawmill that's operated in Fort St. John since the '60s is shut. The pulp mill that I worked in, in Taylor, as a millwright is shut now as well. Closure after closure after closure. Job loss after job loss after job loss.

In the last few years alone, British Columbia has seen dozens of forestry facilities shut down. Since 2020, at least 16 sawmills, three pulp mills and four paper mills have closed across this province, many of those in the North.

Every closure ripples outwards — lost wages, lost services, lost students, lost volunteers. Municipalities lose millions in tax revenue, and that loss doesn't disappear. It gets downloaded onto the homeowners and small businesses.

Industry leaders have been begging this government for certainty. Instead, they get regulatory chaos, rising costs and policies made in Victoria with little understanding of rural realities. This budget offers no credible forestry recovery plan for the North, no urgency, no long-term strategy. Just more consultation while communities are hollowed out bit by bit by bit.

[3:35 p.m.]

Agriculture up north is not being supported. In real terms, funding is flat while costs rise. Farmers face higher fuel prices, higher inputs, higher transportation costs and less provincial support. At a time when food security should be a priority, this government is leaving the northern agriculture sector behind. They are neglecting food security. Why?

I heard, in question period, a question about agriculture, and it got returned instead by a different minister. It's interesting — the response. I just had a constituent ask me about crop loss in their region. They had 160 acres of crop loss. The insurance coverage was supposed to be 81 percent, and it came back that the coverage was 50 percent. What's the point of having insurance if the government isn't going to cover it?

Instead of fixing spending inefficiencies or growing the economy, this budget expands provincial sales tax to new professional services and removes exemptions on everyday items. That means families and small businesses now pay more for accounting, engineering, real estate services, cable and basic necessities. People in Peace River North already pay more for groceries, fuel, heating and transportation. Now they are being hit with expanded PST on top of it. This is nowhere near fiscal management. This can only be classified as utter incompetence. It almost feels like a targeted attack on British Columbians' way of life.

Another pattern in this budget is putting the incompetence of not being able to balance a budget.... When provincial decisions destabilize major employers, municipalities are left holding the bag. When health care fails, families step in. When mental health services aren't available, communities rely on volunteers and charities. When schools can't get staffing, parents fill the gaps.

Peace River North is doing more with less every year, and this budget does nothing to change that trajectory. Constant promises. Shifting timelines. Broken trust. People in the North are tired of announcements. They've heard them before. They've watched projects get announced, re-announced, delayed, re-scoped and delayed again. They've watched timelines disappear from capital plans. They've watched commitments quietly evaporate. What they want is certainty. What they get is perpetual waiting.

Under this government, Peace River North keeps hearing the same message: wait longer, travel farther, accept less. That is not how you build a united province.

Cost of living is higher in the North — being ignored. Everything costs more in the North — groceries, fuel, heating, transportation. Families are paying a premium just to live where they work. Yet this budget offers no targeted northern affordability strategy, no transportation relief, no rural cost of living recognition. Policies are written as though everyone lives within transit distance of downtown Vancouver. That is not reality for Peace River North. Electric batteries don't work when it's minus 46. This is not reality for Peace River North.

This budget lacks a northern health worker workforce strategy with measurable targets, guaranteed rural health mental capacity, education funding that reflects northern recruitment realities, a serious forestry recovery plan, protection for municipalities facing tax base erosion, accountability for capital project delays and recognition of higher operating costs in the North. Instead we get generalized provincial averages and aspiring language. Peace River North cannot live off of aspirations.

[3:40 p.m.]

The North contributes enormously to this province through energy, forestry, agriculture, hydroelectric, mining and hard-working families who keep communities alive in some of the toughest conditions in British Columbia. All they are asking for is a fair share of attention, resources and accountability.

This budget does not deliver that. It leaves northern residents waiting again, out in the cold. We're waiting for doctors, for nurses, for seniors care, waiting for infrastructure, waiting for jobs, waiting for mental health support. We deserve better. Until this government starts treating Peace River North better as an equal partner in this province, not as an afterthought, these gaps will continue to grow, just like the deficit and the debt.

This province, if you look at the fundamental basis of it, just from a practical standpoint.... I grew up in the Lower Mainland. It's a different world down here compared to the North and the rest of British Columbia. There's a very practical way that it can function as a business. We are rich in resources. We need fresh revenue for British Columbians to survive and thrive. But right now our fresh revenue sources are not being utilized to their fullest potential.

Forestry is a great example of what's happening in that industry. It was a backbone of how a lot of the towns were built in this province. If we want to see a balanced budget and a debt being paid down, we need to focus on that backbone again.

Instead, right now the revenues that this government is prospering off of are actually our decline. As our way of life diminishes, we have vices that we turn to. People strug-

gle. They'll buy alcohol, they'll buy marijuana, or they'll go gamble. Oh, but wait. The government taxes those.

Oh, there's no tax on alcohol? There's no tax on marijuana? They're great revenue income streams. Sorry, I was just going off of facial recognition on that.

Right now when we look at the revenue streams that the government makes off of alcohol and marijuana and gambling, these are all things that are actually bad for British Columbians, for our mental health and for our way of life. We need a government to focus on what is actually good for us.

What's good for us is going back to the practical fundamentals of how this province can work. That's our resources. I can tell you right now that if I switched all of the engines on my farm to electrification, I would be bankrupting my farm. It is not practical. There are some things that don't work.

This province and country have to go back to the practical nature of what we have to be able to bring in fresh revenue streams, not recycling the revenue that we currently have in our system.

I want to thank my constituents that are listening and thank them for being able to vote me in. I'll continue to fight as hard as I can for our region.

Sharon Hartwell: Before I begin my remarks, I would like to send my condolences out to Tumbler Ridge.

As a former mayor of a small community, my heart reaches out to you. I know council and mayor are going to be struggling for some time to wrap your heads around the tragedy that happened.

[3:45 p.m.]

Whether it's one family or more, you don't heal that quickly. But we're here, and we're thinking about you. And my colleague the MLA from North Peace will be with you.

I rise today to speak to Budget 2026, and I do so as the member for Bulkley Valley–Stikine; as a critic for rural infrastructure and rural development; and as someone who represents one of the largest, most geographically complex and most resource-dependent regions in this province. I rise not simply to speak about the fiscal plan but to speak about the people behind that plan, the communities that will feel its impact and the growing disconnect between what this government promises and what rural British Columbia is actually experiencing.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the highlights of this budget. Sadly, after reviewing the document in detail and speaking with constituents across my riding, I must say I see no mention of any that meaningfully apply to Bulkley Valley–Stikine or to many of the rural and northern communities that I represent.

That is not a rhetorical point, nor is it intended to be dismissive for the sake of opposition. It is an honest conclusion that comes from asking a very simple question. Where in this budget do the people of the northwest see

themselves? I find it not only disappointing but, frankly, disrespectful that once again there is no meaningful mention of investment in Bulkley Valley–Stikine.

The province continues to look to the northwest for resource revenue and economic contribution. It continues to rely on the industry's workers and the communities of the North to support provincial prosperity. Yet when it comes time to reinvest in those same communities, to build the infrastructure required to sustain that contribution or to support the families who make it possible, the North is once again overlooked.

That imbalance is not new, but it's becoming more and more pronounced, and this budget does nothing to correct it. Instead, it reinforces a pattern that many people in my riding have come to expect, which is that rural communities are asked to contribute more while receiving less in return.

This budget must also be understood in the broader context of the province's fiscal position. We're now facing a projected deficit of \$13.3 billion. Even as the government introduces new taxes and expands existing ones, this is not a situation where the province is struggling due to a lack of revenue. It is a situation where the spending has grown beyond what can reasonably be sustained and where the government has not demonstrated a credible plan to bring that spending under control.

For the people in my riding, this raises serious concerns about accountability and long-term sustainability. They're being asked to pay more in taxes while seeing little improvement in services, infrastructure or economic opportunity. They're being asked to trust that this government has a plan, even as the numbers suggest otherwise.

I want to take some time to speak about what has actually happened over the past year in Bulkley Valley–Stikine. This budget does not exist in isolation. It lands in communities that are already facing significant challenges, and it must be evaluated in that context.

In Houston, the closure of the Canfor mill has had a profound and ongoing impact. This was not just a loss of a workplace. It was a loss of a central economic pillar that supported families, local businesses and municipal revenues. The ripple effects of that closure have been significant and far-reaching. Workers have lost stable employment, and many have been forced to leave the community in search of other opportunities.

Small businesses have seen reduced activity, as fewer people are able to spend locally. The municipality itself is now facing a substantial budget shortfall due to the loss of industrial tax revenue, forcing difficult decisions about service levels and long-term planning.

This is not a temporary setback. It represents a structural shift in the local economy, one that requires a coordinated and meaningful response from the province. Yet when we look at this budget, we see no targeted support for Houston, no transition strategy for forestry-de-

pendent communities and no acknowledgement of the scale of the challenge that these communities are now facing.

Houston is not alone. Across Bulkley Valley–Stikine and across northern British Columbia, the forest sector is experiencing one of the most difficult periods in recent history. Communities like Burns Lake, Smithers and Hazelton have relied on forestry for generations. It has provided stable employment, supported families and sustained local economies. Today that stability is increasingly uncertain.

[3:50 p.m.]

We are seeing mill closures, reduced harvest levels, declining investment and growing concern about the future of the industry. Workers who have spent decades building their lives around forestry are now facing difficult questions about what comes next. Young people are leaving communities because they do not see opportunities for themselves in the region. Local governments are struggling to maintain services as their tax base declines. We all know, those who have been in local government, that local municipalities are bound by the province to balance their budgets. The province is not.

Industry leaders have been clear in their assessment of the situation, with some stating that they have never seen conditions this severe in decades of experience. That level of concern should prompt urgent action from this government. Instead, what we see in this budget is a reduction in forestry funding and no clear path for how to support the sector or the communities that depend on it. That is not a strategy; that is an absence of leadership.

As the critic for rural infrastructure and rural development, I must also speak to the broader issue of infrastructure because this is where the consequences of government decisions are often most visible in rural communities. Infrastructure in rural British Columbia is not simply a matter of convenience. It is essential to safety, connectivity and economic viability.

Roads, bridges, health care facilities and emergency services are the lifelines that connect communities, that allow them to function. However, what we continue to see is a pattern in which major infrastructure projects in urban centres receive significant attention and funding, even as they experience substantial cost overruns and delays, while rural infrastructure needs remain underfunded or even ignored. Billions of dollars have been added to the costs of large-scale projects across the province, yet comparatively modest investments in rural communities continue to be deferred.

In Bulkley Valley–Stikine, the infrastructure needs are clear and well documented. Highway 37 requires upgrades to ensure safety and support of economic development. This is where the province is setting their sights. This is a critical corridor for northern British Columbia, yet it continues to be overlooked in favour of projects elsewhere.

In Telkwa, the existing bridge across the Bulkley River is aging and no longer adequate for a growing community.

In Hazelton, Wrinch Memorial Hospital is operating beyond capacity, placing strain on both staff and patients.

In Atlin, there has been a long-standing effort to secure funding for a new ambulance station and fire hall, yet progress has been slow.

In Kitwanga, residents have raised nearly \$1 million themselves to support essential infrastructure, demonstrating extraordinary commitment, yet are still waiting for meaningful provincial support.

These are not new issues. They have been raised repeatedly in this House and in discussions with government, yet they remain unaddressed.

When communities are raising their own funds for basic infrastructure, when they are organizing bake sales and local fundraising efforts to support projects that should be the responsibility of the province, it raises a fundamental question about priorities. How much more are these communities expected to do on their own? At what point does the province step in and fulfil its role?

The reality is that the cost overruns on a single major project elsewhere in British Columbia could fund multiple critical infrastructure projects in my riding. This is not an exaggeration; that is a reflection of how resources are currently being allocated. Examples: Site C dam, over budget by \$7.225 billion; Surrey-Langley SkyTrain, over budget by \$1.98 billion; second Surrey hospital, over budget by \$1.21 billion; etc. One of those overruns would have funded projects in my riding.

This issue extends beyond my riding and speaks to a broader provincial challenge. As critic for rural infrastructure and rural development, I hear from communities across British Columbia that are facing similar issues. In the Cariboo, in the Kootenays, in the Peace region and on the north coast, communities are dealing with aging infrastructure, limited access to services and increasing financial pressures. They are struggling to maintain what they have, let alone invest in what they need for the future.

The message from these communities is consistent. They feel overlooked. They feel underfunded. They feel like they are expected to contribute to the province's economy without receiving the support necessary to sustain their own communities.

[3:55 p.m.]

I want to turn now to the issue of affordability because this is another area where this budget fails to meet the needs of British Columbians. This budget introduces over \$1 billion in new taxes on working families, including increases to personal income taxes and the expansion of the provincial sales tax to additional goods and services.

In rural communities, the impact of these changes is even more pronounced. People already pay more for fuel, more for groceries and more for basic services, due to distance and limited options. The expansion of the PST to

services such as shoe repair, bookkeeping and other essential services may seem minor in isolation, but for families who rely on these services as part of their daily lives, the additional cost is significant.

This is not about luxury spending. This is about everyday necessities. When people are working hard and still struggling to get ahead, adding new costs only makes that situation worse.

Stakeholders across this province have raised serious concerns about the direction of this budget. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has warned that it will deepen what it describes as an entrepreneurial drought. Highlighting the challenges facing small businesses is already difficult in this economic environment. The Business Council of British Columbia has similarly raised concerns about weak private sector growth and the impact of new taxes on investment.

These are not partisan voices. These are organizations that represent businesses, workers and communities across the province. When they raise concerns, those concerns should be taken seriously.

The cumulative effect of these policies is a growing sense of uncertainty. Businesses are hesitant to invest. Workers are uncertain about their future. Communities are questioning whether they will have the resources they need to sustain themselves. That uncertainty has real consequences, and it is felt most acutely in communities that do not have the same margin for error as larger urban centres.

In rural British Columbia, when a major employer closes, when a piece of infrastructure fails or when a service is reduced, there are fewer alternatives available. People cannot simply relocate services, switch providers or observe increased costs without consequence. Instead, they are forced to make difficult decisions about their livelihoods, their families and their futures. This is why the decisions reflected in this budget matter so deeply. They're not just fiscal choices. They are choices about whether communities will grow or decline, whether families will stay or leave and whether rural British Columbia will be treated as an equal partner in this province's future.

I've heard many of the ministers across the aisle speak about investing in every corner of this province. Well, I certainly don't see it in Bulkley Valley-Stikine, so I think maybe they figure the province stops at Prince George. I'm not really sure.

I want to turn now to health care because this is one of the most pressing and personal issues facing my constituents. In Bulkley Valley-Stikine, access to health care is not guaranteed. It is uncertain, it is inconsistent, and, in some cases, it is simply unavailable when it's most needed.

As I mentioned earlier, taxpayers in this province contribute to health care at multiple levels. They contribute federally; provincially; and, in many cases, locally through municipal taxes and hospital districts. In some

jurisdictions, local tax dollars are used to support health care infrastructure, including clinics and hospitals. This means that in many cases, individuals are effectively paying into the same system multiple times.

Given that level of investment, isn't it reasonable to expect a certain level of service? Yet what are we seeing across British Columbia and particularly in rural areas? It is a system that is struggling to meet basic expectations. Emergency rooms have been closed temporarily due to staffing shortages. Hospital hours have been reduced. Patients are being asked to travel significant distances for care that should be available in their own communities.

In 2025 alone, there were over 250 temporary emergency room closures across the province. That number is not just a statistic. It represents real situations where people arrived at a hospital expecting care, only to find that it was not available. It represents moments of uncertainty, anxiety and, in some cases, serious risk.

For someone living in a major urban centre, an emergency room closure may mean travelling to another facility a short distance away. For someone in Bulkley Valley–Stikine, it may mean travelling hours to access care. That difference matters, and it highlights the importance of ensuring that rural health care is not treated as an afterthought.

[4:00 p.m.]

Despite these challenges, this budget does not provide a clear plan to address health care access in rural British Columbia and rural communities. It does not offer new solutions to staffing shortages, nor does it outline a strategy for reducing service disruptions. Instead, it continues with the same approach that has led us to this current situation, leaving communities uncertain about what that future holds.

I also want to speak about seniors, because this budget fails to recognize their needs in a meaningful way. Seniors in my riding, like seniors across British Columbia, have contributed to their communities for decades. They have worked, raised their families and helped build the province that we all benefit from today. Many of them now live on fixed incomes and are facing increasing costs for housing, utilities and basic necessities. The expansion of taxes in this budget, combined with rising costs, places additional pressures on seniors, who are already managing tight budgets.

At the same time, delays in long-term-care infrastructure and ongoing challenges in health care access create further uncertainty about their ability to receive the care they need as they age. As one seniors advocate has noted, this budget does little to address the needs of seniors, leaving many to question whether their concerns are being heard. That is a serious concern, and it is one that should be addressed with urgency.

I had a constituent, when I was home last time, whose mother is 91. They're a farming family. This is probably

the second generation. She has moved into a smaller home, so she's close to her family. At 91, their assessments on their properties have gone up 30 percent, and now they're going to lose their \$200 homeowner's grant, on top of everything else.

I want to return to the broader issue of economic development. This is where the long-term implications of this budget become most apparent. The government has spoken about the importance of critical minerals, of natural resource development and of economic opportunity in the North. These are important discussions, and they reflect real potential. However, potential alone is not enough. Economic development requires a foundation. That foundation is infrastructure, services and community stability. Without that foundation, investment will not occur, projects will not proceed and opportunities will not be realized.

This is particularly important in the context of the northwest, where the province is increasingly looking to support its economic future. The history of this region provides an important lesson. In the late 1860s, the discovery of gold in the Omineca region brought attention and investment to northern British Columbia. People came in search of opportunity, and communities were built as a result.

Today we are seeing a similar moment with renewed interest in the resources of the northwest. But if the province hopes to benefit from that opportunity, it must also be prepared to invest in the communities that will make it possible. It cannot simply extract value without reinvesting in the infrastructure and services that support that value.

This is where the role of rural infrastructure becomes so critical. It is not just about maintaining roads or building bridges. It is about enabling economic activity, supporting communities and ensuring that growth is sustainable. It is about recognizing that rural British Columbia is not peripheral to the province's success but central to it.

In my role as critic for rural infrastructure and rural development, I've had the opportunity to speak with communities across the province, and the message is remarkably consistent. Rural communities want to be part of the solution. They want to contribute to economic growth. They want to build a strong sustainable future, but they need the tools to do it. They need reliable infrastructure. They need access to health care. They need support for industries. They need policies that recognize their unique challenges, and they need a government that listens.

I also want to address the issue of fiscal accountability, because this underpins everything else. The scale of spending in this budget is unprecedented, approaching \$100 billion annually, yet the outcomes do not reflect that level of investment. Services are not improving at the rate that spending is increasing, infrastructure is not being

delivered efficiently, and the province's financial position continues to deteriorate.

Stakeholders have raised serious concerns about this trajectory. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has warned about rising debt and the need for spending restraint. Business organizations have highlighted the impact of uncertainty on investment decisions. Economists have pointed to the growing gap between spending and results.

[4:05 p.m.]

These concerns are not ideological; they are practical. They reflect a recognition that fiscal sustainability is essential to long-term prosperity. Without it, the province will face increasing constraints, and the ability to invest in communities will be diminished.

I want to return, in closing, to the people of Bulkley Valley–Stikine, because ultimately, this is who this discussion is about. This riding spans over 164,000 square kilometres and includes communities that are diverse, resilient and deeply connected to the land. Many families in this region are multigenerational, with strong ties to their communities and a commitment to building their futures there.

People choose to live in the North because they value the lifestyle, the sense of community and the opportunities that it provides. They are proud of where they live, and they are willing to work hard to sustain it, but they should not be expected to do so without support. They should not be expected to accept a lower standard of service or lack of investment simply because of where they live. They deserve the same level of attention, the same level of respect and the same level of support as any other community in this province.

This budget does not deliver that. It does not invest in the infrastructure that rural communities need. It does not address the challenges facing key industries. It does not improve access to health care. It does not provide meaningful relief to families or seniors. And it does not demonstrate the fiscal responsibility that British Columbians expect.

Budgets are about priorities. They reflect what a government chooses to focus on and what it chooses to leave behind. In this case, it is clear that rural British Columbia has once again been left behind.

The people of Bulkley Valley–Stikine deserve better. They deserve to be recognized for their contributions, supported in their challenges and included in the province's vision for their future. They deserve a government that understands their realities and is prepared to act on them.

This budget does not meet that standard, and for that reason, I cannot support this budget.

Hon. Adrian Dix: It's an honour to rise in this session of the Legislature, as I have in many before, and represent the people of Vancouver–Renfrew, who every day

surprise me and impress me with their entrepreneurship, with their generosity to their fellow citizens, to the wonderful work that's done in our public schools; the wonderful work that's done in schools such as St. Mary's, which are independent schools that are deeply embedded in the community.

The work done.... I think there are more health care workers, health care assistants who live in Vancouver–Kingsway than almost any other community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I understood and saw, when they came back to work — working morning shifts from eight to four, working four to midnight, working midnight to eight — and would come back to the Joyce Street SkyTrain station, the contribution they had made. They went to work in a time of uncertainty to help their fellow citizens.

I am so proud to represent the people of Vancouver–Renfrew, and it's with that in mind, since some of those people have suffered an immense tragedy this year — we think back to April 26 of last year and the Lapu-Lapu tragedy — that I want to reflect briefly on the events that occurred in Tumbler Ridge. I think it's impossible for people to grasp the extent of the tragedy, and I think it's important to recognize, even for members of the House to recognize, the importance of standing together in these moments.

I know a little bit about this. Members of my family have died in two separate mass murders over time. June 23, 1984 — you don't forget these days, you know — was the Air India bombing, and December 21, 1988, the Lockerbie bombing. We remember who they were — Umar Jethwa, Zebunnisa Jethwa, Peter Dix — and what they meant to their families and what they meant to their communities. It never gets better. It gets longer ago, but it never gets better.

[4:10 p.m.]

The only thing I would say to people in Tumbler Ridge is that we will be there for you. Members of this House will be there for you. I'll be there for you.

I want to express my appreciation to my colleague from Peace River South, who has, I think, demonstrated real courage and determination in this difficult moment. It's hard to be with people in this moment. It's exhausting to be with people in this moment.

I just want to say, in the prospect of hope, that when the bombing occurred on Air India, Irfan Jethwa, who was the only son, lost both his parents. They were both doctors, and he had a certain kind of life in mind and possible to him. He survived that and a lot in between. He's now in his 40s. He has children of his own, and he is a generous, wonderful person.

There is hope in those moments. You don't get over this, but there's hope in those moments. We think today of the people of Tumbler Ridge and what they've been through.

I want to talk a little bit about the budget in this moment as well, because these are challenging times in our

world. Sometimes they get expressed in this way and the ways we've seen, and we are able to support each other. They are very challenging times, and this tests us. I believe this budget and our efforts are worthy of that moment. I believe that.

We have the actions of the U.S. President and the U.S. government really breaking a relationship with Canada that existed all the way back to the Ogdensburg Agreement in the early 1940s, through free trade agreements at Auto Pact and the work we did together, our young men and women, in war. To a degree, that relationship has been broken.

We have a profound and tight relationship with the United States, the longest, as we always used to say, undefended border in the world. The actions, even in the last week, of the President, never mind the last 58 weeks or 60 weeks that it's been, have disrupted that, and they've affected negatively the economy of the world. We have to be there for people in these times, and this budget is there.

It's not just that, of course. We've seen, in 2020 on, the COVID-19 pandemic. We've seen the impacts of climate change and how it's profoundly affected, for example, industries such as forestry, but also in terms of natural disasters in communities.

When I was first Minister of Health, I went to your community, hon. Speaker, and visited there. People had been evacuated, and how could one imagine that happening? Yet it did, and people came together.

These are challenges that are, in fact, unique in this time and that we need to address with resilience. We've got to be there with our elders, absolutely, and with young people in these times, taking actions that support us, making our society and our community and our economy more resilient in these times. That is exactly what I think we need to do.

Now, there's a lot of discussion in terms of this budget about where we are in terms of our fiscal situation. You see the same pattern if you look across governments that are similar to us. Really, there are only two parallel governments to us in Canada right now, which are non-equalization provinces. One is Alberta, and the other is the government of Canada. Saskatchewan is in a slightly different situation. Alberta and Canada.

The last budget tabled by the new Prime Minister and his Finance Minister had a budget deficit of \$78.3 billion — federal deficit, largest in history, except for the COVID years, and double what it had been coming out of the COVID years. In other words, the fiscal situation facing this government is facing that government.

Alberta will be tabling its budget tomorrow, and I would expect we will see a record deficit. Why? Alberta's circumstances parallel ours. We're not equalization provinces. Quebec gets a \$14 billion cheque on its \$13 billion deficit. Manitoba gets a \$5 billion, actually larger in size than Que-

bec, equalization payment on a much smaller economy. We are not an equalization province, nor is Alberta.

Some of the challenges in natural resource industries that we're facing — the relatively low price of oil, which is important to provincial revenues in Alberta — are there. You're going to see the Alberta government have a very significant deficit.

[4:15 p.m.]

In addition to that, you see, in part because of federal policies.... What's happened over the last few years, particularly in the years since 2020, are very large increases in population, which Alberta has seen and British Columbia has seen.

I was Minister of Health for a while. People may remember. In the last three years that I was Minister of Health, the number of people on MSP in three years increased by 540,000 people or 11 percent. That's population growth in three years. What you would normally expect in eight or nine happened in three, maybe even more than that in the past.

If you look at the ten years before that, when there was another government in power, three years was about 100,000. This was 540,000. So that significantly demands.... There are very few health care systems that could expand service to absorb 540,000 people in a population of 4.9 million.

Alberta has the same situation. You heard, by the way, the Alberta Premier speak about — I don't agree with her remedies entirely — that very question, because they face the same situation. They are going to face a large deficit, and we are facing a large deficit. How do we deal with that circumstance? And then Canada faces a large deficit.

It seems to me what you have to do is do what the Minister of Finance has done, which is decide what is important. I think what is most significant, most important and most recognized is health and education. They're the significant provincial responsibilities, and they require our support.

I hear a lot about health care, so I'm going to say a few things about health care. This week we had a report on health care, on primary care in Canada. What did it show? It showed in British Columbia, contrary to repeated speeches by the opposition which use another number almost twice as high, that there are 750,000 people without a family doctor. I think one generally might argue that's too much.

It was 910,000, according to the Canadian community health survey, when the current government took office in 2017. We've added, in that time, 900,000 people, and it's lower, according to the survey — not a small survey, a survey of 16,000, one of the most substantial surveys done on the question in Canadian history. It showed that the number of people without a family doctor has declined by 300,000.

Now, how did that happen? It happened because of gov-

ernment action combined with the action of communities and combined with the action of health care professionals. We changed the payment model for doctors. We established primary care networks, which had never happened before. They talked about them, but it didn't happen before. We established primary care networks. We established urgent and primary care centres. We doubled the number of nurse practitioners we were training, and we increased their role in primary care.

This is a good-news story, and we can continue to grow, because these are last year's numbers. They're going to continue to get better. So 750,000 — all of those other numbers people have been using have been debunked by an independent study which shows the reality. People are getting access to primary care, which is a critical aspect of health care, and we've got to maintain the momentum.

The current Minister of Health is doing that by recruiting more doctors, more nurse practitioners, more health care workers and by training more doctors, in the budget, with a new Surrey medical school and by adding seats to the University of British Columbia. You need a plan, you need to be committed to that plan, you need to invest in that plan, and it's got to be there for the long run.

The problem in primary care has been, historically, that emergent care always displaces spending in primary care. This government hasn't done that. They've gone in with a very succinct plan, and that means, for real people in communities, access to a family doctor, who have not had them for years, because that action was taken.

It's not just the government that deserves credit. It's communities that have built out primary care networks. It's teams of medical professionals. It's the Doctors of B.C. It's many more. It's post-secondary institutions.

That's how you bring change. You commit to it, you make the right decisions, and then you support it over time. We've seen an unprecedented success in British Columbia on the issue of primary care, and we should acknowledge that.

How do we deal, though, with these circumstances broadly now? We've seen this. We've taken action on the fiscal side to ensure that we're making efficient use of our resources. We're investing in critical services like health care and education. I think there are three other things that I suggest we must do.

[4:20 p.m.]

The first is we've got to build things, and we are building things in British Columbia in an unprecedented way, I'd argue. That is B.C. Hydro, which historically has been a builder in B.C., deeply connected to the economic prosperity of British Columbia. In the '60s and '70s and '80s was the decision to nationalize B.C. Hydro., because at that time, the private sector wouldn't provide the capital to develop two rivers at once. So the Premier of British Columbia, who would not describe himself as a socialist,

W.A.C. Bennett, made the decision to nationalize and to build.

Well, in this moment, with the potential of our economy about to grow — just look at our integrated resources plan — we have to invest and use B.C. Hydro, as it has been used before, to drive economic growth, and we are doing that. It is a difference between ourselves and the members on the other side.

We did a call for power — \$6 billion in investment; \$3 billion of First Nations equity in partnerships; power the equivalent of Site C to power 500,000 homes; electricity purchase agreements; and, by the way, projects that are mostly creating jobs in opposition members' ridings.

Now we're doing it again. In May, we'll be announcing the winning projects for the next call for power, because we need electricity. The price of electricity, the price of solar and the price of wind have dropped 75 percent and 90 percent, respectively, in the last 15 years. So we are investing in effective, efficient economic opportunity for our province.

In addition to that, we're building Revelstoke 6. In addition to that, we're making improvements to the Mica dam. In addition to that, also opposed by the opposition, we're building the North Coast transmission line, which will enable mining in our province.

It is a moment for those things. It's a moment for those things in our province. This is what you do with B.C. Hydro.

In addition to that, a call for expressions of interest on firm power. We received 103 responses — we'll be putting that forward soon — which, in total, combined to 19 gigawatts of power, of capacity, an extraordinary opportunity for B.C. B.C. Hydro must invest to create opportunities for the future, and it is doing that, enabling mining, enabling LNG, enabling people.

All of those people I talked about who are requiring family doctors.... All of those people also require, of course, electricity. That means investment in Surrey. That means investment in Burnaby. That means investment in Vancouver. New substations all over our province.

In addition to that, we see.... We need the public sector, the public agencies like B.C. Hydro, like B.C. Timber Sales and the work being done by the Minister of Forests, to drive and support economic growth in our province, and they are doing so in an unprecedented way. This is like the 1960s, and we are operating in that way.

The way you address deficits is to increase wealth, and we want to do that. My inspiration for addressing wealth and driving energy projects is the public health care I feel passionately about. That's what you do, and that's what we need to do in our province.

That also requires.... You see it in the budget — page 155, approximately. You see the impact of the work of the Minister of Mining and Critical Minerals. You see it reflected in resource rents that pay for health care and edu-

cation. They're going to double in two years — mining resource rents, mining royalties — triple in four years.

That doesn't count all of the projects that are coming connected to the North Coast transmission line — outstanding work by the minister and also by the Mining Association and the proponents and communities and First Nations who all, again, partnered on those initiatives.

Let's talk about natural gas. With a very cautious estimate on the price of natural gas, dramatically below the average of estimates, we're seeing a very significant growth in natural gas royalties in the fiscal period, over \$800 million. That reflects, in part, the LNG policies of the government, which are, I think, to my way of thinking, progressive and serious.

[Mable Elmore in the chair.]

There were no final investment decisions, no LNG projects, in B.C. when the NDP government took office. Now we have LNG Canada. We have Ksi Lisims LNG. We have Cedar LNG — First Nations-led, Haisla First Nation.

[4:25 p.m.]

We have Woodfibre LNG. We have the work that's being done with Tilbury and the x̱w̱məθḵw̱əy̱əm First Nation — Woodfibre with the Sḵw̱x̱w̱7mesh First Nation and Tilbury with the x̱w̱məθḵw̱əy̱əm First Nation — that is significant and important work, and other proposals.

You see the immediate effects on revenues, but there are 50,000 people combined to build LNG Canada 1. The opportunities for Ksi Lisims, which is looking at final investment decisions — LNG Canada 2 — are important.

But I want to make one point about all that. There's a lot of talk, and we've heard it, especially from some members on the other side, not all members on the other side, about reconciliation. Tilbury partnership with x̱w̱məθḵw̱əy̱əm First Nation. Woodfibre LNG partnership with Sḵw̱x̱w̱7mesh First Nation. Cedar LNG, a project of the Haisla First Nation. Ksi Lisims LNG, the Nisga'a First Nation.

In other words, you look down the list of projects, and what you see is the value of partnerships. You see it in mining and the work being done by the Minister of Mining and Critical Minerals and the Mining Association and the companies. You see it in the work and the enormous potential of the AltaGas project in Prince Rupert LNG, which is a significant risk that was taken that is bearing fruit today and will bring more wealth and prosperity and jobs to the province.

You have to build, and you have to ensure that there is electricity available to projects that create jobs, that our electricity, first and foremost, is for people. That is precisely what we're doing.

Secondly, you need some capacity for government. This is not new. It's being looked at, of course, and advanced in other jurisdictions, in Ontario and Quebec and other jurisdictions in Canada and even in the United

States. You hear the decision by the United States government and the Trump administration to invest money in ownership share of, for example, in that case, Intel and all their companies.

We've created in this budget an investment fund directed by the Minister of Jobs and Economic Growth that will allow us to partner with other levels of government and business to create wealth and long-term jobs in our province and for the province itself to have a share of that wealth. I think that makes a lot of sense. It gives us the flexibility in our province to have opportunities.

Members of the opposition who oppose NCTL, who oppose the allocation framework, who oppose wind projects, who oppose renewable energy are also opposed to this. But we need to invest right now. We need to build right now. We need to work together and advance while other jurisdictions are doing the same. It would be uncompetitive for us not to do precisely what the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation are doing in this budget, and we should do it.

Finally, I think the most important thing... I want to reflect on something that people will understand, I think, and is of concern for people. We've seen COVID-19. We've seen the Trump administration and the breaking of the old international order so eloquently described by the Prime Minister in Davos recently.

We've seen the impacts of climate change and the need to invest in clean electricity, which is precisely what the government is doing. If you don't have clean electricity, you cannot address climate emissions in a province. We are doing that, with B.C. Hydro in a leadership role. So we do all of those things we need to do.

We are facing other significant challenges in addition, if you can believe it, to climate change and to Trump and others. One of those challenges is the challenge brought forward by artificial intelligence, which presents a significant challenge to a whole generation of workers.

I just want to quote what the people in charge of the companies and the leaders of it say about this. Dario Amodei, the CEO of AI company Anthropic, says: "AI could drive unemployment up 10 to 20 percent in the next one to five years and wipe out half of all entry-level white-collar jobs." Sam Altman, of OpenAI, has a bet about the inevitable date when a billion-dollar company is staffed by just one person.

We've said, and we've looked, in these times.... You think of the great advances of the past, how long it was from Edison to the advent when electricity was in 50 percent of people's homes.

[4:30 p.m.]

How long it took for the telephone to be invented, then be in 50 percent of homes. It was decades and decades, so its impact on the economy was dealt with through attrition and other means.

We're talking about immediate impact. That is why governments that have a focus on the future will do exactly what this government is doing, which is to invest in training. We need to arm young people with the training they need for the jobs of the future.

When we talk about medical schools and investment in post-secondary education and allowing people in housing to live near their campuses and have an opportunity for people elsewhere to go to other places to learn more and we invest in communities, we are building the resilience of society. We are standing up for people at a time when all of these things, Trump and climate change, require a government committed to young people and humans in the future.

That is what we are doing. It is when you invest, for example, in the \$283 million in incremental spending on a skilled workforce to fill new jobs — that's responding to the future. It is foolhardy not to do that. It's foolhardy to say we are seeing disruptions in our economy and not to allow the young people that we represent to be supported in these times.

We need more skills training, and this budget delivers it. It delivers it. I would say.... When you're facing this, we need to ensure, as we did with our allocation framework, that our electricity responses go to human beings first, that they advance projects that support jobs and communities. That is precisely what we did, even though the Conservatives and the Green Party opposed it.

We think our electricity.... We have an ALR in B.C., and I say thank God. Our land and our water should go first to human beings and to our future. That our young people and all people have access to the training they will need in this time of disruption.... That's what this budget seeks to do, not to see this moment, which is facing every government in Canada, as an opportunity to cut on things that are essential in the future, like public education and public health care.

The budget defends public education and it defends public health care, but it is also future-seeking in that it is saying that we need to build in our province, we need to build capital projects in the public system, we need to build them in the private system, and we need to make it happen now. That's how we respond.

You improve the revenue side, and that is what we're doing. You can see the results of the investment in mining. You can see the results in the investment in natural gas. You can see the results in the investment in clean tech. You can see the results in our investment in public health care, which means hundreds of thousands of people who didn't have a family doctor now have a family doctor. You see that impact.

This is a time for government to respond, to make our province more resilient, to support the future, to support the future of young people, to be there with them in these disruptive times. We can't stop the development of

artificial intelligence, even if we wanted to. There are opportunities there, and you're going to see them in British Columbia soon with new projects launched here soon. We can ensure that the people that matter, the people who live here, the people who are going to live here, have access to opportunity.

We can't stop, sometimes, a worldwide pandemic from coming to B.C. Oh, if we could, but we can't. But we can respond better than anyone else, supporting our workers more, having the best outcomes, making sure our children got back to school earlier than anywhere else. You can do that.

We can't stop worldwide climate change. But we can do our part to fight it and to make people more resilient against it and to ensure that people have access to a cleaner future, which the world is pointing to, even if the current U.S. government is not right now.

We know that there are challenges in the future. We know we have an aging population. But this budget presents another opportunity to say what we're about in B.C.

[4:35 p.m.]

We're about addressing our challenges head-on. We're about supporting health care and education. We're about building and creating jobs in our province. We're about ensuring that inequality, in these times which will drive inequality, is reduced, not increased, in our province.

You bet that's what we're for. That's what this government is for, that's what this Finance Minister is for, and that's what this budget is for.

Amelia Boulton: Before I begin my remarks on Budget 2026, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the heart-breaking tragedy in Tumbler Ridge. Our thoughts are with the families, first responders and the entire community as they navigate unimaginable loss.

In moments like this, British Columbians are reminded of what truly matters — the safety of our neighbours, the strength of our communities and the responsibility we carry in the Legislature to make decisions worthy of the people we serve.

It is in that spirit that I rise to respond to Budget 2026. This budget asks British Columbians to accept a projected \$13-billion-plus deficit as business as usual; it asks families to accept mounting debt as inevitable; and it asks small businesses, already struggling under inflation, rising input costs and public safety challenges, to accept new taxes on the very services they rely on to survive.

The issue before us is not whether government should invest in British Columbians. We all believe in investing in health care, in schools and in public safety. The question is whether this government has demonstrated discipline, focus and a credible path back to balance. On that question, this budget falls short.

This is now one of the largest deficits in British Columbia's history outside of a global emergency. Debt is climb-

ing. Interest payments, money that does not build a single hospital bed or hire a single police officer, are consuming billions of dollars that could otherwise go to front-line services. That is not sustainable, it is not compassionate, and it is not responsible.

Beyond the macro numbers, there are specific choices in this budget that should deeply concern every small business owner and every working family in this province. One of the most significant is the expansion of the provincial sales tax, the PST, to a broad range of services that have historically been exempt — accounting services; legal services; consulting; engineering; architecture; and, notably, private security services.

This is not a minor administrative tweak. This is a structural change to how British Columbia taxes its economy. For decades, the PST in British Columbia has primarily applied to goods, tangible items people purchase. Services, particularly professional services, were largely exempt. This government has now decided to expand the tax base and apply the 7 percent PST to a wide array of services, effective later this year.

Let us be clear about what that means. It means that a small business that hires an accountant to file its taxes will now pay more. A family that needs professional advice when starting a small enterprise will now pay more. A developer hiring engineers and architects to build housing will face higher costs, costs that will ultimately be passed on to homebuyers and renters.

Then there is the most egregious: the issue of private security. Across this province, businesses are hiring private security, not because it is a luxury but because it has become a necessity. Retailers facing repeated shoplifting, construction sites targeted by theft, community events requiring crowd management and apartment buildings dealing with safety concerns — these businesses are not hiring security because they want to. They are hiring security because they feel they have no choice, yet this budget adds PST to those services.

At a time when we acknowledge ongoing concerns about public safety, at a time when small businesses are already paying out of pocket to protect their staff and customers, this government has chosen to tax that very protection. Think about the message that sends. Instead of meaningfully addressing the root causes of crime, instead of ensuring adequate policing resources or delivering timely justice through our courts, this government is making it more expensive for businesses to protect themselves.

[4:40 p.m.]

When you apply PST to professional services, those costs ripple outward through housing projects; infrastructure builds; small businesses; and, ultimately, to consumers. The government may see a revenue line, but British Columbians will see higher bills.

This budget also speaks to a broader pattern — record

spending without corresponding reform. We continue to hear announcements, we see press releases, but we do not see the structural changes necessary to improve health care access, to accelerate housing approvals, to streamline permitting in the resource sector or to unleash private sector growth. Instead, we see deficits projected not just for one year but for years to come.

Every dollar borrowed today is a dollar that must be repaid tomorrow with interest by our children and grandchildren. We are told that this is necessary, that there is no alternative. But there is always an alternative to unchecked spending and ever-expanding taxation.

We could prioritize core services over administrative growth. We could focus on outcomes rather than announcements. We could create an environment where investment is welcomed rather than penalized. And we could recognize that small businesses are not an endless source of revenue. They are the backbone of our communities.

In ridings across this province, including Penticton-Summerland, I hear the same message. Costs are rising faster than revenues. Insurance, rent, utilities, wages, compliance burdens and now expanded PST on essential services. At some point, something has to give.

A responsible budget should provide confidence, confidence to investors, to entrepreneurs and to families planning their futures. Instead, Budget 2026 creates uncertainty — uncertainty about the sustainability of our finances, uncertainty about the long-term tax burden and uncertainty about whether this government truly understands the pressures facing ordinary British Columbians.

British Columbians deserve a government that lives within its means, that protects essential services without layering on new taxes and that understands economic growth is not a talking point. It is a foundation upon which all social progress rests. This budget does not meet that standard. For that reason, I cannot support it.

David Williams: Today my heart is heavy as I reflect on the tragic shooting in Tumbler Ridge. On behalf of the residents of my riding of Salmon Arm-Shuswap, I extend the deepest condolences to the victims, their families and the entire community.

We stand with you in the grief and solidarity during this difficult time.

Going on, budgets are not just accounting exercises; they're choices. They reveal priorities. They show very clearly who government believes can afford to wait and who cannot. Unfortunately, Budget 2026 makes a series of choices that will make life harder for all British Columbians who already are struggling to get by — seniors on fixed incomes, young people trying to build a future, working families, rural communities and small businesses.

This budget may attempt to address a serious deficit problem of the government's own making, but it also does so by deferring solutions, narrowing opportunity and

quietly downloading today's costs onto the next generation. Unfortunately, this government continues to choose hindsight over foresight, kind of like the movie *Groundhog Day*.

A budget is not simply a ledger of revenues and expenses; it is also a statement of values. It reveals who government chooses to protect, and it chooses who they prioritize and who is asked once again to sacrifice or wait.

[4:45 p.m.]

It has long been said that a society is judged on how the government treats the elderly, the young and the most vulnerable. Today as we debate the budget, the question before this House is not simply whether the numbers add up but whether the choices made reflect compassion, fairness and responsibility or whether they once again leave too many British Columbians feeling forgotten, overburdened and, most of all, unheard.

For seniors who built this province, now facing rising costs, shrinking services and uncertainty in health care, a budget should offer dignity and security. For young people and families trying to put down roots, afford a home or plan for the future in British Columbia, a budget should offer opportunity and hope. And for the most vulnerable — those struggling with disabilities, mental illness, addictions, housing insecurity or living in rural or remote communities — a budget should be a lifeline, not a hollow promise.

Let's start with the elderly. I want to speak directly to seniors watching this debate, those people who built our communities, raised our families, and contributed for decades to the province we enjoy today.

I want seniors to know on this side of the House, we are listening and we are speaking directly to you on matters that you care about.

I realize for many seniors living in Salmon Arm, Armstrong or the many communities in this province, Budget 2026 is not just a fiscal plan. It is a signal about whether this government truly understands the realities of British Columbians. Unfortunately, this government either doesn't care or simply doesn't listen.

Across this province, seniors are facing a perfect storm — rising costs, stretched health services, limited housing options and a growing uncertainty about whether help will be there when they need it. Budget 2026 does little to ease those priorities and pressures, and in some cases, it makes them worse.

How can this NDP government justify taxing yarn and clothing patterns and natural fibres that may be made into a fuchsia sweater for a grandson or a dress for a granddaughter? How can this NDP government tax basic cable and landline telephone services when we all know that that disproportionately affects seniors?

The government will point to its increases in overall health spending, but seniors do not experience health care

in the abstract. They experience it at home, in care facilities and through front-line support services.

Critics and seniors advocates have been clear. Additional health funding does not sufficiently target long-term care, assisted living or home support services. That means seniors needing help to remain independent still struggle to access home care.

I know in my riding there are lots living out in the country there that certainly can't get home care. They would love to stay in their homes, but they can't get it. Families trying to keep loved ones at home receive little relief. Again, families struggling. They like to keep people at home. Tough to do.

Care homes remain understaffed and unable to expand capacity. I get numerous emails in the constituency office regarding that. One of the most troubling aspects of this budget is the decision to pause or "re-pace" long-term-care construction projects around British Columbia. We already know that wait times for long-term-care placements in supportive and long-term care average months and, in some cases, far, far longer.

[4:50 p.m.]

Polson Extended Care in Vernon, as well as Mount Ida Mews, as well as Bastion Place in Salmon Arm, to mention only a few, are stretched to the limit, with future demand inevitable. Seniors who can no longer safely live at home are waiting in hospital beds, emergency departments or housing that no longer meets their needs.

When long-care projects are delayed, the consequences are immediate and predictable. Seniors wait for appropriate care. Families shoulder more and more responsibility with less and less support. Hospitals remain congested with patients who should be in care homes, not congesting up the emergency wards.

With British Columbia's population aging faster than ever, this lack of targeted investment is not just short-sighted; it is irresponsible. This is not compassionate care. This is a system failure, and it is particularly damaging in communities with aging populations, including rural and semi-rural regions such as the riding of Salmon Arm—Shuswap.

When infrastructure is delayed today, the shortage becomes a crisis tomorrow. Budget 2026 tells seniors with complex care needs and their care providers to just make it work. Long-term-care projects across the province are delayed or postponed — as the NDP word of the day states, re-paced. There is no new investment for home support services despite repeated warnings from advocates that this is where the pressure could be relieved and dignity preserved.

At the same time, the government quietly makes it more expensive for seniors to stay in their homes. Property tax deferment interest rates are raised to prime plus 2 percent, and interest now compounds monthly. For seniors on fixed incomes, that's not a technical change. It is

a financial squeeze that grows every single month. This budget makes aging in place much, much harder, not easier.

Budget 2026 also includes plans to reduce the size of the public service through attrition and hiring freezes. Sounds good. While these reductions may not be labelled as seniors cuts, seniors will feel them first.

Seniors rely heavily on health administration, social service coordination, community support programs, case-workers and system navigators. When staffing levels drop, phone calls go unanswered, paperwork piles up and wait times grow. Seniors, often the least able to navigate complex systems, are left to fend for themselves. This is how services erode quietly, without ever being called a cut.

Many seniors live on fixed incomes. They do not benefit from wage increases. They cannot work extra hours to absorb higher costs. Yet the budget raises serious concerns about tax fairness through paused indexation and bracket creep. That means seniors pay more tax without earning more income. The purchasing power of pensions declines. Essentials like food, utilities, medications and transportation become harder to afford. For seniors budgeting carefully each month, this is just another squeeze.

Changes to the property tax deferment program have not received nearly enough attention. Under Budget 2026, the interest compounds monthly rather than simple interest, and new deferrals become significantly more expensive. For seniors that are house-rich but cash-poor, this erodes equity faster and discourages participation altogether.

[4:55 p.m.]

This has a profound effect on seniors living in rural and remote areas, which directly speaks to many of the constituents in the North Okanagan and Shuswap. Many have retired to the area and now face challenges to remain in their homes, or at least they will face challenges in the future.

Seniors are not commercial borrowers. Their homes are not investment vehicles. They are places of stability, dignity and independence. This budget was an opportunity to prepare for an aging population. Instead, seniors see delayed care, stretched services, rising costs and shrinking support.

Seniors are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for foresight, fairness and a little bit of respect. Budget 2026 does not meet that test.

What about the young? Well, when we examine the challenges of seniors compared to young people, we see a different stage of life but the same pattern of delay and displacement.

Let me begin with housing. The government speaks often about housing and affordability, yet this budget quietly pulls back from the very programs meant to deliver supply. The community housing fund is indefin-

itely closed. Capital delivery is re-paced, and projects are delayed.

Less supply does not mean affordability. It means higher rents, longer commutes and the possibility of more young people leaving their communities altogether. I would like to see young families stay and contribute in my region rather than relocate to Alberta. You cannot claim to be addressing affordability while slowing housing delivery. Those two things do not reconcile.

Budget 2026 also provides flat operating funding to colleges and universities, while the costs continue to rise. The resulting action is predictable: fewer course offerings, larger class sizes, reduced student services and upward pressure on fees. When students face higher debt and fewer pathways, the entire province pays the price. Education is an investment for a better future for all of us.

Budget 2026 effectively freezes transit funding as well. Inflation alone erodes service levels. Young people, students, apprentices and entry-level workers rely heavily on transit to access education and employment. In rural and semi-rural communities like Scotch Creek, Sorrento and Sicamous, limited transportation compounds isolation and reduces workforce participation. Mobility is opportunity, and this budget restricts both.

Budget 2026 raises the lowest personal income tax rate and pauses indexing. What does that mean for younger residents, who are generally at the lower end of the tax bracket? Well, that's easy. It means that young workers may pay more on their paycheque. Inflation will quietly raise the effect of tax burdens, and government revenues will rise without transparency — surprise, surprise. This is bracket creep, and it hits those least able to absorb it.

What about child care? Well, as for young families, this government long promised affordable, accessible child care with a \$10-a-day commitment. Yet Budget 2026 quietly pauses the expansion of that program. Existing families keep their subsidies, but no new spaces, and new provider enrolment is effectively frozen.

We should take a moment to reflect. Only a small fraction of spaces actually met the \$10-a-day target announced by the NDP. Most families still pay far more than promised and sit on wait-lists that stretch into the unforeseen future.

[5:00 p.m.]

A system that exists in theory but not in practice is not affordability. It is a roadblock to meaningful employment for many families in this province. There is no serious plan to restore affordability, no urgency in housing supply, no bold investment in workforce development. The younger generation should not be asked to accept a lower standard of living than the one before it. Yet Budget 2026 moves us closer to that reality.

Now, let's talk about the vulnerable. When we connect the impacts on seniors and youth, we see the same pattern playing out, most harshly on the vulnerable. Mental

health funding is cut at MCFD. Autism supports are in jeopardy. Children in care receive rhetoric without prevention. Seniors with complex needs face delayed care. Low-income households face higher taxes.

Those at risk and most in need live in our communities. They live in Falkland, Malakwa, Blind Bay and near every one of us, wherever we reside. This budget fails them.

When we look past the headlines in this budget, past the slogans, past the spin, we are left with a troubling reality. This budget asks the most vulnerable British Columbians and their caring families to carry more of the burden while receiving less in support and not much in return.

Community-based advocates have been prominently quoted in the media and organizational releases urging the government not to overlook the broader health supports. The autism funding program is being phased out by March 31, 2027, replaced by two new funding streams plus expanded community services. *Business in Vancouver* commentary by Rob Shaw reports that the redesign could leave 10,000 B.C. kids with less support — not one; 10,000 — arguing that fiscal mechanics effectively trade off prior autism funding against new benefit costs.

Child care directors note that well-staffed, quality care for children requires adequate funding for educators and that current struggles could affect access, going forward.

The B.C. Care Providers Association said this budget's lack of immediate funding for seniors care is appalling, warning that about 7,000 seniors — not one; 7,000 — already on long-term-care wait-lists will face worsened delays and pressure on emergency rooms as a result.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives stated that the budget impacts will fall on low- to moderate-income households. Budget 2026 fails them all.

Mental health services are not a luxury; they are essential. Yet this budget cuts \$3 million from the Ministry of Children and Family Development's mental health budget. That's not trimming the fat. That's cutting preventative care. Those dollars pay for early intervention, youth counselling and family supports — the very services that stop people from ending up in emergency rooms, police cells or even worse.

At the same time, there are no new investments in mental health services beyond what already was announced last year — no expansion, no new capacity, no response to rising demand. All three involuntary care facilities referenced by the government were announced previously. Budget 2026 added nothing new. Yet emergency departments are overwhelmed, police officers are doing mental health work they were never trained for, and families are begging for help. That's not compassion; that's managed neglect.

[5:05 p.m.]

Families raising children with autism and developmental disabilities already carry an extraordinary emo-

tional and financial burden. This budget offers them silence. There are no new autism-specific investments, only a new funding model; no increase to therapy caps; no increase to unit funding; no plan for youth aging out of services, and an uncertain future when they turn 18. Inflation rises, demand grows, and costs increase. When government fails to keep pace, families pay the difference out of pocket, out of their savings and out of exhaustion.

The government often speaks about protecting children, but protection requires prevention. Cutting mental health funding undermines youth supports, family reunification efforts and trauma-informed care, especially for Indigenous children, who remain vastly overrepresented in care. There are no new investments in youth transition housing, wraparound services for complex behaviour needs or supports for neurodiverse children in care.

When we fail these young people early, we do not save money. We simply delay the bill until it shows up in the justice system, the hospitals and the homeless stats. This is not responsible government. That's a very expensive indifference.

Affordability is not improving; it's deteriorating. This NDP budget raises the lowest personal income tax rate, the first increase in that bracket in more than two decades. It pauses tax bracket indexation, guaranteeing that inflation will quietly push people into higher taxes, even if their purchasing power never increases. It expands PST into areas like professional and security service costs that do not get absorbed. They are passed on directly to consumers.

Who pays for tax preparation? Who pays strata management fees? Who pays security when their business is vandalized? Many working families, seniors and small business owners who are barely hanging on, that's who. This is a budget that raises revenue from the people who can least absorb it.

Housing insecurity is not solved by announcement or press announcements. Budget 2026 introduces no new enhancements to rental assistance programs for seniors or low-income renters. One policy commentary notes that Budget 2026 does not add new increases to SAFER, which is Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters, or RAP supplements, despite high rates of unaffordable housing among senior renters.

At the same time, capital projects that are tied to supportive housing, student housing and community health infrastructure are delayed under the so-called re-pacing. For some people on the margins, delay is denial. We all know when housing falls short, homelessness grows, and when homelessness grows, pressure explodes across health care, policing and social services. Yet this budget offers no structural response.

British Columbians were told that decriminalization would improve outcomes. Instead, this NDP government has committed roughly \$19 million to monitoring and

evaluation, while admitting it moved ahead without reliable baseline data. Surprise, surprise.

There are no meaningful new investments in long-term-treatment beds, no expansion of recovery housing and no serious rural access strategy. Downtowns deteriorate, families grieve, communities feel unsafe, and all this government calls it is a learning experience. British Columbians deserve much, much better.

[5:10 p.m.]

It's abundantly clear that this budget fails the elderly, the young and the most vulnerable among us. British Columbia is not a Third World jurisdiction. We should be a prosperous province, one that has outcomes that reflect our shared values — caring for our neighbours, protecting those who cannot protect themselves and providing a credible roadmap that gives future generations confidence, opportunity and hope.

I'm seeing I'd better cut along here. There's so much to go on here. I could go on forever.

While the government points to a \$15 million recapitalization for 2026, this funding merely patches immediate gaps after communities were forced to compete for shrinking resources, and it provides no certainty for the fiscal year. Earlier in the year, funding constraints had already pushed FireSmart into a pause and a competitive education model, stripping out fuel management work. The most effective on-the-ground mitigations from eligible activities, intake periods and program scope have been narrowed to fit constrained budgets, not the wildfire risk.

At the same time, reports of a shift to a more centralized provincial wildfire mitigation model have alarmed rural and municipal leaders, who fear local expertise and decision-making will be sidelined as wildfire threats continue to escalate. The Insurance Brokers Association of B.C. has warned that the FireSmart program is essential to insurers' ability to mitigate wildfire risk and that without that meaningful risk reduction program, rural communities could face higher premiums or lose access to home insurance altogether.

Having worked previously in loss control, I see firsthand the value of these programs. These funding models have been decreased by the government as part of the strategy of reducing a little bit of funding to some of the districts, right? The reason I brought that up is because that's very, very important for my riding, where they've suffered all kinds of fires in the past. I know the value that the FireSmart program brings to everybody.

Looking at the time, I'm just closing here. When we step back and look at Budget 2026 as a whole, not through a lens but across the full scope of government, it becomes clear that this is not a budget of renewal, recovery or confidence. It is a budget of decline.

One more quick little mention here. One of the most deeply concerning things that I have.... It was quietly bur-

ied in the elements of this year's budget legislation. It was the decision to eliminate the independent hiring watchdog, the Office of the Merit Commissioner. This office....

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

David Williams: Ah, I could go on for hours here. Either way, I will just say that I definitely have to oppose this budget.

Hon. Niki Sharma: I just wanted to take a moment, before I got into the content of my speech, to let the residents of Tumbler Ridge and those that have lost loved ones know that our hearts are still with them as they go through what we can only imagine as a deep amount of grief. I'm grateful for all the counselling supports and the people that are out there to provide them support. As they move through it, we'll continue to have them in our hearts.

It's my pleasure to speak in favour of the budget speech. Before I do, I have to say that it's been an honour for me to serve the riding of Vancouver-Hastings and to serve as Attorney General. It's been a real honour to be part of a great team, and I wanted to spend a moment to thank the people that work with me, both in my constituency office and here in the Attorney General's office.

It takes a tremendous amount of work, compassion, empathy and dedication to show up for a community every single day, and I'm so grateful to have the team that I do in my constituency office who, every day, show up for the citizens of Vancouver-Hastings and, I know, change lives. Whether it's housing, medical care or insecure immigration status, they are changing lives every day, and I couldn't be more proud of them. So a big thank-you to Kathryn Mandell, Patrick Colvin and Sylvia Wu for the work that they do in my constituency office.

[5:15 p.m.]

It's also been a real honour to be Attorney General over the years, and it's never boring. It's never a boring day. I have such a great team in my minister's office that supports me every day and helps everybody manage through all the different issues that come through every day. I will be forever grateful for the work and the commitment that they do, and I think they deserve a moment of recognition before I move on. That's Derrick Harder, my chief of staff; Keefer Pelech; Raunaq Singh; and Claire Stechishin.

I am so grateful for the work that you do.

I also have a team that keeps me organized and keeps me fed and keeps me supported.

Tanera Nanninga, Paula Demelo and Candice Hughes — so grateful for your work and corresponding to people and keeping my office such a great place to work. I know the people of the province are grateful for the work that you do as well.

In response to Budget 2026, I just want to spend a moment talking about the work that we've done as a govern-

ment over the last few years. We've seen it in our communities. We're building hospitals. We're building schools. We're investing in transit. We're investing in housing and clean electricity. There is a transformation happening on the ground with the largest number of capital projects that are there to increase the level of services for people of this province.

We have a lot to be proud of because of that work and because of the work that will continue to happen with the investments in this budget.

The fastest-growing attachment to family doctors in the country. So 350,000 people are now attached to a family doctor when they weren't before because of the work of our government and our commitment to improving the health care of all British Columbians. That's better than any other province in the whole country and something we can all be proud of.

I want to spend a moment just to let the people of Vancouver know that the investments that we're making in all of those capital projects and services are also showing up in their communities. Whether it's through investment in housing, St. Paul's Hospital, a new clean tech centre at Vancouver Community College; whether it's the investments that we're making in transit that are coming on-line soon, student housing at UBC, all the investments in health care that are expanding, including expanded surgery capacity in our hospitals in Vancouver, it's tremendous. It's going to benefit so many people with the work that we're doing to improve services.

A few things that I wanted to spend some time on in this budget that mean a lot, not only to me but, I know, to the people of my community.

I've had parents very often speak to me about how important it is that our education is strong for their children, and I agree. We need to keep making sure that our kids have the best opportunities possible in their schools every day. We're investing \$634 million in K to 12. What's included in that, which I think is very important, is \$167 million with a classroom enhancement fund. That's to make sure that we can increase the supports in our classrooms.

I made a commitment to some parents that have come to me in my constituency about how we could show up to have better supports in classrooms for them and how we would work together with the Vancouver school board to make sure that that support is showing up in their classrooms across my riding and across the city.

I continue that commitment. I think with this budget, it shows that as a government, we're also committed to improving that and doing the work necessary to make sure every kid, no matter what their needs are, gets a really good start and the best education that we can offer them.

That includes the supports that.... I'm so proud of the Minister of Children and Family Development, who I know is so committed to this work and has done a tremendous job of transforming a system that will provide

\$475 million of new money for kids in this province. It's just breathtaking to think about those kids that didn't have access to services that will now and what that will do for their families and what that will do for their futures.

I know that was a lot of work to get where we are today, and it was a lot of working together. I'm just so proud of that work, and I know it's going to make a difference.

Child care. We made a commitment when we came into government to expand affordable, accessible child care across this province. That's a commitment that required investment, and we put our money to it, close to \$1 billion of investment into child care along with the federal money.

[5:20 p.m.]

We've been able to make a real difference for families across this province, making it so they can save money on child care and have better access to child care.

We know we have more work to do. This budget commits \$330 million to child care, and the Minister of Education and Child Care is working hard right now. I'm so grateful for all the advocates, all of the people on the front line that are sitting down with us to figure out the future of child care so that we can continue to expand that access and that affordability across this province.

It's such important work. It puts women back to work. It changes lives. It puts money back into the pockets of families so that they can put it in other ways to support their tightening cost of living that's happening across the country. It's such important work, and this budget shows our commitment to continuing to grow that work. It's really important.

Another really important part that I am proud of in this budget is our investment in skilled trades. We just heard a rousing speech from the Minister of Energy and Climate Solutions about the impacts of AI and other uncertainties happening to our young people and how our job market needs to change to respond.

I know a lot of the labour movement have been asking for more investment in skilled trades so we can get the skills into the hands of the workers in the province, to be there for all the jobs of the future and all the jobs that we need them to help us with when it comes to building out our province, building out our clean energy grid, building housing, growing our economy.

So \$241 million in SkilledTradesBC is tremendous, and I know that will impact and improve lives across this province. I'm really, really looking forward to that work as it rolls out across this province.

I've been so honoured to serve as Attorney General for a few years now, and I wanted to focus a little bit on the budget that we have in our ministry and the work that we're going to continue to do with the investments that are made. There are a lot of really good investments into our justice system in this budget. We've had a commitment to making our justice system timely, effective and

centred on people, including improving access to justice across this province.

This budget includes a \$22 million investment in staffing for Crown counsel, judges and lawyers to improve access to justice. The more we can get matters dealt with and done in a timely way, the better it is for everybody.

A big investment in our sheriff service — \$5 million to support sheriffs.

I want to take a moment to say thank you to all the sheriffs out there. I get to go to your graduations. I get to see you in the courthouses across this province. I see the good work that you do and how you show up to keep our courtrooms safe and our system of justice working in such an incredible way. And you tell articling students and other people lost in courthouses where they have to go. I'm so grateful for that work.

There's \$1.2 million for the independent investigations office to ensure transparency and oversight of our policing. They play a really important role in our justice system and our enforcement system, so if there's serious bodily harm or an injury by a police officer, our IIO is there. Over the last few years, we've been on a journey to make sure the investments we're making in them help them get to timely resolutions of their investigations. They've done a great job of turning some of those timelines around and investing in their resources to be training investigators and doing the important work that they do with integrity.

Improving access to justice is one of my priorities as Attorney General. The justice system impacts so many people's lives, and we want to make sure that it's available to people in ways when they most need it, or else there can be very significant impacts upon their lives, their rights and their futures.

We're working to modernize our justice system. It's about making sure we have the right investments at the right time for people to access services, like a virtual counter service that provides people with remote access to registrar experts so they can understand what they need to file and what the processes are. We've moved traffic court online. It enables end-to-end digital dispute resolution to make those processes easy. We've provided money for online booking systems to ensure that we're helping to use technology to improve access to justice.

[5:25 p.m.]

We've also been committed as a government to improving public safety. That requires systems working together in new ways. Our ReVOII program, the repeat violent offender initiative that was launched a few months after I became AG, has resulted in those 12 hubs operating around the province to circle around the most violent repeat offenders and solve for them, whether it means increased incarceration or solving for the mental health or other needs that they have, so that they are no longer causing harm to themselves or communities.

The results of that program have been quite remark-

able. I'm really proud of the work that everybody has done in that system. What it showed is a decrease in recidivism. People that were responsible for 100 calls a month are stable and no longer resulting in calls to the police. A reduction in violence, a reduction in addictions. It has just been such an incredible program to show up to make our streets safer.

That's why, in this budget, we're expanding that program and changing it to chronic property offending initiatives. This is \$16 million over two years that will have our system circle around those repeat offenders that may not be in the violent category but that are causing that street disorder. What I hear from mayors across the province is that usually they know of 15 or 30 people that are maybe not in the ReVOII program and that are causing most of the challenges.

I'm confident that with the model that we used for ReVOII applying to that chronic property offender program, we'll be able to tackle that together with our partners.

We have also invested in the prosecution service — \$40 million more in the prosecutions, to ensure they have stable resourcing levels, along with positions related to bail and facilities expansion. That represents a 28 percent increase, since 2024, in our prosecution service funding.

I've been aggressively advocating for changes to our Criminal Code that will help our system work better. We're calling for those changes with Bill C-14, which has now passed through the House and is with the Senate.

I'm hopeful that those will help when it comes to strengthening our bail system, particularly when it comes to intimate-partner violence. When somebody seeks safety from the system and comes forward to say that they're experiencing intimate-partner violence, it is the most dangerous time for them, often. The system needs to respond with that safety.

It's something that's been a really high priority for myself in the reforms that we're doing through Dr. Stanton's report, which she has given me, about how to reform the whole justice system when it comes to sexual assault and intimate-partner violence. I have a whole team in my ministry that has been hard at work doing that, with regular updates on how we're able to transform that system.

Another key focus of ours is on multinational companies that operate to either engage in deceptive practices or cause widespread harm, at significant cost to people in this province and without facing any repercussions. We have a great legal team in my ministry that has been leveraging every tool available, whether it's legislation, regulation or litigation, to make sure that the bad actors are accountable for the harms that they create.

B.C. is leading across North America when it comes to successfully taking the world's largest tobacco, opioid and vaping manufacturers to the highest courts to recover health care costs. In 2025, a national settlement was reached in the tobacco litigation, also led by B.C. and

on behalf of all the provinces and federal governments. Under the settlement, B.C. will receive \$3.6 billion because of litigation that started right here in B.C.

We had the leadership and the forcefulness to take on these companies that were causing harm, and we were paying the bills. That benefited our budget, and it benefits all of the services that we know British Columbians rely on. Not only that, but provinces across this country, including Canada, also received billions of dollars into their health care systems, which is, I think, a remarkable achievement that we can all be proud of and that started here in B.C.

Another part of the work in my ministry is anti-racism. We're working every day to make sure that we remove the racism that exists in systemic ways in our systems. The budget from last year and today continues investments in our racist incident helpline, which, I know, is helping people every day that are reporting incidents and getting referred to the right resources across this province.

[5:30 p.m.]

We also have a Resilience B.C. Anti-Racism Network, and I know the parliamentary secretary, who's sitting right here, has been really doing a lot of great work going around the province to meet with the Resilience Anti-Racism Network and hear the needs that they have and help us work on our anti-racism action plan, which will be coming.

We've seen a tremendous expansion in First Nations justice across this province, with key investments that include funding for the First Nations Justice Council to set up Indigenous justice centres across this province, with 15 now serving Indigenous people. It's a remarkable thing to offer access to justice. I'm really grateful for that work.

This budget continues that investment. Every day people are showing up at those centres and getting the services that they need, whether it's with child and family services or with criminal matters, and getting the culturally appropriate supports that they need for that.

We've been able to invest in expansive ways in legal aid. Legal aid in this budget has \$162 million. That also includes an expansion to family law legal aid — one of the largest, I think, in history, in terms of money, over these last few years — and the opening of a family violence clinic that is there to serve people that need particular supports related to family violence and complex matters they're dealing with, getting free legal advice and free legal support for those matters.

It's been just great work that I think we should all be proud of. I'm proud of the work that we have been doing to show up for people. If we can get people to get the support they need at the right time in family law, we know it changes lives. A lot of people across this province have experienced the family law justice system in different ways throughout their life, and we know it can be traumatizing. It can be, sometimes, longer than what people want it to

be, and it can affect the children and the relationships that we know we need to make sure are strong in the future.

The early resolution process was something that was introduced to help resolve these matters outside of court. We're expanding that across the province because we saw a huge level of success for this program. When we piloted in Surrey, we saw that 57 percent of the families that were using the early resolution process resolved their matter without going to court, a 61 percent decline in new family cases at the courthouse.

We know that this process works, and I'm really glad that this budget has the investment that will bring it across the province in more registries, because it'll help families when they need it.

Online safety has been a real focus of mine since I've been Attorney General. It's my view that laws across the world have not kept up with the harms that people experience online, particularly our young people, and that is something that, as legislators and as policy-makers across the world, we need to reckon with.

We launched the IIPA, the Intimate Images Protection Act, with victim support services attached to it. This is a program that helps people take hold of intimate images of themselves that are being distributed without their consent. We continue to invest in the supports that the CRT, the Civil Resolution Tribunal, needs to run this program and the victim supports that are necessary for people that are coming forward with this type of harm.

The victim support services have now helped hundreds of people and no doubt have saved some people's lives, because we know that sometimes the most tragic outcomes come from not having the right intervention at the right time. On top of that, the speed of their resolution — and the CRT deserves full credit for this — is so fast, record-breaking in the justice system, where you can get an order, or an image taken down, sometimes the same day, which is a quite remarkable feat.

When it comes to the speed of things that happen online, the justice system also needs to be just as quick. I've been advocating directly with the federal government. I know they are working on online harms legislation.

It's my expectation and request with the federal government, the body that has the most tools to deal with online harm as their jurisdiction over telecommunications and other constitutional matters that they have more powers over, that they should put in place legislation that makes sure that children are protected from the dangers online. Some jurisdictions have age restrictions, which I think are important, on social media use and what is also just not available for them unless the platforms can show that they are safe.

[5:35 p.m.]

This is an important issue, not only for young people but every parent across this province. I speak for myself, but I think I speak for many parents when we talk about

the struggle of screen time and the struggle of working with your kids to be safe online.

Every parent across this province in this world is dealing with that and, in my view, we should not be letting these social media companies experiment on the minds of our children without regulation. So my ask is for the federal government to move on that, and if they don't, then we certainly will in this province.

Budget 2026 protects the justice and public safety services that British Columbians rely on. It makes key investments in those services and helps to make sure that there are the tools that all the actors need in place to make sure of timely resolution of our system, of our justice matters, and also supports growth in different areas like access to justice.

We are investing in so many things in this budget and continue to invest over the years. I've talked about some of the things that people of Vancouver can see that come online, like St. Paul's Hospital, transit, new schools, housing. In a lot of communities.... We are building so much non-market housing in Vancouver and across this province.

We've been through a lot as a province and continue to be going through a trade war and a lot of serious impacts on people across this province that are feeling the effects of that.

I want to assure everybody that we stand together in fighting for and protecting services and fighting for British Columbia in every way that we can, fighting for the economy that we know we need in order to support the services that everybody relies on. We're not backing down from the services like health care, hospitals, schools that make British Columbia what it is. We will continue to stand up for that, including investing in the future, like our children and the different areas that I talked about related to schools and more supports for kids that need it.

I'm really proud of the strides that we've made in government, and it's really a deep honour for me to serve as Attorney General of B.C. We'll continue to do the work that British Columbians need to advance all of the things that make this province strong and make all of us united in a common cause for British Columbians.

Jody Toor: On behalf of the residents of Langley-Willowbrook, I would like to extend my heartfelt condolences to the community of Tumbler Ridge, especially to the victims and their families. I also want to express my gratitude to all the first responders and all the health care workers. You are in our thoughts and prayers as you navigate this difficult time and begin the healing process.

I rise today as the MLA for Langley-Willowbrook to address an issue of profound importance, one that affects every resident, every business, every family and every community in our province. I speak today about the fiscal direction of British Columbia and the very real consequences that follow with it.

Today British Columbia faces a projected budget deficit of \$13.3 billion for 2026 and 2027, one of the largest deficits in our history outside of extraordinary emergency circumstances: \$13.3 billion. Let that sink in. This is not a seasonal shift. It is not an unavoidable crisis caused solely by external forces. It is the result of policy choices, decisions made right here in Victoria about spending, taxation and long-term planning — choices that ripple through every household, every business and every community across this province.

Deficits at this scale affect real people in very tangible ways. Seniors worry about health care access. Families struggle with long wait-times for essential services. Small businesses face uncertainty that impacts hiring, investments and growth. Municipalities struggle to maintain infrastructure while their costs rise. And communities like Langley-Willowbrook which are growing rapidly face increasing pressures on roads, schools, transit and health care facilities.

[5:40 p.m.]

My purpose today is not political positioning. It is not to point fingers or score points. My goal is to provide a fact-based, balanced and deep understanding of our province's fiscal situation, highlighting both province-wide realities and the lived experiences of residents of Langley-Willowbrook.

We will examine the historical deficit, the growing debt, rising interest costs, tax policy impacts and the effect of fiscal choices on health care, long-term care, public safety, infrastructure and the economy. We will explore the consequences for families, for seniors and the future generation who will inherit the policies we implement today.

We will confront a very concrete example of the broken promises, one that implements public safety and mental health outcomes in our community of Langley-Willowbrook. This is a moment for transparency, accountability and reflection. The decisions we make today will determine whether B.C. remains a province of opportunity or whether we pass on unnecessary financial burdens and service gaps to future generations.

Let us begin by examining the scale of the budget deficit of 2026-2027 and how we arrived here. When the current government took over, British Columbia was in a position of fiscal strength. Surplus provided flexibility, the ability to invest in schools, hospitals, transportation and community services, while also preparing for unforeseen economic challenges. That position of strength represented a promise to residents that fiscal responsibility could coexist with strategic investments.

That position now has been replaced by a projected \$13.3 billion deficit. This deficit is not entirely large. It is structural. It results from decisions that consistently outpace revenue growth rather than temporarily circling shifts in the economy.

Historical content is important here. During the 2008 and 2009 recession, B.C. experienced deficits of roughly \$3 billion to \$4 billion. Yet through careful management, the province turned to balance within a few years. Today we face a deficit more than three times that magnitude, outside of recession conditions. This is not circular. It is a reflection of the ongoing fiscal choices. The 2026 fiscal plan highlights that despite growing spending, there's no clear path to balanced budgets in the medium term. Past budgets suggested a path towards surplus. Today the path remains smeared.

Deficit spending at this scale carries multiple consequences. First, higher interest payments consume a growing portion of the provincial budget. Second, reduced fiscal flexibility limits our ability to respond to emergencies, natural disasters or economic shock. Third, economic uncertainty creates hesitation among businesses, investors and households.

These are not abstract concerns. These affect families deciding whether they can afford to expand a business, young professionals considering whether to remain in B.C. and seniors wondering whether health care and long-term-care services will meet their needs when they need them.

We must be honest about the choices that brought us here. Spending growth has outpaced revenue growth. Priorities have shifted without accurate consideration of long-term solutions, and there is a risk that people of British Columbia will inherit not opportunity but a growing fiscal burden.

Deficits do not exist in isolation. They accumulate into debt, and debt carries a cost in interest payments. Debt is not just a simple number on a page. It represents resources diverted from schools, hospitals, infrastructures and other essential services simply to pay interest. According to fiscal projections leading up to Budget 2026-2027, taxpayer-supported debt in B.C. is forecasted to grow greatly and the debt-to-GDP ratio is trending upwards. Debt-serving costs are among the fastest-growing items in the provincial budget.

[5:45 p.m.]

Let me give a tangible example. If current debt-servicing projections continue, by 2030, B.C. could be paying billions more annually in interest than it does today, money that could otherwise fund new schools, hospitals, transit expansions or long-term-care facilities. Every dollar directed towards interest is a dollar not improving the daily lives of residents throughout B.C.

The rising debt also reduces the government's ability to respond to unexpected economic challenges, whether that be a natural disaster, a downturn in the housing market or global supply chain disruptions. Future governments will inherit fewer tools to manage crises effectively.

Compared to other provinces, B.C.'s projected debt growth is concerning. Provinces with stronger fiscal

management have maintained lower debt-to-GDP ratios, preserving flexibility for both investment and economic stability. Without corrective action, B.C. risks falling behind its peers in both economic competitiveness and social outcomes.

That debt we accumulate today is a generational concern. The fiscal choices we make here in Victoria do not simply affect this year or the next. They shape the financial landscape for decades. And while we talk about surplus and spending plans, every delay in responsible action compounds the future burden.

Budget 2026 and '27 also introduces tax policy changes that will have direct consequences for individuals, families and businesses across the province. At a time when the deficit remains elevated, among these changes are the increase to the lowest personal income tax rate, expansions of the provincial sales tax to professional services and adjustments to other tax bases.

The PST expansion is particularly noteworthy. Services previously exempted — accounting, engineering, architect and security services — will now be subject to a 7 per cent tax. That is far-reaching. Businesses that rely on these services will face higher input costs, potentially slowing hiring, delaying investments and passing the cost on to the consumers.

Business organizations, including the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade, the Mining Association of British Columbia and the Retail Council of Canada, have issued statements warning that these tax changes undermine competitiveness and create economic uncertainty.

Municipal governments also have expressed concerns, noting that infrastructure projects or essential services often rely on services now subject to PST, increasing costs for local communities.

These are not fringe concerns. They are warnings from organizations representing thousands of businesses, employees and municipal residents. When tax policies raise costs while deficits remain high, it sends mixed signals to the business community and decreases economic confidence.

At the same time, families across B.C. feel the effect in their everyday lives in higher service costs, lower job growth and uncertainty about their financial future. Fiscal policy must strike a balance, raising revenue responsibly while maintaining predictability, fairness and confidence in the economy.

My community of Langley-Willowbrook is one of the fastest-growing regions in the Lower Mainland. The combined population of Langley city and the township of Langley is approaching 200,000 residents, growing by several thousand annually.

Growth brings opportunity, vibrant communities, cultural diversity and economic development, but it also brings pressure on infrastructure, health care, education and the public service. Schools must expand to accommo-

date new students. Roads must handle increasing traffic volumes. Transit must evolve to keep pace. Hospitals and clinics must absorb growing demand.

Residents of Langley-Willowbrook are noticing that strain. Families report to my office regularly of the difficulties of securing family doctors and specialists. Roads and transit corridors face congestion that impacts daily commutes. New housing development increases density faster than service can expand, creating real challenges for quality of life.

[5:50 p.m.]

These pressures are compounded when provincial spending decisions fail to align with growth. Investments are often announced delayed, over budget or insufficient, leaving local governments, residents and businesses to shoulder the consequences. This disconnect between policy and lived experience is particularly pronounced in growing communities like Langley-Willowbrook, where the pace of population growth demands timely and predictable investment.

Health care is an area where fiscal decisions have the most immediate impact on residents' lives. In Langley, we have seen important improvements, such as the Langley Urgent and Primary Care Centre, which now provides extended hours and imaging services. These enhancements help reduce pressure on the emergency departments and improve access to care.

However, major challenges remain. Wait times for specialties remain long, families struggle to access family doctors, and critical long-term-care capacity continues to fall short across B.C. Langley Memorial Hospital has long wait times, about an average from ten to 14 hours. You see people waiting in the hallways regularly. Our hospital is in major need of an update.

According to the office of the seniors advocate 2025 report, B.C. faces a growing gap between seniors needing care and publicly funded long-term-care beds. Under current projections, the shortfall could reach 16,000 beds by 2036 if construction and care models do not expand.

This deficit is not an abstract. Seniors remain in hospitals longer than medically necessary, increasing strain on acute care capacity and lengthening wait times in emergency departments. Families carry that burden by caregiving, often while maintaining jobs, education and personal responsibilities.

Budget 2026 paused construction of seven long-term-care facilities, ranging from Abbotsford to Fort St. John, to reassess sequencing and costs. While framed as strategic, this delay postpones desperately needed beds and directly affects seniors and families across this province.

The human impact is major. A daughter caring for her 85-year-old father in Abbotsford cannot secure a bed for him, despite urgent medical need. A couple in Fort St. John must split caregiving duties between elderly parents

to meet capacity. These are real stories, not abstract numbers — real stories.

Beyond construction, we must focus on workforce investment. Nurses, care aides and support staff are critical. Without proper staffing, beds cannot meet demand. Regardless of physical capacity, recruitment, retention, training and fair pay must accompany facility expansion.

Alternate models, such as home care, assisted living and community-based support, must also expand. These models allow seniors to live safely in their communities. While reducing hospital pressure, they are cost-effective, improve quality of life and can be scaled across urban, suburban and rural B.C.

Deficits and debt projections are not abstract numbers. They determine whether families have access to timely care, whether hospitals can function effectively and whether seniors can live with dignity.

Public safety is a fundamental responsibility of government. Residents and business owners in Langley-Willowbrook express ongoing concern about crime and safety. Many retail businesses have invested in private security, and residents install home surveillance systems to protect their properties.

One critical promise made during the 2024 election was the introduction of Car 67, a mobile integrated crisis response unit. These units pair trained officers with mental health professionals to respond to crisis calls effectively, diverting cases from traditional emergency responses and improving the outcomes.

While communities like Surrey and Abbotsford, and even smaller communities like Prince Rupert and Squamish that have populations of 30,000 and 13,000, all have these services, and the programs have shown successful implementation, Langley has yet to receive this service. This is not just a broken campaign promise. It represents a tangible gap in crisis response and public safety.

[5:55 p.m.]

Residents deserve follow-through. First responders deserve suitable support. Communities deserve measurable outcomes for the resources invested in safety and mental health.

Rapid population growth in Langley-Willowbrook brings both opportunity and responsibility. Growth creates economic vibrancy, cultural diversity and a stronger tax base, all positive for the province, but it also demands investment in infrastructure, transit, utilities, schools and community facilities.

[Lorne Doerkson in the chair.]

Consider the SkyTrain extension to Willowbrook, a transformative investment that will connect communities, reduce congestion and improve access to jobs and services. This is the type of infrastructure that transforms lives, reduces commute times and supports sustainable growth.

Yet growth is not limited to transit corridors. Every day

our local roads see increased traffic volumes, particularly across major arteries like the Fraser Highway, 200 Street and Glover Road. Without timely upgrades and expansions, congestion rises, emergency response times are delayed and local businesses face logistical challenges.

Utilities, water, sewerage and electricity are also under pressure. New developments bring more residents and more demands. Without proactive investments, we risk service disruptions or the need for reactive, costly emergency fixes.

Schools are another urgent concern. We didn't see any increase in schooling for Langley-Willowbrook. Langley-Willowbrook has welcomed thousands of new students in the past five years, straining existing school capacity. Class size increases, extracurricular programs are limited, and educators face mounting pressure. Investing in modern, well-resourced schools is critical for the long-term success of our children.

Community centres, libraries and recreational facilities are also vital. They provide safe places for youth, seniors and families, spaces that foster community unity and healthy lifestyles. But when provincial funding lags behind population growth, these essential community supports cannot keep pace.

Infrastructure delays are not abstract. They impact daily life, economic productivity and community well-being. Families experience longer commutes, children are crowded into aging schools, and seniors struggle to access services. Businesses face higher transportation and occupational costs.

Timely, predictable investment is not optional. It is essential for a growing province. Growth must be matched with foresight, planning and financial stewardship to ensure our communities thrive today and in the future.

Small businesses are the backbone of Langley-Willowbrook and of British Columbia more broadly. They create jobs, provide essential services and anchor communities. From local restaurants and retail shops to construction companies and professional services to farmers, these businesses are vital to our community, yet Budget 2026-27 introduces measures that have raised major concerns across the business community.

The expansion of the PST to professional services is a clear example. Small businesses now face higher costs for services like accounting, engineering and security services. They rely on operative effectiveness. Organizations such as Greater Vancouver Board of Trade have issued warnings of measures for this and how the businesses have showed that they're discouraged to hire and have increased administrative burdens.

Government echoes these concerns, noting that local infrastructure projects will also become expensive due to the tax expansion. For small business owners, certainty is essential. When taxes increase while deficits remain elevated, the debt rises. Businesses face difficult choices: de-

lay hiring, reduce services or pass the costs on to customers. This reduces economic confidence and slows growth precisely when we need local economics to flourish.

In Langley-Willowbrook, these pressures are visible. Local business owners report that raising operational costs affects their ability to expand, hire and invest in technology or training. Young entrepreneurs deciding whether to start businesses in our community face uncertainty. Investors weigh the risk of expanding in a region with high costs and fiscal uncertainty.

[6:00 p.m.]

Fiscal policy should encourage confidence, innovation and growth, not hinder it. Supporting small businesses ensures job creation, strengthens the tax base and provides vital services to communities. The government must recognize the interconnectedness of fiscal policy, economic confidence and community well-being.

The fiscal choices we make today have profound intergenerational consequences. Every deficit, every increase in debt, every delay in infrastructure or service delivery is ultimately a burden carried forward by future taxpayers. When deficits accumulate without a clear path for balance, future governments inherit fewer tools to respond to economic shocks, natural disasters and social challenges. They inherit higher interest payments that play essential services. They inherit a province strained by debt rather than empowered by opportunity.

Consider a scenario. A natural disaster strikes B.C. in 2030. Raising debt and limited fiscal flexibility means fewer resources are available for emergency responses, rebuilding infrastructure and supporting affected families. Or consider economic downturns, which require spending to protect jobs and services. Without room to operate, future governments will face difficult trade-offs that today's government could have avoided.

The impact on youth is equally concerning. Raising debt may lead to higher taxes in the future or cuts to education and post-secondary supports. Seniors may face longer wait times for health care and long-term-care facilities. Families may see reduced access to public service and infrastructure improvements.

Fiscal stewardship is therefore not a political choice; it is a moral responsibility. We must ensure that the province we leave to the next generation is stronger, not weaker, empowered, fiscally sound, not burdened by avoidable debt.

The projected \$13.3 billion deficit, rising debt, increasing interest costs and the tax measures of concern demand serious reflection and critical action. Families, seniors, small business owners and future generations deserve fiscal stewardship, transparency and measurable results.

Spending must be aligned with outcomes that residents can see and feel. Promises such as the Car 67 mobile crisis unit in Langley must be fulfilled. Infrastructure and transit investments must match population growth. Long-

term-care capacity must expand urgently to meet the rising demand.

Responsible fiscal policies require clear paths to reduce deficits and control debt growth; tax policies that balance revenue needs with economic competitiveness; investments in health care, education, infrastructure and public safety that deliver tangible outcomes; accountability for campaign promises and transparent reporting of advancement. The decisions we make today will echo for decades. We can choose a path of responsible stewardship, ensuring that B.C. remains a province of opportunity, growth and prosperity, or we can allow debt and deficits to drive our communities, limit services and shift the burden to future generations.

The residents of Langley-Willowbrook — family, seniors, small business owners and young people — deserve a government that respects their tax dollars, delivers results and plans responsibly for the future. Let us commit to a path of responsible governance, fiscal accountability and measurable outcomes. Let us ensure that the province we leave behind is stronger, more resilient and more prosperous than the one that we inherited.

Sunita Dhir: I am grateful to stand in this House on the territory of the *ləkʷəŋən* Peoples, the Songhees and the Esquimalt Nations.

Firstly, I send my heartfelt condolences to everyone in Tumbler Ridge and to all British Columbians affected. My prayers are with the families, friends and community members during this difficult time.

I hope you find strength and comfort in one another.

[6:05 p.m.]

I am proud to stand up in this House to talk about Budget 2026, which makes careful choices to protect what matters most and secure B.C.'s future.

Firstly, I would like to convey my sincere thanks to the people of Vancouver-Langara for electing me as their representative. It's a real honour to serve as the first B.C. NDP MLA elected in this riding since 1973. I'm deeply grateful for the trust you have placed in me. I am here in this House because of you and for you.

Special thanks to my team members in our constituency office — Amy Li, Kayla Charchuk, Dominic Denofrio and Charlene Ling — as well as my staff assisting me here in the Legislature, especially my executive assistant, Brian Lee, and the dedicated ministry staff at the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills. They are exceptional people doing excellent work serving the people of British Columbia and supporting me every day in carrying out my responsibilities.

Last but not least, from the bottom of my heart, thank you to my loving husband, Navdeep Dhir, and my children Arun, Hiromi and Kevin.

Your love, strength and unwavering support mean

everything to me, and I am forever grateful to walk this journey with you by my side.

It's an honour to speak in support of Budget 2026 as the Parliamentary Secretary for International Credentials for the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills. Budget 2026 is about making sure that we are protecting jobs and services people rely on while growing the economy to create good jobs with higher paycheques, improving health care, helping families manage costs of living and making communities safer.

British Columbia has always been a place where bold ideas, natural strengths and diverse people come together to shape the future. We are a major driver of Canada's economy. With our geography, natural resources and diverse skilled workforce, B.C. has what it takes to grow and protect the things people care about.

Today the world around us is shifting faster than ever. Global markets are unpredictable. New industries are emerging overnight, and competition for talent is intensifying. In moments like this, waiting is not an option. B.C. is choosing to lead with purpose, confidence and a clear plan for action.

This is why our government launched Look West, our targeted jobs and economic plan expected to deliver major projects, create robust employment opportunities and strengthen B.C. and Canada's economic security in the face of economic threats.

A strong economy depends on strong people. Investing in our workforce and the specialized talent required must be one of our main priorities. Our government continues to invest in post-secondary education and skills training so British Columbians can gain the expertise needed for the jobs of today and the opportunities of tomorrow.

We are encouraged that Budget 2026 provides our ministry with a total budget of \$3.58 billion for 2026-27. The budget has increased by \$273 million over the three-year fiscal plan. This investment gives us the resources we need to help grow B.C.'s economy by preparing people for good careers and strengthening the province's long-term prosperity.

[6:10 p.m.]

B.C. is expected to see about one million job openings over the next decade. Of those, about 94,000 will be in skilled trades, with 40 percent of the major projects identified by Prime Minister Carney's government as being in the national interest expected to be built in B.C. The demand for skilled trade workers and the opportunities for British Columbians have never been greater.

As major projects in housing, clean energy, critical minerals and transportation move forward, a skilled workforce will be vital to delivering major projects and supporting a resilient, sustainable economy. That's why our government is making a historic \$241 million investment to strengthen B.C.'s trades-training system and double the funding for SkilledTradesBC by 2028-29, ensuring people

are prepared for the family-supporting jobs being created throughout the province.

Alongside this, we are investing in post-secondary education to provide world-class talent that fuels the technology sector and creates access to good-paying careers. After more than a decade without major investment prior to 2017 by the previous government, our government is focused on enhancing tech education. This includes targeted ongoing annual funding of \$77.7 million in tech-relevant programming, with B.C. now supporting more than 4,000 additional student spaces each year compared to 2017.

We have also committed \$50 million to Mitacs since 2023, supporting 10,000 student internships over five years in priority sectors such as clean technology, life sciences, emergency management, advanced timber and agritech.

At its core, this work is about building a stronger future, one defined by opportunity, good jobs and shared prosperity so that everyone in British Columbia has the chance to succeed.

At the same time, we also know that training alone won't meet the moment. With an aging population in B.C., we need the skills and contributions of newcomers to fill gaps in the labour market and help grow our workforce. We need more health care workers, veterinarians, engineers, teachers, technology specialists and many other talented professionals.

Given the tight labour market, we will need the skills and contributions of international professionals. To fully seize the opportunities ahead, we need to break down barriers and unlock the full potential of skilled workers from across Canada and around the world. That's why a key vision of the Look West strategy is leveraging talent and expertise, wherever it comes from, so we can strengthen our workforce and grow our economy.

Since becoming the Parliamentary Secretary for International Credentials, I have had the privilege of meeting hundreds of skilled immigrants. These professionals bring remarkable talent, fresh ideas and an eagerness to contribute. Their stories remind us that when we welcome people and create clear pathways for them to succeed, our province thrives. We must ensure that B.C. not only attracts global talent but embraces it and puts people's skills to work for the benefit of everyone.

[6:15 p.m.]

Our goal is to support skilled professionals in continuing their chosen careers here in B.C. We want to create meaningful job opportunities and foster a genuine sense of belonging, where newcomers' skills and contributions are recognized and valued.

As a first-generation immigrant and long-term advocate for newcomers to Canada, I know firsthand the challenges and barriers people face when moving to a new country and building a life from scratch. That's why I am passionate about supporting international profession-

als who are ready and eager to contribute their skills and build a better future here in British Columbia.

It's my honour to continue focusing on this important portfolio as the Parliamentary Secretary for International Credentials. For too long, the recognition process has been drawn out and difficult for internationally trained professionals. Professionals trained in other countries often end up working in unrelated, lower-paying jobs while their skills are wasted and critical jobs remain unfilled.

Our government is taking action to close the gaps and streamline processes so people can get certified to work in their professions faster, fill in-demand jobs and provide important services we all need. That's why we have passed the International Credentials Recognition Act to remove unfair barriers, increase transparency and make international credential recognition faster and easier for 29 occupations.

These occupations align with B.C.'s economic priorities and have a direct impact on high-demand sectors like health care, education, construction and housing. We need teachers, child care educators, veterinarians, architects, engineers and paramedics to join our workforce. Many of these professionals are highly qualified, with years of professional experience and advanced backgrounds.

We don't want to lose international talents in fields that are in demand here, because losing these professionals means losing valuable talent that could contribute significantly to our communities and economy. We want to keep these professionals by making the credentials process fairer, easier and faster.

Let's talk about some of the practical ways the International Credentials Recognition Act will help.

First, the act eliminates redundant English-language testing requirements. To start working in B.C., international professionals meet English language requirements through official language tests. However, in the past, they were required to retake the English language test even if they had already passed it. Now we are prohibiting regulators from requiring multiple or repeat English language tests when applicants have already submitted valid test results.

In addition, in the past, the fees to get credentials assessed could be much higher for international professionals compared to domestic applicants. With the new act, we are requiring regulators to charge similar fees to both international and domestic applicants. This helps ensure the credential recognition process is as fair and equitable as possible for international applicants.

The new act will also help ensure transparency. Regulators are required to publish all information about their credential assessment processes online and make decisions within a reasonable time frame.

All this reflects a simple belief. If people have the skills, B.C. should help put them into work.

[6:20 p.m.]

We didn't stop there. Since the legislation took place, we have worked closely with regulatory authorities to update their rules, policies and online information so that these changes are reflected in practice.

Many international professionals who came to B.C. before this legislation were required to have domestic work experience before they could start working. This created a terrible catch-22 cycle. People couldn't gain experience without credentials, but to get the credentials, they needed experience.

That's why in July 2025 we took another significant step by limiting Canadian work experience requirements and removing a barrier that so many professionals told us was holding them back. Most regulators have already replaced the Canadian work experience requirement with more commonsense frameworks to assess international credentials, such as competency-based evaluations.

These actions are opening doors for more qualified people to join the workforce quickly and confidently and demonstrate their skills, without facing unnecessary barriers and delays, so that internationally trained professionals will be able to start working faster in some fields.

Faster, clearer credential recognition allows skilled professionals to begin contributing sooner, strengthening the industries and communities that depend on their expertise. It also helps businesses find the workers they need and build a stronger economy that benefits everyone. This work directly supports the vision of Look West, where B.C.'s workforce is resilient, innovative and ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Apart from the International Credentials Recognition Act, our ministry also has other initiatives to support internationally trained professionals. This includes the credential assessment improvement fund, also known as CAIF. The fund supports projects led by professional regulatory authorities to improve the fairness, efficiency and transparency of regulatory processes for assessing international credentials.

Since 2019, the province has invested \$4.3 million towards 45 projects that have reduced or removed unnecessary barriers for international applicants in regulated occupations. Funding through CAIF will continue to support regulatory authorities to implement the requirements of the International Credentials Recognition Act.

On top of that, our government also supports internationally trained professionals through the career paths for skilled immigrants program. The province invests \$6.1 million annually in the career paths for skilled immigrants program. The program supports approximately 1,400 new permanent residents each year in covering fees related to credential assessment and helping them find employment that aligns with their pre-arrival skills, education and experience.

Some 70 percent of those clients who complete the program go on to practise in their own fields. This is an en-

couraging outcome. I'm confident that with the right support, internationally trained professionals can continue to grow in their careers and make valuable contributions to our economy and communities.

By improving the recognition of international credentials and helping skilled immigrants transition into employment in their field, we are not just helping individuals. These benefits extend to their families and communities, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive economy.

[6:25 p.m.]

British Columbia has a long history of welcoming people from around the world. Today immigrants make up about 30 percent of our population, making B.C. the most diverse province in Canada. It's no surprise that newcomers choose to live, work, raise their families and build their futures here, because B.C. is one of the best places in Canada to build a life.

Newcomers contribute fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, bring valuable skills, start businesses and work in key sectors that keep our economy strong. Immigration plays an important role in growing our workforce and helping offset the impacts of an aging population. As B.C.'s population gets older, newcomers help keep communities strong by bringing in younger workers and families.

For many years, B.C. has successfully attracted international talent through the B.C. provincial nominee program, also known as B.C. PNP, helping skilled workers and their families settle and build their lives here.

The B.C. PNP is the only economic immigration program administered directly by the province. It allows B.C. to attract and retain skilled workers and entrepreneurs who are ready to contribute to our community and economy. Through the B.C. PNP, we can nominate individuals whose skills align with local labour market needs in priority areas, such as health care, skilled trades, child care and business creation, an important benefit for rural communities.

The B.C. PNP provides a pathway for international workers and entrepreneurs to become permanent residents, build their lives in B.C. and contribute to the province's long-term economic growth. In 2025, the B.C. PNP nominated 6,214 individuals for permanent residency.

Although the federal government significantly reduced the number of nominations that B.C. could make last year, the province still managed to nominate 1,259 medical professionals who work for B.C.'s health authorities, an increase of almost 85 percent over the number it nominated in 2024. Those included 208 doctors, 48 nurse practitioners, 604 registered nurses, as well as 399 other health care professionals.

We know that B.C. is well positioned to nominate skilled immigrants who meet our economic priorities. The strong outcomes of the B.C. PNP demonstrate this. Most B.C. PNP applicants are already living and working

in the province when they apply, and the vast majority of B.C. PNP nominees remain in B.C. five years after becoming permanent residents, helping ensure long-term benefits for communities and employers.

The program also supports regional growth by attracting skilled immigrants to communities outside Metro Vancouver. In 2025, 38 percent of skilled immigration nominees and 100 percent of entrepreneur immigration nominees were located outside of Metro Vancouver.

These positive results prove that B.C. PNP is an effective way to strengthen our economy and support communities across the province. However, recent federal decisions to reduce immigration targets are undermining B.C.'s workforce development efforts. The federal government advised that B.C.'s provincial nominee program allocation for 2026 is 5,254 nominations, significantly lower than the 9,000 nominations we requested.

[6:30 p.m.]

In addition, B.C. has also allocated approximately 32,600 provincial attestation letters for 2026, a reduction of more than 57 percent compared to the previous year. This reduction follows a 40 percent cut to B.C.'s undergraduate international students allocation in 2025 compared to 2024.

Lower immigration targets and caps on international students have significant impacts on both the post-secondary education sector and the availability of skilled workers across the province.

According to B.C. Stats, B.C.'s population declined by 0.2 percent over the 12-month period from October 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025. This is the first time the province has experienced negative annual population growth on record.

The province's 2025 labour market outlook projects that far fewer new workers than were previously expected will come from immigration over the next ten years, creating challenges for employers that rely heavily on immigration to meet labour market needs.

These are challenging circumstances for B.C.'s economy, workforce and the post-secondary education system.

B.C. continues to advocate for an immigration system that is stable, predictable and sustainable, one that allows the province to play a stronger role in ensuring immigration supports economic growth and our labour market priorities.

We will continue working closely with post-secondary education institutions, industry partners and Indigenous partners to navigate these challenges and advance B.C.'s priorities.

We know that a strong economy depends on people being able to live, work and build their futures here in British Columbia, and that counts on a reliable and accessible public health care system. Our ministry is working with the Ministry of Health in supporting these efforts by expanding education and training opportunities for doc-

tors, nurses, paramedics and allied health workers so that people in every part of the province can access the care they need when and where they need it.

A significant part of this work is the \$195 million investment our ministry has made to establish operations at western Canada's first new medical school in nearly 60 years at Simon Fraser University's Surrey campus.

The Ministry of Infrastructure is responsible for ensuring the successful delivery of the capital investments government is making. This includes the \$33.7 million funding to develop interim space to be ready for the inaugural first-year cohort in August 2026 and \$496 million to develop the permanent building targeted to open in the fall of 2030.

The first cohort will start with 48 seats and will grow to approximately 120 first-year seats by 2035. These initiatives contribute to the increased number of trained doctors in B.C.

In closing, I want to acknowledge and encourage progress we have made together, while recognizing that there is still much work ahead. Budget 2026 is focused on improving the quality of life for everyone in British Columbia and seizing the opportunities that will drive our province's prosperity.

Our ministry will continue to play a vital role in this work by strengthening our workforce and expertise from across Canada and around the globe. When we talk about building a strong British Columbia, it means investing in people and creating opportunities for everyone.

Macklin McCall: Budgets are about choices. They reflect what a government decides to prioritize, what it decides can wait and what it believes families and communities can absorb.

[6:35 p.m.]

This is an exceptionally large budget. It proposes nearly \$100 billion in spending alongside a deficit exceeding \$13 billion. The province's debt is projected to reach \$182 billion this year and is expected to climb even higher in the years ahead.

Interest payments alone are approaching \$9 billion annually. That is a significant figure. It represents money that will not go toward building roads, hiring nurses, expanding policing capacity or strengthening mental health services. It will go towards servicing accumulated debt.

When debt-servicing becomes one of the largest expenditures in a provincial budget, it should give all of us pause. While spending has grown dramatically over the past decade, nearly doubling, British Columbians are not experiencing doubled confidence in their institutions, doubled access to care or doubled safety in their communities.

Only a few years ago, this province was reporting a \$5 billion surplus. Today we are debating a \$13 billion

deficit. That is not a minor fluctuation. It represents a structural shift in the province's fiscal position.

Debt projected to exceed \$200 billion in the coming years is not an abstract concern. It is future constraint. Every dollar spent servicing debt is a dollar that cannot be used to respond to wildfire seasons, reduce health care wait times, expand provincial policing capacity or invest in infrastructure resilience.

Responsible governance requires preserving options for the future. It requires discipline, not just scale.

There are times when governments must invest heavily. There are emergencies. There are economic downturns. There are moments when increased spending is necessary and justified. But when spending increases dramatically and deficits persist year after year, British Columbians reasonably expect to see measurable improvements in outcomes. They expect to see health care access stabilizing. They expect to see public safety strengthening. They expect to see infrastructure moving from planning into construction.

Instead, what many are experiencing is strain. Health care access remains difficult in many regions. Emergency rooms across the province have faced temporary closures. Communities are expressing concern about public safety. Businesses are absorbing rising costs and growing uncertainty. Families are navigating instability in programs they rely on.

The central question here, therefore, is not whether this budget is large. It clearly is. The real question is whether it is aligned with the lived experience of British Columbians. Are the fundamentals strengthening? Is capacity expanding where it is most needed? Are systems becoming more resilient?

Time is not neutral when debt compounds. Time is not neutral when front-line systems are operating under sustained pressure. And time is not neutral for families who are waiting for stability.

When government spends at this scale, it carries an obligation to demonstrate clear prioritization. It must show that each major allocation is strengthening the core foundations of the province: public safety, health care, infrastructure and long-term fiscal sustainability.

British Columbians are not looking for political theatre. They are looking for stewardship. They want to know their tax dollars are building something durable. They want confidence that their children will inherit a province with strong institutions and sound finances.

This debate is not about opposing spending for its own sake. It is about ensuring that spending produces strength. If the connection between spending and outcomes is unclear, confidence erodes. Once public confidence erodes, it is difficult to restore.

This budget is ambitious in scale, but ambition must be paired with discipline. Without that discipline, the risk shifts to future generations.

I represent a riding with a growing senior population. Many of the people I speak with lived in our community for decades. They raised families there. They built businesses. They worked in forestry, construction, health care, education and public service. They helped build this province into what it is today.

They are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for stability. They are watching costs rise — groceries, utilities, insurance and property taxes, everyday expenses that matter more when you are living on a fixed income.

At the same time, they are watching debt rise. They are watching deficits grow, and they are asking a very reasonable question. What does this mean for the long term?

[6:40 p.m.]

When interest payments approach \$9 billion annually, that is \$9 billion that will not be invested in long-term-care expansion. It will not go toward reducing wait times in the health care system. It will not strengthen infrastructure in growing communities. It will not expand community-based services that allow seniors to age with dignity.

Debt-servicing is not neutral. It carries consequences. Seniors understand this. Many of them managed household budgets for decades. Many of them ran small businesses. They know that when borrowing grows faster than income, flexibility shrinks. They understand that eventually difficult choices must be made. What concerns them is not simply the size of the numbers. It is the trajectory.

They want to know whether the province is on a sustainable path. They want to know whether future governments will be forced to cut services abruptly because today we chose to delay discipline. They want to know whether long-term-care beds will be there when they need them.

This is not about alarmism; it is about stewardship. The people who built this province deserve to see it managed with care. They deserve a government that balances necessary investment with long-term stability. They deserve transparency about where we are headed and how we intend to get there. That matters to them, and that matters to me.

Let me speak about infrastructure in my riding, because infrastructure is one of the clearest measures of whether government is keeping pace with growth and keeping its commitments.

When the Kelowna bridge was completed, there was a clear understanding in the community that the interchanges along Highway 97 would follow. The bridge was not intended to operate in isolation. It was part of a broader transportation plan designed to improve traffic flow and safety in a rapidly growing region. One overpass was completed. Two interchanges were not. Sixteen years later, those remaining projects are still described as being in planning.

Sixteen years is not a short delay. During that time, the Central Okanagan has experienced significant population

growth. Housing developments have expanded. Commercial activity has increased. Traffic volumes have grown substantially beyond what they were when the bridge was first opened.

Residents remember what was discussed when that bridge project was announced. They remember that the interchanges were part of the overall vision. They experience the consequences of delay every day as they sit in congestion at Westlake Road, at Boucherie Road and on Bridge Hill. Businesses absorb the impact in lost productivity and longer travel times. Employees spend more time commuting and less time with their families. Emergency response vehicles navigate increasing traffic pressure. They are the daily realities.

Planning is necessary. Engineering work, environmental assessments and consultation all play important roles in responsible infrastructure development. However, planning that extends for more than a decade without visible progress begins to undermine confidence. At some point, communities expect to see movement. When projects remain in planning for 16 years, it raises a broader concern about prioritization and delivery.

This province is carrying record levels of debt and record levels of spending. In that context, residents reasonably expect to see tangible infrastructure progress in growing regions. Infrastructure is not simply about asphalt and concrete. It is about economic efficiency, safety and credibility.

When communities made years ago remain unresolved, frustration builds.... Communities like West Kelowna and Peachland are growing and contributing economically. Infrastructure must grow with them. When it does not, congestion worsens, productivity declines and confidence erodes.

I want to turn now to what I believe is the essential issue facing British Columbians, and that is the overall strength and resilience of our public safety system. West Kelowna remains the largest city in British Columbia served by a single transmission line, and that reality speaks to infrastructure vulnerability. In much the same way, our public safety system today is operating without sufficient redundancy. It is operating with little margin for error.

The environment that officers operate in today is far more complex than it was ten years ago. Calls for service are more frequent and more layered. Officers are responding not only to traditional criminal matters but to mental health crises, addiction-related incidents, organized crime activity and situations that involve social service gaps as much as law enforcement.

[6:45 p.m.]

If capacity remains flat while demand increases, pressure builds. That is not a political statement. It is operational reality. When I look at the provincial RCMP contingent and I see that it has not meaningfully expanded in over a decade, I do not view that as a partisan issue. I view

it as a structural concern. Population has grown. Urban density has increased. Organized crime networks have adapted. The demands placed on front-line officers have intensified.

Now consider the broader system in which policing operates. Police respond to calls. Those files move into the courts. Court backlogs create delays. Delays affect victims, delays affect accused persons, and delays affect confidence in the justice system. When cases are delayed, victims can feel abandoned, witnesses disengage, and communities begin to question whether accountability is functioning as it should.

Corrections capacity pressures affect supervision. When institutions are strained and probation services are stretched, oversight becomes difficult, and that increases risk.

Mental health gaps mean police are responding to crises that should be managed upstream by health care and community supports. Officers routinely find themselves as the first and sometimes only responders to situations rooted in untreated mental illness or addiction.

Emergency rooms are closing temporarily across the province at a rate that should concern all of us. When emergency care becomes unstable, crisis escalates. When crisis escalates, police involvement increases. When police involvement increases, those files move back into courts and corrections.

This is an interconnected system. Public safety is not siloed. It is not confined to a single ministry or line item. When one part weakens, pressure spreads.

[The Speaker in the chair.]

That is what I believe we are seeing in British Columbia. We are seeing cumulative strain across policing, courts, corrections, health care and community supports. Against that backdrop, when I look at this budget and see a reduction in public safety funding, I struggle to reconcile that decision with what communities are experiencing.

If public safety is foundational, and I firmly believe that it is, then funding and capacity should reflect that belief. Public safety is not simply another program. It is the condition that allows economic growth, community life and social stability to function.

Let me address specifically the extortion crisis in Surrey. Organized intimidation targeting homes and businesses is not a major issue. It is coordinated criminal behaviour designed to instil fear and extract compliance. When homes are shot at and businesses are threatened, the impact goes beyond the immediate victims. It affects community confidence. It affects investment. It affects whether families feel secure in their own neighbourhoods.

If that type of activity is escalating, the provincial response should be visible and structured. The budget should demonstrate that government recognizes the seriousness of the threat and is prepared to allocate sustained

resources to address it. A clear, funded response matters. It signals to communities that enforcement capacity will match the scale of the challenge. It signals to organized crime groups that the province is prepared to invest in investigations, intelligence and coordinated enforcement.

Public safety is not declared through press conferences. It is built over time through sustained capacity, staffing, training and coordination between agencies. That means ensuring that provincial policing levels are aligned with demand. It means ensuring that courts are resourced to move cases forward in a timely manner. It means ensuring that corrections and probation services have the capacity to supervise effectively. It means strengthening upstream mental health supports so that police are not the only responders to complex social crises.

When these elements are properly aligned, this system is resilient. When they are not, strain accumulates and confidence erodes. British Columbians deserve a public safety system that is built deliberately and funded responsibly. They deserve to see that when threats escalate, capacity escalates with them.

This is not about assigning blame. It is about acknowledging the pressures that are clearly visible across the province and ensuring that our fiscal decisions reflect those realities. If we accept that public safety is foundational, then we must treat it as foundational in our budgeting decisions. That requires sustained investment, strategic planning and measurable outcomes. Without that alignment, strain will continue to build and communities will continue to feel it. That is the concern I am raising today.

[6:50 p.m.]

I also want to speak about mental health in this context, because it cannot be separated from public safety, health care stability or fiscal responsibility.

In my riding, there are no meaningful local mental health supports that meet the scale of the need. Families regularly travel outside the community to access care. They take time off work, drive significant distances and navigate long wait times in order to secure services that should be more readily available.

When local supports are limited in accessibility, the pressure does not disappear. It shifts. Police respond to crises that should be managed upstream by trained mental health professionals. Officers are often the first point of contact for individuals in acute psychological distress. That is not because policing is the ideal response but because, in many cases, it is the only available response in the moment.

Emergency departments absorb cases that should never reach them. Individuals in crises wait in hallways and treatment areas that are already under strain. Health care professionals work to stabilize situations that might have been prevented with earlier intervention. This cycle is not efficient, it is not humane, and it is not fiscally responsible.

Yet this budget reduces mental health funding under Children and Family Development at a time when demand is growing and communities are asking for more upstream support.

The decision to reduce funding sends a concerning signal. If we do not invest upstream, we overload emergency systems downstream. When early intervention and community-based services are insufficient, crises become more frequent and more severe. Crisis response is resource intensive. It requires police time, emergency medical care, hospital space and even court involvement.

That becomes a public safety issue because officers are diverted from proactive policing to crisis management. It becomes a health care issue because emergency departments become holding spaces for complex mental health crises. It becomes a fiscal issue because crisis response costs far more than prevention.

Prevention is not only more humane; it is more sustainable. Stable housing supports, accessible counselling services, youth mental health programs and community-based treatment options reduce the likelihood that individuals reach a breaking point.

When mental health services are insufficient, the entire system absorbs the consequences. Families absorb stress. Police absorb workload. Hospitals absorb capacity strain. Courts absorb additional files. Corrections absorb supervision challenges.

This is why mental health funding should not be viewed as a discretionary social program. It is a core infrastructure for a functioning province. If we are serious about strengthening public safety and stabilizing health care, we must address mental health at its roots. That requires sustained, targeted investment in accessible services in communities like mine, not reductions.

British Columbians deserve a system that intervenes early rather than reacting late. They deserve to see that budgets reflect the reality that prevention is both morally and fiscally responsible. Without that alignment, pressure will continue to build across policing, health care and corrections, and communities will feel the constant strain. This is why mental health cannot be treated as a peripheral. It is central to the strength of the province.

There is also a governance issue in this budget that deserves careful attention. It is not as visible as a capital project or as immediate as a service reduction, but it goes to the core of institutional trust. The Office of the Merit Commissioner is being eliminated. That office exists to ensure that hiring within the public service is based on merit. It is designed to safeguard the principle that public positions are filled through fair, transparent and competency-based processes rather than political influence or favour.

Independent oversight builds public trust. It provides assurance that decisions affecting the structure and oper-

ation of government are subject to review and standards that extend beyond the government of the day.

Over the past decade, the size of the public service has grown significantly.

I reserve my right to continue, and I move to adjourn debate.

Macklin McCall moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. Jodie Wickens moved adjournment of the House.

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

The House adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

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