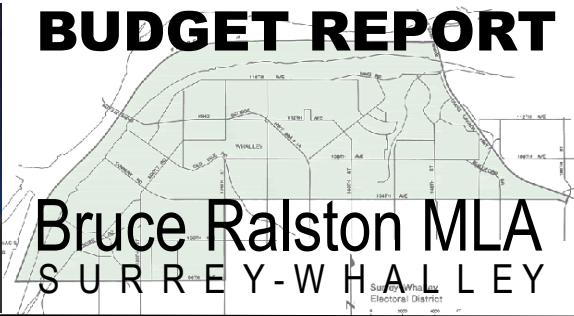




# BUDGET REPORT



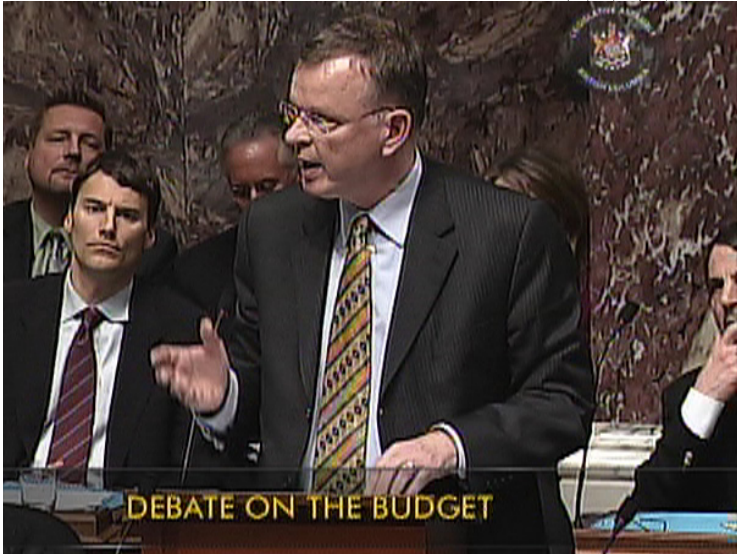
**Bruce Ralston MLA**  
SURREY-WHALLEY



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This Just In: Gas Prices



DEBATE ON THE BUDGET

As Finance Critic, Bruce responds to the gaps in the government's budget

## BRUCE RESPONDS TO 2007/08 BUDGET

The 2007 provincial budget represents a missed opportunity. At a time of large surpluses due to high commodity prices, government should be investing in programs for working people. But this year's budget misses the mark and it raises questions about the current government's ability to govern in the interests of ordinary British Columbians.

Last month, the speech from the throne unveiled a rhetorically ambitious plan to tackle climate change. In the words of the Premier: "The science is clear. It leaves no room for procrastination." But despite the sense of urgency in those words, the government has chosen not to make climate change a priority in the budget.

It's a case of all talk and no action. In the next three years, the government has allocated a mere \$4 million to tackle climate change. There's a substantial cut in alternative energy programs in the ministry of energy and mines. And there's still no plan for short term targets for green house gas emissions.

## The Reports Are In:

### "Housing" Budget Misses the Mark

"This could have turned into a real housing budget. But, despite modest increases for the homeless and low-income renters, it isn't. And Minister Taylor and her colleagues deserve to have their noses tweaked for pretending it is."

*Don Cayo*  
*Vancouver Sun, Feb 23, 2007*

"Somebody should sue the Liberal government's spin doctors for malpractice, because they sure botched the operation yesterday."

*Michael Smyth*  
*The Province, Feb 21, 2007*

"That part of the budget, is probably the most misleading part of any budget I have seen since the Liberals came to power."

*Keith Baldrey*  
*Global TV, Feb 21, 2007*

"The notion that somehow giving people a tax cut and then calling that a housing budget strikes me as somewhat laughable."

*Tsur Somerville - Sauder School of Business*  
*CKNW, Feb 20, 2007*

"Can anyone argue with a straight face that a tax cut worth \$25 a month to a typical family is really the centrepiece of an effective housing strategy?"

*Paul Willcocks*  
*Victoria Times-Colonist, Feb 21, 2007*

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## **Budget Silent on Childcare**

Childcare is a cornerstone of early childhood development -- we all want our children to get the best possible start in life. But families today are scrambling to find quality child care spaces. Despite this crisis, there was not a single word about childcare in the budget speech this year.

## **Hallway Medicine: Health Care in Crisis**

The B.C. government promised British Columbians patient care where and when they need it. In the last five years, we have seen the opposite: ER gridlocks, Code Purples in our hospitals, and the growth of private care -- prompting Health Authority Board Members to resign in protest.

The Finance Minister asserts that health care funding is adequate. But this year's budget does nothing to address gridlock in Surrey Memorial Hospital. It does nothing to address hallway medicine at Royal Columbian Hospital. And it does nothing for seniors who need home care.



## **'Housing' Missing From Housing Strategy**

British Columbians are still waiting for a homeless strategy that will address one of the root causes of homelessness: a lack of affordable housing. Rather than make a long-term investment in housing for the homeless, the B.C. government is creating more shelter beds -- temporary spaces that do not provide the homeless with a place to call their own. And by converting social housing units to supportive housing, the government is cutting the existing affordable housing stock for low-income families even further.

This year's budget provides a marginal increase to shelter rates for income assistance recipients -- dollars that should have started flowing when the government first made the announcement last fall. This increase is long overdue. And we encourage the government to index future increases to ensure that recipients keep up with the growing cost of living.

## **This Just In: Opposition Moves To Regulate Gas Prices**

Feel Like You're Being Gouged Every Time You Fill Up At The Pump? You're not alone. And the Opposition wants to do something about it.

This week, the Opposition introduced a Private Members' Bill in the Legislature which, if adopted, would protect B.C. consumers from wildly fluctuating gas prices. It would empower the B.C. Utilities Commission (BCUC) to examine and regulate retail prices, and would establish a special office to oversee the act and report regularly to the Legislature about gas prices. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador all have similar Legislation on the books. It's time that B.C. did the same.