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LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR
His Honour the Honourable Steven L. Point, OBC

SECOND SESSION, 39TH PARLIAMENT

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TUESDAY, MARCH 2, 2010

The House met at 10:02 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, good morning. I call throne speech debate.

Throne Speech Debate (continued)

D. Hayer: Before I give my response to the throne speech, I just want to, first of all, say thank you to my constituents who helped me out and have sent me here, as well as many of my staff members including Manuel Santos, Mark Rushton, Gina Andersen, Matt Pitcairn, Russel Lolacher, Paul Keenleyside and Justin Molander.

[C. Trevena in the chair.]

Also, there are many volunteers who have helped my constituency office as well as at many barbecues and community events we hold, including the seniors dinner. There are many volunteers who are regularly helping us. I want to recognize them because they volunteer to make sure I can do my job as an MLA, and they make sure our office is accessible and that we are available in the community.

Some of these volunteers include Alex Peter, Carlos Mendonca, Rue Bains, Brenda Lee, James Plett, Isabelle Hayer, Marilena Santos, Kulwinder Aujla, Kathy Doyle, Dawn Mendonca, Sherrold Haddad, Penny Hazle, Marina Haddad, Nola Young, Marianne Brown, Sonia Hayer, Ian MacPherson, Rick Orlando, Avtar Mann, Dave Sandher, Jas Kular, Russ Burtnick, Gurpreet Rai, Preet Virk, Katrina Hayer, Bobby Grewel, Tom Peach, Alex Hayer, Ray Mol, Shivraj Kular, Anthony Hayer, Barbara Larson, Jassa Grewal, Del Virk and many others who are constantly helping.

[1005]

I want to say thank you very much for helping us and constantly going out of your way, giving time away from your work or your family to help our office be successful.

Madam Speaker, it is truly an honour to speak in this House following an incredible 17 days when British Columbia and the Canadian athletes shone brightly in the eyes of the world. We showed the world what Canadians and Canadian pride truly are. People talk about Canadian unity and national pride, and they were very impressed with what they saw over the last 17 days.

That shine was for the most part golden because our athletes not only won an unprecedented number of gold medals but won more gold medals than any other country in the history of the Olympics. If that is not owning the podium, I don't know what we will call owning the podium.

Canada won 26 medals — 14 gold, seven silver, five bronze. This surpasses the 24 medals we won in Turin. Canadians won more gold medals than the United States and the Russian Federation combined. Canadians have amazed the world with our patriotism, amazed the world with our remarkably talented athletes and amazed the world with the thousands of volunteers and British Columbians of all ages who proudly welcomed the world with open arms.

What is also amazing is the incredible diversity of the Olympic Games and the representation of all races, religions and nations. That includes the athletes and the countries that they come together from. There is no better place to hold such a multicultural festival than in British Columbia, which is one of the most ethnically diverse areas of the world.

Billions of people have now seen what British Columbia and its people, who have come together from all corners of the world, have to offer — a welcoming place where anybody can be successful. With those billions of television viewers throughout the world who watched the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, our province has received incredible exposure that will benefit tourism, investment and international trade for decades to come.

That television coverage also showcased just how wonderful it is, just how privileged we all are to live here in this province. The media, while detailing the accomplishments of athletes from throughout the world, have done us an amazing service that will attract millions of visitors to British Columbia and Canada over many years to come.

Visitors will not only spend money to vacation here, but they will see the advantages of investment, the advantages of working here, the advantages of doing business here, the advantages of moving here and the benefits of establishing their families in our province and creating right here a great and secure future for themselves and their families.

I have never been more proud than when Canadian athletes rose to the moment and captured the gold medals. But I am also very proud of each and every one of our athletes, whether they went home with a medal or not, because just to qualify for the Olympic Games is an incredible victory and an incredible achievement. Our medallists are truly one in a million, and the odds of making it to the Olympics are so phenomenal. All who participated during the past 17 days are among our most gifted citizens and winners, and I want to thank them.

I also want to praise the participation of all British Columbians of all ages from diverse backgrounds in

making this fabulous golden period in the history of our province and our country, Canada. Wherever I went, all that people talked about was the Olympics — the best Olympics ever, the safest Olympics ever, what a great event they were, how proud they were and how wonderful it was that everyone could participate in one way or another in the activities.

This success was because of the hard work over many years of planning done by many individuals — the athletes, the coaches, the parents — and involving businesses, organizations, governments, over 30,000 volunteers and our seniors who built our country.

Across the province, in most communities, there were Olympic live sites where people could go to watch the action and become part of a truly remarkable bringing together of pride, emotion and participation. Foremost among the live sites was Surrey's own Holland Park, which was packed with people of all ages and backgrounds, attracted by the thrilling entertainment every day.

[1010]

It was a phenomenal experience to go there to meet people, to see the joy in their eyes, to watch them demonstrate the wonder of being Canadian, being proud not just of our athletes but of each other and the place we all call our home — British Columbia.

Like the Olympic flame that danced for 17 days in Vancouver's Coal Harbour, we had our own cauldron in Surrey lit during the torch run in Surrey by our own Olympian, Daniel Igali.

The Surrey torch run, I want to add, went right by my constituency office. It was amazing to see the support for this event mirrored in the faces of so many people lining up on 152nd Street. There were families, little children, youths and seniors from very diverse and ethnic backgrounds cheering the flame as it passed us on its way to Holland Park, where more than 20,000 people lined up in person to see the flame themselves. It was an emotional experience for me, and I know it was emotional for everyone else who saw it and gloried in it.

Just as we have had an incredible 17 days, I also want to say thank you to all the British Columbians and Canadians and all the guests who made the Olympics such a success. I look forward to another two weeks of celebrating, with the rest of British Columbia, the outstanding athletes of the Paralympic Games, which we are also hosting for the first time ever in British Columbia.

At this time I also want to add that people said this was the safest, because they felt safe. They were there with their families, people of all ages, all backgrounds. That is because of the hard work of many people, especially our Vancouver police as well as the RCMP, all the integrated security units and many other police forces from Canada that came to participate, and partners from other parts of Canada including the transit police, correctional officers, sheriffs, military, border personnel,

our B.C. Ambulance Service, our paramedics, doctors and nurses and other health care staff, our fire department and many other volunteers who actually took time away from their work to volunteer or who took the job to have the first-time experience of a lifetime of a very successful Olympics.

However, before the Olympic cauldron was lit, before Canada's athletes led the world in gold-medal wins, before we demonstrated to the world what a wonderful place we live in, we heard in this House a speech that set the tone for British Columbia to continue to grow and continue to prosper. On February 9 the hon. Lieutenant-Governor laid out a plan that our government has developed to get us through the economic tough times of the past couple of years — described the plan that will return our province to the buoyancy and prosperity that marked the middle years of the past decade.

It was a speech and a plan that emphasized the steps we will take to carry forward British Columbia's Olympic momentum to create jobs, improve the environment and support families with children. What I also found very important in the speech was the new support for families with children that is at the centre of our economic and social agenda — encouraging healthy lifestyle and secure, affordable health care.

Today, this afternoon, we will hear a budget that will set the foundation for where we want this province to be in 2030. It was clear in the throne speech that our government's economic mission is clear: growing job creation with faster approvals, lower cost, open trade and labour mobility.

As our Premier said: "Productivity and competitiveness are keys to growing people's paycheques and reasserting our role as Canada's job creation leader." He also said that balancing the budget is both a financial and social imperative. Therefore, our government, over the next year, will look for new ways to meet the needs of citizens within the substantial spending increase already provided and announced to critical government services, including health and education.

Throughout my constituency of Surrey-Tynehead and my city of Surrey there is tremendous evidence of job creation, of thinking to the future and acting on those thoughts. Every major main road in Surrey is being upgraded, widened and enhanced. We are doing what we said we will do. We are not only planning, but we are actually building for the future. All the interchanges and overpasses on Highway 1 in my riding are being widened. The freeway is getting two extra lanes each way.

The new ten-lane Port Mann bridge is being built. It is under construction as we speak. It's the right bridge in the right place at the right time. It is action, not simply words, as some other people would say.

[1015]

Fraser Highway is being four-laned, and 176th Street is being four-laned from the U.S. border to Highway 1.

Highway 10 is being four-laned to improve the east-west connection in Surrey. The Golden Ears Bridge is open, carrying residents and commuters and making life a lot easier for business operators in Port Kells.

The SkyTrain is coming to Guildford in my riding and will run down the Fraser Highway, eventually providing rapid transit service to Langley. And we have a new outpatient hospital under construction and new addition to Surrey Memorial Hospital with an emergency department five times larger than the one we now have.

We have the incredible Surrey campus of Simon Fraser University and our very own Kwantlen Polytechnic University, along with a world-leading trade and technology centre in Cloverdale.

This partial list is truly remarkable, and the jobs created and the economic enhancements that will benefit Surrey residents and all the rest of British Columbia are incredible. On top of that, by getting all the traffic moving, by providing green alternatives such as more rapid transit, fuel cell technology and more buses, we are making the air quality and the environment so much better for everyone.

I know there are many others who will be speaking about our throne speech, but I do want to highlight a number of important points that were raised in it. For instance, British Columbia will join with Washington State in officially naming the area covered by the Georgia Basin–Puget Sound ecosystem the Salish Sea. The Salish Sea will not change the existing name but will serve as the designation for the body of inland salt water stretching from Campbell River and Desolation Sound to the southern reaches of Puget Sound.

A new partnership with the state of Montana will sustain the environmental values in the Flathead River basin. Mining, oil, gas development and coalbed gas extraction will not be permitted there. British Columbia will pursue with Canada and other provinces an amendment to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act to create a unified federal-provincial review process that does away with redundancy and unnecessary costs while encouraging investment and building jobs.

A new investment process review will be launched to simplify and expedite a review process across government. Local governments will be included in this endeavour as governments look at all impediments to reasonable investment, including zoning, licensing and permitting requirements.

A joint committee on municipal property tax reform will identify specific steps to make property taxes more conducive to investment and fair as B.C. works to move to securing existing jobs and encouraging new ones while assuring municipal services are fairly provided for all residents.

Government will take a fresh look at the B.C. regulatory regimes including the B.C. Utilities Commission, B.C. Ferry Commission, TransLink Commission and

others. With California, Washington and Oregon, the province will commit to a common vision for sustainable prosperity and sign a new agreement to work together on innovation, economic development, ocean conservation and climate change adoption through the Pacific Coast Collaborative.

The new western partnership with Alberta and Saskatchewan will build on the success of the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement to foster free trade, investment and labour mobility including new unified and mutually beneficial purchasing, procurement and licensing opportunities. This will be good for all provinces and all taxpayers as it will save a lot of money for the taxpayers.

The province will continue efforts to remove internal trade barriers with other provinces and territories and will continue to fight for the government of Canada's adoption of the Open Skies policy, which will add almost \$800 million to B.C.'s economy alone.

New budget measures will make an international financial centre more attractive for international investors and head offices to move here. The government will establish a national centre on contemporary Asia in partnership with the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada and the government of Canada.

B.C. will encourage a new high-speed rail link between Vancouver and Seattle, which is needed and which is great news for both countries. The success of the new Canada Line has reinforced government's commitment to invest record numbers in public transit, fix TransLink and get on with the Evergreen line, which is really needed.

Clean energy is a cornerstone of climate action plan. Government will build on the contributions of the Green Energy Advisory Task Force and launch a comprehensive strategy to put B.C. at the forefront of clean energy development.

[1020]

A new families-with-children property tax deferral option for all B.C. families with children under age 18. The government will work with the municipalities to dramatically reduce housing costs for young families and to provide increased opportunities for homes they can afford in the existing neighbourhoods where they live and where they grew up.

A new \$180 million integrated case management information technology system will deliver better front-line services and support to women, children, income assistance recipients and our most vulnerable.

A new extended family program will modernize and improve upon the Child in the Home of a Relative program to provide increased assistance, broader support and new safeguards for children.

Establishment of neighbourhood preschools for four-year-olds and three-year-olds within communities over the next five years. They will provide families new voluntary options for public and private preschools across B.C.

close to where they live. New emphasis will be placed on parental involvement and in tailoring the education system to each child's individual needs and passion.

Voluntary full-time kindergarten for five-year-olds will be implemented this September. It will be fully funded and in every school by September 2011.

In concert with local governments, neighbourhood learning centres will integrate neighbourhood needs with available capital resources for the underutilized spaces. Seven-day-a-week facility management is fundamental to provincial critical community services that meet the needs of B.C.'s families with affordability.

Innovation in health support services, new hospitals and public-private partnerships will be introduced to give patients new choices, to reward performance in health delivery and to protect public health care for future generations to come.

Significant changes to improve timely access to justice, combat crime, reduce impaired and dangerous driving and improve public safety. The throne speech lays out our plan to drive our province's future to success. Although there are economic tough times still affecting many in British Columbia, we have provided a road map and a vision that is focusing on creating jobs and supporting families with children and that will build on Olympic momentum. Our government believes in the bright future for all British Columbians.

Since 2001 we have taken the steps to ensure that our province leads the country in economic opportunity and support for B.C. families. I support the throne speech in creating jobs and supporting our families. It provides real, concrete answers to our economic challenges.

Since 2001 we have made the right decision to lead this province and become the envy of Canada and many other people. When I was talking to them when they were visiting at the Olympics, they were talking about how successful British Columbia has been in the last nine years, how they look at the example of what British Columbia has done. We will continue that tradition, meeting the needs of B.C. families and building a strong economy for our future generations.

B. Simpson: I just wanted to note that I did dress quite brightly today, because as opposition members we need to brighten up our whole approach to the government's business.

The words that I have to say are more critical than the clothes I'm wearing, but I also know that my mom and dad are at home watching. My mom likes to critique what I wear, so I thought I'd give her something to critique as well.

But Mom, don't critique me while I'm speaking because that distracts me when my BlackBerry buzzes.

And I know it's her calling.

Interjection.

B. Simpson: The minister across there has got the fact that my folks speak with a Scottish accent. They've been in the House. They've been in the hallways. They've introduced themselves to many people here and on both sides of the House as longtime friends. It's the way that they are.

[1025]

One time — just a funny story — my mom actually called me while I was speaking in the House, and the voice mail went something like: "Oh, Robert, you're more in my house now than you were for years." She says, "I love it. Here, listen to yourself," and I had to listen to myself for about 20 seconds on the voice mail.

So, Mom, I apologize for having some fun at your expense, but you know I love you both.

We've said much about athletic endeavours in this House for a number of years, not just over the last couple of days. Since the government has been in power, effectively, they've had the Olympics to look forward to. They've had the Olympics to point to as something that British Columbians and then eventually Canadians could get their arms around as something to embrace — something that will invigorate our economy, something that will give people a thing to hope for.

Now, I want to couch what I say in context, because I've been there. I've competed on the national and international stage. I've represented Canada as a national age group triathlete both in Edmonton at the world championships and in Cancun at the world championships. So I get what it takes to compete at that level. I get how much fun it is. I get how much drama is involved, etc.

But I think part of what we have to do here as MLAs, and what we're elected to do, is to actually look at the daily lives of the people we serve and somehow understand that what they do is just as important.

That teacher who goes into that classroom with 30 kids day after day — who drags himself or herself out of bed, energize themselves, pour themselves into those children.... Their endeavours every day contribute more to our society than a 17-day event. I think we have to be realistic about that, because the day-to-day things that we do in here affect their lives dramatically — whether that's the budget that we assign to it or the way we regulate it or the way we enforce regulation.

Nurses who deal with palliative care patients on a regular basis have to be heroes every hour of every day — our health care practitioners, our professionals in all fields.

You know, we had a debate in this House about legislating paramedics back to work. Yet it was our paramedics who had to respond to what was happening at the Olympics. It was our paramedics that we depended upon to treat those athletes when they were injured or were involved in an accident.

My brother-in-law was involved with the cross-country skier who had the pneumothorax. As heroic as her

endeavours were.... I can't even imagine competing and winning a bronze medal when you have a lung that's collapsed and broken ribs. I can't even begin to imagine that. We had our B.C. paramedics there treating that person and giving her care and comfort. Those are the people that day after day, in our sort of daily grind, we need to pay more attention to.

It's that lens that I want to apply to the throne speech. I find it interesting that this is the first throne speech this government has had to really give — other than its first one — where it didn't have the Olympics to point to. It couldn't put an aura around a future event that was real and was going to do something. Now they have to project into the next decade, and that's what this throne speech does.

The throne speech, as I've said in a previous speech in this House — I'm showing my own age by having to put my glasses on — actually captures that in a sense where it talks about the Olympic platform being "a launching pad to lift British Columbia and Canada to new heights and new prosperity." That remains to be seen. It's an arguable point. It's not something that we should just accept at face value. We're going to have to take a look at that.

Hopefully, we will get the government to agree to allow the Auditor General to actually take a look at the true costs of the Olympics and the true legacy of the Olympics, because I think other jurisdictions need to know that in order to make a decision as to whether they want these games in the future.

They are very expensive. They are very expensive to the local tax base, and whether those expenses are justified, given the future considerations, is a legitimate and debatable proposition.

So I hope that this government does become more transparent on this issue and does in fact have someone take a look at that not only for ourselves but for other jurisdictions to understand that as well.

[1030]

The throne speech goes on and says: "A new decade is upon us. It demands we leave the past behind and embrace new solutions for this new century. In this age of relentless change and global transformation, standing still is not an option. We must ask how we can best lead change for our children's advantage."

That's the rhetoric of the throne speech looking forward to a new decade and asking questions about new solutions for a new century — of course, a decade into that century.

So with that lens of the day-to-day people that we served, with that lens of a new decade requiring new solutions and looking beyond the Olympics, I take a look at this throne speech, and I ask: is the government putting forward to us new solutions? Is there something new in here that truly understands the challenges that we're confronted with as a human species, the challenges

of the degradation of our natural environment, the challenges of ecosystems that are at risk of collapsing?

I don't overstate that point. All anybody has to do is go on line, google *Living Beyond Our Means* and bring up the UN's report. The language they use, the language of the United Nations Climate Change Committee, is way more frightening and concerning than anything that we've heard in this House.

Is the vision that the government's proposing addressing those real issues? Is the vision the government's proposing addressing that growing wage gap, the rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer, that loss of the middle class that has become evident even to the fact that economists now are talking about it, the fact that if we do not address that, we're in serious trouble? Because we're in a trap. We live in a consumer-based society.

The economy is predicated upon disposable income. Disposable income. Yet we have heard report after report that Canadians are getting deeper and deeper into debt on a daily basis. So where is the disposable income to keep the economy going?

With that lens, does the government bring forward a new vision? One of the things they talk about in the throne speech is sustainable prosperity. I'm going to talk about language in a second, but they use the phrase "sustainable prosperity" with respect to some of the trade agreements that they're going to engage in with the states south of us and with Alberta and Saskatchewan, etc.

Well, we know from experience that TILMA is a race-to-the-bottom agreement. It brings us all down. It doesn't bring us all up. So how do you get sustainable prosperity when trade agreements are actually undermining things that people have fought long and hard for: employment standards, environmental standards, good wages, good return to the government for natural resources — all of those things?

In the context of trade agreements, sustainable prosperity becomes a questionable term that I want to talk about later on. That's one of the things that they talk about in the new decade.

Next they talk about ending byzantine bureaucratic practices. I think everybody recalls in this House how the Lieutenant-Governor sort of stumbled over that and had to go back and reframe it for us. I wish I could remember how he reframed it, but it was basically: "Don't make things too complicated."

Ending byzantine bureaucratic practices. The only thing that I can see from the throne speech is that this is not a new way of thinking. This is just a way of reframing deregulation, which is what this government has been doing and which we should have learned, given the global economic crisis that we're in, is a major problem worldwide. Now, instead of further deregulation and all the rhetoric around cutting regulation, we get this new phrase — "ending byzantine bureaucratic practices." Not new thinking; new words.

The third thing in the throne speech is the relationship with First Nations. Again, as the Aboriginal Relations critic for the opposition, I am busily trying to figure out that file and understand it. It is very complicated. But does the government offer anything new? Is there new thinking in the throne speech that points to redressing the problems that exist, and the problems, quite frankly, created by the government and by the Premier's office in particular?

[1035]

The language of the throne speech actually just uses the same language as before — new relationship, reconciliation, etc. — and yet we know that all of the First Nations associations have called the government's bluff on the new relationship.

For those who don't know what the new relationship is, it's a promise to First Nations to redress longstanding issues, not just around territorial rights and title but around shared decision-making and shared benefits from the land base. The First Nations will tell you that that is not being realized, that the new relationship is words only. That's what they say. So is the language around First Nations and the new relationship any different than before? Is it new thinking for a new decade? The answer: categorically not.

Fourth, there is the issue of taxation. Now, it's interesting to watch the federal debate because the federal Budget Officer is actually beginning to raise the issue of taxation and a different conversation around taxation at the federal level. I think we need to have that conversation here.

What does the government offer for a new decade? Is it new thinking? I'll get into each of these more substantively in a minute. The answer again is no, because what again they're saying is that we still have to continue to lower taxes under the guise of competitiveness and productivity.

There are two major tax initiatives that apparently we're going to see in the House — one for sure, HST, which we can have a good debate on when the bill comes to the House, and also the promise twice now of doing something with municipal industrial property tax.

Is there new language around taxation? Is there an infusion in the throne speech of having a different dialogue around taxation? The answer is no. There's nothing new there.

Then the fifth part is the interesting part because the government is actually re-asserting itself in this field, and that is on the social services side. Is there a recognition by this government that because of successive tax cuts...?

Just as the Budget Officer federally has indicated, if you continue to cut taxes and you continue to gut government and then you get a deficit, you've got a serious problem. You already have a government that is as lean as you want to get there without beginning to give up a

lot of the public good and you've given away a lot of your revenue capacity to fund good public services, but now you've got a deficit that's adding to your debt. You've got a triple whammy.

That's a debate I think that we should engage in here. It's a debate that has implications for public policy, and it's a debate I think the public is ready for. I think the public is ready for that debate, and I think we have to find a mechanism in this House to engage in it.

Do we need to have a different thinking about taxation and what it returns to the public good? The taxpayers I talk to get the connection between paying taxes and getting good public services. The problem they have is that they don't trust us. They don't trust the politicians with their tax money, and we have to resolve that issue.

Interjection.

B. Simpson: One of the ministers is shocked over there. He'll remain unnamed for the record.

The rhetoric of the throne speech is interesting. A new decade demands that we have new solutions, and yet the government's response, other than some new language, is actually the same that they've been playing with for the last two terms in office.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about each of those, but I want to talk a little bit about language. I really struggle in this House, and members on both sides know that I think we could be a lot more productive. I've had many conversations with the ministers on the other side and members on this side about: how do you make this place more productive? One of the things that I really struggle with is the language that's often used.

When I was at university I read a Franz Kafka novel called *The Trial*. If anybody's read that, they'll know exactly what I'm talking about. The language used in there is.... This individual is, first of all, taken in and arrested, and then he's constantly awaiting trial and constantly awaiting the charges being put to him. The language in the book constantly gives you the sense that something is going to happen, but nothing happens. At the end of the book he's just taken out back and shot. I can remember throwing the book into the fireplace where I was sitting reading the final chapters and thinking: "Oh my god."

[1040]

If you read books like that, if you read *Brave New World* — one of my wife's favourite books is *This Perfect Day* — or *1984*, the use of language to obfuscate, to try and hide your agenda, was all pointed to by these folks back in the 1950s. They all said that as governments continue to use language to obfuscate what they're actually doing, then you disconnect the public from what their elected officials are doing. I believe that that's what we've been doing for some time and in particular what this government is doing.

I mean, all you have to think about is the heartland strategy. Where I live, that is a matter of joke, where people say it really was the hurtland strategy, and it was abandoned as quickly as it was published. It never amounted to anything. The new relationship, as First Nations point out, is rhetoric only. The golden decade and the five great goals. It continues to bubble up a little bit, but really, what does it mean? What does it mean?

Ronald Wright points out in his book, which I think should be mandatory reading for all of the MLAs, that when a civilization is threatened with collapsing on itself, which a lot of people are beginning to ask: has the western world kind of reached a critical mass...? As India and China assert themselves, as the financial meltdown continues to unfold, is that what's going on?

Ronald Wright points out that what the electorate tends to do is vote in people who give them the biggest empty promises, because they can't face the hard realities. This throne speech talks about the hard realities but never confronts them.

The language of the throne speech does have that sense of obfuscation. One of the classic examples of it — and it's one of the things, a legacy of this government and of this Premier that I think will be a lasting shame, and I use that word with all seriousness — is the language in this throne speech about B.C. Rail. The statement is: "B.C. Rail will be brought into government and wound down as a...corporation."

Remember all of the things? "We won't sell B.C. Rail. We're not going to do it. We never sold B.C. Rail." In the '05 election, when we went through that election, the government members said: "We never sold it." Even though CN was operating on it and acting as if they owned it. "We never sold it."

We asked questions in here about that deal in the fall of '05, in the spring of '06. The language of the government was: "What are you talking about? We still own the rail lines. B.C. Rail is still a viable entity." Then we asked some questions in the House a little while ago about how much we were paying for folks that were managing a short piece of track, and you get in the throne speech: "We're going to wind up B.C. Rail."

That's the language of obfuscation. The government needs to admit that they sold it. They sold B.C.'s railway. They did it deliberately. There are implications for that, and how are they going to redress those implications, including implications that are still before the courts?

The language in the throne speech of "choice and diversity" for health and education is also part of that obfuscation. If the government is serious about privatizing education and health care, let's have the debate. Let's have the debate. Let's have the debate here. Let's have the debate in the public domain. Do people want their public health care system privatized? Do they want their public education system privatized? Yes or no? And what are the implications of taking both paths?

Because where I live, public education and public health care are absolutely necessary. We don't have the critical mass of population. We have a dispersed population living in small communities. So it's a different debate for us than possibly where you have the larger population down south.

But I would argue that that is not tenable either — to privatize there, because when you get the growing income gap, when you get people who day by day are unable to meet their financial obligations, and then you put a health crisis on top of it.... We don't want to look like our brothers and sisters down in the United States, where it bankrupts whole families.

Rather than choice and diversity, let's get a clear signal from the government. Is this a privatization agenda? We believe it is, but is it a privatization agenda? If so, how are we going to have the debate both in this Legislature and out in the public domain? Because this government took it out into the public domain, in the Conversation on Health, and they were rebuffed. The public said: "Not on your life. We like our public health care system."

[1045]

This government did not like that answer — actually, it was, again, the Premier's office — and, as a consequence, is now doing it under the table, bit by bit. From the language in this throne speech — and I ask everybody to go look at it — it's clear to me that the idea of choice and diversity is to chip away at those two systems.

I had to laugh when I read the section on choice for schooling — trust me, I won't be able to find it. The choice for schooling reads like this. "New emphasis will be placed on parental involvement and on tailoring our education system to each child's individual needs, interests and passions. New forms of schooling will be developed to provide greater choice and diversity centred on students' special interests and talents."

Does that mean home-schooling in Horsefly and in Likely and in McBride? Is that what that means? More parental involvement and individualized schooling. Is that what this is? Part of what the folks in my area think is that if we actually get on to high-speed Internet, that's what their choice becomes — because they are given a choice.

They're given a choice of publicly educating their children through the school system via Internet, because their schools are closed, or they can put their child on a bus for an hour and a half or two hours. So they have a choice, and they're more directly involved. Is that what it means? Let's have the debate.

We were at a meeting with the northern school trustees with a couple of the government ministers and our Education critic and myself. None of us disagreed that we need to take a look at fundamental reform in the public education system. None of us disagreed that we need to catch it up with some of the latest research and findings in brain science and human development.

None of us disagreed with that, but let's be transparent about how we believe we accomplish that. We on this side believe you accomplish that through a robust public education system with certified and qualified teachers. That's what we believe. What does the government actually believe about that? Do they believe that the best way to do that is through privatization?

The language around the HST. I found this particularly interesting, as well, in the guise of the push-back that the government must be getting and government members must be getting. Because I can tell you what we're getting in our office is a significant push-back on HST to the point that we know that there's going to be an initiative undertaken to try and get the government to take a look at this again once the legislation comes in.

The language in the throne speech caught me by surprise when the Lieutenant-Governor read it because it actually put it in the context of wages. It said: "Productivity gains and global competitiveness are essential to improving people's take-home pay. They will be the hallmarks of the government's economic strategy."

Now again, Madam Speaker, this idea that productivity gains and global competitiveness are essential to improving people's take-home pay is a very debatable point because, as anybody who's paid attention to globalization knows, what competitiveness means is driving wages down. That's what it does over time.

Within the context of take-home pay, the government raises harmonized sales tax. It says nothing is more important in that regard than harmonized sales tax, and then it talks about the \$2 billion that is going to be taken off the backs of the larger corporations.

What it doesn't talk about is the direct hit on take-home pay for all of the people who are in the lower-income brackets or on fixed incomes or seniors on fixed pensions. It's a direct hit to their take-home pay. The language of obfuscation. The language of not calling what is going on in real terms so that people can understand it and we can have a real debate based on truth, based on a true set of facts.

We need to have that debate on HST in this House, but I can tell you, as the critic for Tourism and I have met with the tourism sector in my area, that they don't want it. They believe that it will not create jobs, as promised in the throne speech, but it will actually create the loss of jobs in this province. They've quantified that. They've put that brief in front of the government, and I hope that when we see the bill, their questions and their concerns are taken into account.

Then, of course, the whole issue, as I've indicated, of taxation. Now, the tax debate that I believe we really need to have and this whole issue of municipal taxation needs to be addressed.

I've met with one of the major corporations in my riding over this very issue because they were wondering whether they wanted to get involved in the court case. Again, for those who don't know this, industrial ratepayers on Vancouver Island were actually refusing to pay their taxes. Try that in your household, Madam Speaker, and see if you get away with it for too long.

They were avoiding paying their taxes and took the municipalities to court. The court found in favour of the municipalities. They've decided that they're actually going to appeal it, and that process is ongoing.

What I said to the folks who are part of that.... I said: "Okay, fine. If you want your property taxes down because you don't think you get great services — again, a debatable point — then we'll start charging you for the air. We'll start charging you for water. We'll start giving you a surcharge for public health. We'll start giving you a surcharge for public education. We'll start giving you charges that currently right now they either externalize — that is, they don't put it on their books.... When they pollute the Fraser River or the Thompson River, it doesn't go on their books.

So we'll give you a surcharge for that that's in keeping with what that does to our watershed, and we're going to charge you a surcharge for what you get in the way of education and training — we train their workforces for them — and what you're going to get in the way of public health and public services and public good in your communities.

What we need to do is we need to engage in a different debate. Rather than fight it in the courts, let's have the discussion about taxation. Let's get rid of the old language of taxes are bad, *carte blanche*, that they're just bad — period. And let's revisit taxation and look at the relationship between taxes and the public good.

You always prepare speeches in this House thinking that you never have enough to say and then realize you only get halfway through and your time starts running out.

Back to sustainable prosperity. The throne speech promised new thinking, new solutions. I think, certainly on balance for me, it doesn't do that. What it does say at the end is that people need to curtail their expectations of government, and I think that captures the truest statement in the throne speech and this government's ideological position.

They don't believe there's a role for government in society, and they think what they need to do is to get people to go and figure out what they're going to do for themselves. Well, I would argue that pooling our resources together through taxation — having good public services, good public resources put to good use — is the best way for us to deal with what we have to deal with in this next decade.

The throne speech asked us to be great. It asked us in this House to put aside our differences. So I challenge

the government: let's do that. Let's make this place work. Let's fully reconstitute legislative committees. Let's debate legislation through committee. Let's go out and consult together. Let's have the great debates together about public services, about taxation, about what would be a truly sustainable future.

I want to close by pointing to something. We're doing that thinking on this side, and it's not easy thinking. We have an initiative called Sustainable B.C. I ask all of the members on the other side of the House to just simply google that — "Sustainable B.C." It will bring up the webpage. There's a video; there's a document.

We're struggling with a set of principles and some tools that we can use to truly try and get a sustainable future for our children, because a sustainable future for our children is more than fiscal prudence. It's more than fiscal prudence. It's environmental prudence. It's social prudence. It's actually building systems that make sure that we do not pass on to our children a legacy that involves fewer choices and fewer possibilities. With that I close.

E. Foster: As I rise in the House to give my inaugural speech, I would like to say what an honour and privilege it is to represent the people from Vernon-Monashee. As we all know, it takes a dedicated team of supporters to get here, and I would take this opportunity to say thank you to everyone that helped me.

At the top of that list is my wife, Janice, whose support throughout my political career — which started in 1986 as an alderman and then councillor and later as a mayor of the village of Lumby — has been unwavering. She is the one who I can always count on to keep me grounded. Janice, thank you for your support, your guidance and for being the love of my life.

[1055]

Another very special thank-you is to my mom, Leytha Foster. She's currently in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, and I'm sure watching us live on Hansard here. Mom, thanks to you and Dad for providing a home for us where we learned the importance of family and a work ethic, which dictated that if you didn't earn it, you didn't deserve it.

Hon. K. Krueger: We agree with that.

E. Foster: Well, thank you very much.

To my campaign team, Helen Armstrong, Brett Kirkpatrick, Ken Christensen, Derek Hall, Andrew Powell, Cam Fenn, Greg Beattie, Derek and Marjorie Allen, Michael Tindall, Greg and Leanne Louis, Woody Kuroka, Dana Plecas, John Ringness, Harvey Downs — I had a lot of people that helped me — Jacquie Hansen, Elinor Warren, Marjean Postill, Dave Pussey, Adjet Sidhu, Sid Sidhu, Karem Sidhu, Jit Mann, Surjan Thind, Gabel Randowa, Harmit Jasi: thank you, all, for your help, your hard work and, most importantly, your friendship.

There are two very special ladies I'd like to thank: Min Sidhu and Kristen Kiell, who run my constituency office in Vernon. Ladies, thank you so very much for your hard work and all of your support.

Madam Speaker, I've heard my fellow members tell this House about their ridings and how great it is to live and represent them here in the Legislature. Well, I'm no different. As I said, it is a great honour to represent all the residents of Vernon-Monashee, and we feel that it might be the most beautiful place in Beautiful British Columbia to live.

Interjection.

E. Foster: I may get argument on that. I appreciate that. I knew I'd get a lot of argument on that.

Whether you're in Vernon around one of the lakes; at Silver Star Mountain, a world-class ski resort; or heading out on a journey through Coldstream, Lavington, Lumby and Cherryville in the Monashees, it's truly a spectacular part of our province.

Forestry and agriculture have been and continue to be the focus of the economy in my riding. Having said that, Vernon-Monashee has seen a major increase in tourism, which has had a very positive impact on our local economy.

Be it on the beach, at the ski hills, playing a round of golf at one of our many destination golf courses, hiking the mountains or just enjoying the scenery, people come from all over the world to visit the North Okanagan.

Earlier I spoke about the importance of family in my upbringing. Nowhere will you see that family is more important than in the North Okanagan. Kal Tire, one of the largest independent tire retailers in North America, had its start and still has its head office in Vernon. The company's founders, Mr. Tom Ford and his family, still make their home in Vernon and have third-generation family members working in the operation.

DCT Chambers Trucking is another family-owned-and-operated business. You'll see their trucks all over British Columbia and western Canada, owned and operated by Art and Mona Chambers and their families, with four generations taking part in various aspects of the family business all over western Canada.

Tolko Industries, one of the major forest companies in North America, was started by Harold Thorlakson as Lavington Planer Mill in Coldstream in my riding some 50 years ago. Harold's three sons, Doug, John and Al Thorlakson, have in the years since built a company that started with that single small mill in Lavington and have expanded to 17 manufacturing and three co-gen facilities and about 3,000 employees.

Tolko still has its largest presence in British Columbia with 12 manufacturing and two co-gen plants in B.C. Tolko maintains its corporate headquarters in Vernon and is still owned by the Thorlakson family. Mr. Al Thorlakson has

recently retired as president and CEO of Tolko, and the reins have been passed on to his son Brad, thus establishing the succession transition to a third generation of the Thorlakson family.

These are but a few of the many family success stories in my riding, the North Okanagan, a great place to live.

Over the past few weeks families in Vernon have been glued to their television sets as we witnessed what can only be described as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games have truly placed British Columbia on the world map as a remarkable host.

I've heard visitors from all over the world comment on what a beautiful place we live in and how lucky we are to live here. We truly are a diverse province. With the arid wine country of the Okanagan to the west coast rain forest, we have a lot to showcase from this province, and the Olympic Games were the perfect opportunity to do so.

Regions from all across Canada were part of the Olympic experience, and after having travelled from Olympia, Greece, the torch touched down here in Victoria. It passed through roughly a thousand communities, and over 12,000 torchbearers beamed with pride as their friends and family watched them carry the Olympic flame.

[1100]

The torch came through my riding on Tuesday, January 26, and it was a truly spectacular moment. People from Vernon, Coldstream, Cherryville, Lavington and Lumby came to welcome the Olympic flame, where the cauldron was lit by Lannie Houle, a local First Nations girl and the only First Nations girl on the ladies' B.C. hockey team.

[L. Reid in the chair.]

When the time came for the Olympic flame to be lit in Vancouver, millions upon millions of people were glued to their televisions as they witnessed a spectacular Canadian story. The Olympic Games showcased what Canada's Pacific province has to offer, and it made a proud British Columbian even prouder.

I'm especially proud of Sonja Gaudet, a Paralympic curler in my riding who represented Canada in the last Olympics in Italy and came home with a gold medal. My wife, Janice, and I will be among the thousands of people in the crowd cheering her on as she strives to bring home Olympic gold once again. It's people like Sonja that make the Olympics so remarkable, as they bring communities together in such a way that we have very rarely ever seen before.

The overt patriotism that has come from these Olympic Games has been astounding. When I was in Vancouver last week, I saw the crowds cheering at the big screens whenever a medal was won, and spontaneous rendi-

tions of *O Canada* made all our hearts glow, not only with Olympic but Canadian pride. We should be proud. Fourteen gold medals — 26 in total — is an all-time record for Canada, and how great it was to happen here in our home province.

I've visited the B.C. Showcase pavilion, where thousands of visitors had a chance to see what B.C. is known for, and that's wood. The fir and larch flooring was spectacular, along with the cedar doors that had hung at the B.C.-Canada house in Torino, Italy, in 2006. What a sight it was to have our province on display for everyone to see.

We all know that the forest industry is going through tough times, and with the financial troubles in the United States we've seen our lumber exports diminish significantly. Through measures such as the B.C. pavilion we can help showcase our natural resources to burgeoning economies in Asia, such as China, India, Japan and Korea. I know that my colleague the hon. Minister of Forests and Range has been active at this file, and it's only a matter of time before our forest industry is back on top again.

The Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor will provide us with the necessary direction to emerge stronger and more efficient from this recent economic downturn. I wholeheartedly believe that the harmonized sales tax will do just that. As our Premier has stated, it's not about doing the most popular thing; it's about doing the right thing. And I believe that the HST is the right thing.

The HST will level the playing field for businesses in British Columbia, as over 130 countries around the world have a value-added tax. With the announcement that Ontario would adopt a value-added tax, British Columbia could not be left behind. We are the third-largest province in Confederation, and we must take the measures to ensure that our businesses can compete domestically here at home and internationally abroad.

The harmonized sales tax will cut the effective tax on new business investment in B.C. by 40 percent. In doing so, it will help create jobs during a time when many people are out of work. The HST will also remove \$2 billion in costs that are hampering growth in forestry, construction, mining, oil and gas, transportation, manufacturing and small business. That means it will save British Columbia taxpayers \$150 million in annual compliance costs. It will also remove some \$30 million a year in administration costs, which further streamlines the tax process.

There's been a lot of misinformation about the HST circulating throughout the province, much to the credit of our friends in opposition. They have certainly taken many liberties in describing the harmonized sales tax. While I won't address their fictional concerns, I want to stress that the HST is the single most important piece of legislation we can introduce to help start our economy after the recession.

Jobs don't appear miraculously from the air. They come from sound business practices. They come when businesses are stable and prosperous to create them. That is why I support the HST.

[1105]

His Honour also mentioned the importance of clean energy as an integral part of British Columbia's environment and economy. I'm proud to be a member of the Premier's cabinet committee on climate action and clean energy, which works to advance our climate action plan and to maximize our province's economic potential as a clean energy powerhouse, producing clean, reliable, competitively priced power that meets British Columbia's electricity needs, reduces global greenhouse gas emissions and fosters economic development and job creation in every region of this province.

This government is committed to making British Columbia a leader in clean energy. I'm proud of our record in bioenergy, run-of-river, wind, geothermal, tidal wave and solar energy projects. While certain members of the opposition oppose these clean energy sources, our government will continue to do what is best for the environment and the wallets of every British Columbian.

I was pleased with the government's commitment to ensure that the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act must be changed. His Honour phrased it well. The bureaucratic red tape is byzantine. There should be one process for one project. Time is money, and to have \$3 billion in provincially approved projects held up is unacceptable. By reducing the red tape, we will have more jobs, which will further strengthen our economy.

My constituents, particularly those who rely on the forest industry, are excited about the new advances in biotechnology. Our forests have been affected by the mountain pine beetle, but we can use this beetle-kill wood in pellet plants, cellulose ethanol production, biomass gasification technologies and fuel cell technologies.

These bioenergy technologies create new uses for waste wood in beetle-kill forests that would otherwise go unused on the forest floor. Not only are we investing in new ways to use these wood products, but we are investing in new, diverse jobs for the future of British Columbians.

This throne speech also addresses our most important assets: our children. We have committed to introducing full-day kindergarten for five-year-olds and increasing the number of StrongStart programs throughout the province. I'm very pleased that Vernon has a StrongStart program where parents can bring their pre-kindergarten-aged children into an early learning environment. This is one of the many innovative programs that we have implemented to help foster early childhood education.

Society has an obligation to our children. We have an obligation to provide them with the best education imaginable, and that is what we aim to do. We will initiate

several significant reforms to modernize our education system for the 21st century.

Government recognizes the importance of parental involvement in a child's education needs. That's why we will place a stronger emphasis on parental involvement and to shaping our education system to each individual child's specific needs. By placing more emphasis on the needs of students and introducing new, innovative forms of schooling, we will provide greater choice, centred on students' special interests and talents. By introducing these measures, not only will we enhance children's education throughout the province, but we will be able to focus resources on students' needs and less on administrative costs.

We are also committed to ensure that families have access to affordable housing here in British Columbia. We will work with municipal governments to help lower housing costs for young families. As my colleague the hon. Minister of Housing and Social Development has mentioned, we will provide more opportunities for people to stay in their existing neighbourhoods. There is nothing more important than making sure that families, and particularly children, have a roof over their heads. I'm proud of this government's commitment to affordable housing.

His Honour also mentioned that government recognizes that families with children face additional costs. As a father, I realize this. Even though my son has long since left the family nest, I am too aware of the costs of raising a family. This is why we will implement a new families-with-children property tax deferral option for all B.C. families with children under the age of 18. Under this program, those families will be able to defer their property taxes, similar to the program already available to seniors and those facing financial hardships.

These measures are just a select few of those already in place to help British Columbia families with the increasing costs of raising children.

[1110]

We heard the Lieutenant-Governor speak of innovations in the health care industry. Since 2001 we have increased health care spending by over 70 percent, from \$9.8 billion to \$15.9 billion this year. We continue to increase our spending on health care, and British Columbians are better for it. We have increased the number of training spaces for doctors and nurses in our province, and we will commit to increase access to residencies for Canadians who have received their medical training outside of Canada.

Through these measures we will continue to increase the number of medical professionals practising in our province. I was fortunate enough to meet some of them when I had my hip replaced in December. Just a few months ago I underwent hip replacement surgery. Doctors, nurses and support staff were very professional, and I would like to thank them for getting me back on my feet.

As I draw to the end of my remarks, I would like to reiterate my support for this throne speech. Two years ago we would never have imagined that the financial crisis would have impacted us as much as it has. We must move forward, however, and that's what I believe this throne speech will do.

I'm proud to be a member of a government that is willing to make tough decisions so British Columbians will benefit in the long term. With this throne speech and the budget that will be presented this afternoon, I wholeheartedly believe that we will be better positioned to weather the economic downturn and emerge stronger than ever before.

M. Sather: It's my pleasure to rise today to respond to the throne speech 2010 version. You know, listening to the speeches about the throne speech from the government side, reading the throne speech, it's like being in a time warp. I feel like we're back in 2001-2002 again when the government is coming up with the same failed solutions that they brought up then, the same language, the same ideas that have proven to be inadequate in a modern world.

Yet that's what we're hearing. It's totally remarkable that the crisis that we've faced over the last year and a half to two years seems to have had no effect whatsoever on the thinking of this government, and so we hear a great deal again about cutting red tape.

Remember that one? Everybody will remember that one from 2001. That was, you know, when the government rode in on their white charger. "All this miserable red tape in government — we're going to get rid of it, because, don't you know, it's just in the way of a better life for all." But in fact, what most of the world has learned — sadly, apparently not this government — is that regulation actually has a place in government.

I mean, we've had a complete collapse due to deregulation, a complete collapse that seems to have gone unnoticed by the Premier, by the Finance Minister and by the government caucus, because they, dragging the rest of British Columbia along with them, are riding that same horse.

The same language that we heard back then is back into the forefront now, even talking about the five great goals that I thought had mercifully been buried because they weren't being met, clearly. But the Premier has decided that the future — his future, anyway — lies in the completion of the five great goals that started, I guess, he says, in 2005. I'm not sure what the first four years of this reign were. Maybe that was the silver medal or the bronze medal. I don't know what that was, but anyway, the Premier says it all started in 2005, and we've got to meet those goals, and he's going to be around long enough to see that happen.

[1115]

All of this kind of thinking coming from this government is regurgitated stuff. This is stuff that we've heard

a long time ago. And there's an aggressiveness to this throne speech, a determination, a redetermination, I guess, by the Premier to forge ahead strongly with the failed agenda that he brought forward in the first part of this decade.

We see some interesting discussion in the throne speech around a number of subjects. One of them that I wanted to talk a little bit about is Site C. Site C, of course, is on the Peace River in the Fort St. John area. There's been lots of discussion over the years about whether or not to develop Site C, should it be developed at all, what are the benefits, what are the costs and so on and so forth.

In the throne speech the government says it "will optimize existing generation facilities and report on the Site C review this spring. It will develop and capture B.C.'s unique capability to firm and shape the intermittent power supply that characterizes new sources of clean energy to develop reliable, competitively priced, clean power" and when it is needed most.

That certainly sounds to me like an endorsement for Site C. When they talk about capturing "the capability to firm and shape the intermittent power supply," of course, the intermittent power supply they're talking about are things like run of river. You know, during the spring freshet is when it produces most of its power, and you need a steady supply such as you get from a large hydroelectric dam like Site C. So this endorsement is pretty clear, and it's got some interesting ramifications.

It's certainly worthy of discussion — very much so. And I expect at sometime during the current term of this government we'll be having further discussion on Site C. But what exactly is going on with Site C? Well, there are some interesting developments that have occurred.

You see, one of the things that has come up, of course, with Site C that I wanted to bring up is coordination — supposedly; it's certainly being talked about — between Site C power, were it to be developed, and the massive shale gas developments in northeastern British Columbia in the Fort Nelson area.

The potential new transmission line interconnecting Fort Nelson to the British Columbia Transmission Corporation integrated system can be found in B.C. Hydro's long-term acquisition plan, which says: "B.C. Hydro has requested that BCTC" — British Columbia Transmission Corporation — "complete a planning-level assessment with respect to a new transmission connection between the Peace region and Fort Nelson." It goes on to say that "new transmission infrastructure will link northeastern B.C. to our integrated grid."

An Hon. Member: I can't even imagine that.

M. Sather: The member can't imagine it. Well, you know, put out your feelers there. I'm sure the member, who is from that area, can imagine it quite clearly, and

I expect he's quite aware of the discussion that's taking place in the northeast about the connection between Site C and the shale gas developments in the northeast. He's very aware of it, I'm sure.

It goes on to say that a "new transmission infrastructure will link northeastern B.C. to our integrated grid, provide clean power" — so it says — "to the energy industry and open up new capacity for clean power exports to Alberta, Saskatchewan and south of the border." Okay. "We will seek major transmission upgrades with utilities in California and elsewhere."

[1120]

So the government is always talking about how we are short of power in British Columbia, we are short of electricity. But is that the game? Is that the game? I don't think so. The game is about exporting power, and this is another indication of what the true intentions of this government are with regard to Site C and of course with regard to run of the river....

Interjection.

M. Sather: The member's worried about the lights being turned off. You know, I guess there's a boogeyman under every bed for the member but....

G. Coons: The lights are already off on their side.

M. Sather: My colleague says the lights are already off, and that's unkind to the other side. I think we have to admit that there is some light on the other side, albeit dim. Lights are on and nobody's home. There it goes.

"Green energy is bad," the member said. No, green energy isn't bad. But what we're here to discuss — well, I'm here to discuss anyway — is: is it green energy we're in fact talking about?

According to Michele Rampersad, who is with Nexen Inc., and Nexen is one of the corporations that's planning to develop the shale gas deposit.... She says: "With the geographical location of Horn River," — that's where the shale gas is — "we feel it makes sense to come across and feed those volumes over to the oil sands." So develop Site C; ship the power to the shale gas deposits. To what? To power the oil sands. Now, that is a green project if I ever saw one.

The oil sands, the single dirtiest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the world — that is what this impetus, this enthusiasm for Site C is driven by, in large measure. It's not about providing energy for British Columbians. That's the farce. That's the doublespeak that this government has engaged in for years, and it's simply not the case.

I think it's disingenuous of member after member to get up in this House, from the government side, and talk about how proud they are of all the clean energy developments that this government is involved in. It's

indicative of.... I'm going to call it a tired government, to be charitable — a tired government.

In many areas we've been asking this government to come clean on what their real intentions are. They don't do it. There has been greenwashing galore for years from this government. They won't tell us. They won't come out and say: "You know what? We want this power for export. We want this power to produce oil from the tar sands."

That's okay if the government wants to say that we're in favour of facilitating the development of the tar sands, but don't at the same time try to tell British Columbians that your agenda is about clean and green energy. It's not. So I think it's really incumbent upon the government to come clean on that.

I expect the member from the northeast that spoke earlier may have been at a recent presentation made by Sen. Richard Neufeld, who of course was the former Energy Minister in this government. On February 8, speaking to the Fort St. John city council, he encouraged the council to get on the train of Site C.

[1125]

He said: "I know that there has been some discussion ongoing about the amount of electricity that would be needed in Fort Nelson with the advent of the Horn River basin, which is in the magnitude of 500 megawatts. Understanding that Site C would generate about 900 megawatts; it's a significant amount of Site C." Indeed it is. It's over half, as a matter of fact.

So here you have the former Energy Minister of this government, from that particular area, saying that Site C would use half of that to develop the shale gas deposits to ship the natural gas resource over to the tar sands to develop the tar sands. Sweet but disingenuous, and therein lies the problem.

You know, the whole thing about the energy plan of this government, the so-called energy plan, the run of the river.... It's really interesting to look at how that particular issue is being played out by this government. Originally — and for several years, again — it was all this misconstruing of the energy needs of British Columbia. "We have to have run-of-the-river development because we're short of energy." But that discussion has been shifted by the government quite considerably so that now they're quite upfront about the fact that that power is going to, again, be for export.

It's a torturous trail that this government has left around the energy discussion in British Columbia. So what I'm hoping, anyway, is that the government will come clean, stop misleading British Columbians around their energy plan and tell it like it is. It's largely about energy export.

Look at the people that are involved, too. When you look at run of the river, we all know that there are large numbers of folks who have worked with this government that have gone over to work for Plutonic and other

people in the run-of-the-river business. So there are all these financial interconnections that leave British Columbians with a great deal of doubt about the intentions of this government with regard to energy, with regard to run-of-the-river projects and now with regard to Site C, and concerns about the veracity of this government that I would say are well-founded.

Another thing I wanted to make comment on from the throne speech, again on clean energy or so-called clean energy.... The throne speech says: "A new clean energy act will encourage new investments in independent power production while strengthening B.C. Hydro." I don't know how they're exactly going to do that — strengthen B.C. Hydro. That will be interesting to see.

"It will provide for fair, predictable, clean power calls." This is a word that the government is bandying around a lot this year — "predictable." Heard the Forests Minister talk about it yesterday. Predictable, clean power calls. Not like the last call that was turned down by the regulatory commission. The government said: "Uh-uh, can't do that. That's not allowed."

It's so bizarre, because whenever the government wants to hide behind a regulatory body, like the Minister of Mines does with the local mining development in my area.... He says: "Oh, can't meddle with that. The mining inspector has ultimate rule. I would never do a thing like that."

[1130]

Then, of course, when it comes to what they see as interference with what they want to do, such as push run of the river — even though the major users of electricity in this province have cautioned the government greatly about their run-of-the-river agenda, their clean call through B.C. Hydro. You know, paying \$120 a megawatt hour for power that you'll only be able to sell for \$50 to \$60 doesn't sound like a sound business plan to them and doesn't sound like a sound business plan to me.

But there's an agenda here. There's a fervour. There's a determination on the part of the Premier and on the part of this government to jam run-of-the-river projects down the throats of British Columbians, whether it's in our best interests or not. It causes British Columbians to have doubts about the intentions of this government. I think it's incumbent upon the government to, as I say, come clean about their intentions.

I will give them some credit. They are coming more clean about their intentions with regard to power export. It was a very hidden thing for a while there, but not quite so much anymore.

Now if we look at these so-called equivalency agreements that government is keen on engaging in because you know, we got to get rid of a lot of that red tape. They did that on things like streamside protection. There are any number of environmental regulations that are red tape to this government.

The environmental assessment process has not been going entirely the way they want it to, so they're going

to come up with some equivalency agreements with Ottawa to ensure that they get the result they want.

You know, I think the agenda here.... And the government can tell me I'm all wrong about this maybe, but I think they don't trust or want the federal government involved in the regulatory process. In particular, they don't want the Department of Fisheries and Oceans involved because those folks — those of them that are still on the job and able to speak up — actually know something about salmon.

We don't have that expertise. We're not supposed to have. That's their jurisdiction. But those people are problematic. For example, when it comes to run-of-the-river projects, unfortunately, there are salmon in a number of those rivers. And what the heck, you get those Fisheries biologists out of there. That would help a little bit too.

I'm sure the equivalency agreement can be worked out to get rid of some more of that red tape. It's ridiculous having all of these environmental regulations, although this government wants to be and says they are.... The Minister of Forests said yesterday: "We intend to be..." — what is it? — "...strongest fisheries regulations in the world or in North America..." or something.

An Hon. Member: The universe.

M. Sather: The universe.

Another thing that's topical and mentioned in the throne speech is bioenergy. The last speaker just mentioned it as well. The throne speech says that we have enormous potential in bioenergy. "Bioenergy creates new uses for waste wood and beetle-killed forests and new jobs for forest workers." The thing is that it's not necessarily in all cases. I mean, it may very well be the best use in many cases for beetle-killed wood because it's true that that rotting wood in the forest is releasing greenhouse gases as it rots.

[1135]

So it may, in fact, be the best use for some of it but not necessarily for all of it. There are a lot of younger forests that are quickly growing up in some of that territory. I've seen it in the Cariboo. You know, some studies have shown that it's not the best thing to do — to be in there logging with heavy equipment in those forests — and that there may be a smaller number of forests that could be used for that purpose.

What I think about is the history of this government in forest management. You talk to folks in the forest industry, whether they be from Vancouver Island — my colleagues there talk to them and have talked about it a lot in this House — or wherever it is, it seems, in the province, the resounding concern that's been raised is the huge amount of wood waste that's been left in the forest.

Logging practices, as allowed by this government, have resulted in a tremendous amount of waste, which

is problematic in several respects. Clearly, that's a source of greenhouse gas emissions that is unnecessary. The other part, of course, is the loss of jobs. It's the loss of productivity. It's the loss of the capacity to develop our export market in a way that helps British Columbians more.

I've done some work myself and have visited the Flathead area. I notice that the Flathead in southeastern British Columbia is mentioned in the throne speech, and I'm pleased about that. It says that "mining, oil and gas development and coalbed gas extraction will not be permitted in British Columbia's Flathead Valley."

That's what we've been calling for, for a number of years, and I think that's a good move. But it doesn't go far enough either, because what is really being called for there in addition to that, as the government knows, is the extension of the park system, of the Waterton Glacier system. This doesn't have any mention of that, so I'm hoping that the government hasn't ruled out that as a possibility in their discussions.

Turning to another subject, the throne speech says, "B.C.'s success in private-public partnerships has also sent a resounding message around the world. We will expand those partnerships" in various areas. Well, they haven't been a resounding success throughout. Some can arguably be successful, but others certainly haven't panned out, certainly not without a bailout anyway — like the Port Mann Bridge, where the private partner failed financially, and we the taxpayers have had to ride into save the day.

In my own area the Golden Ears Bridge, which the former Transportation Minister and now the Health Minister repeatedly would say is a project that was on budget, on time, when it clearly was two years....

It was delivered two years after the government said it would be delivered, and it was supposed to be \$600 million — announced that — and is over \$1.1 billion. We've got problems now with that bridge being underutilized, and of course, being that it's a P3 project, guess who's going to have to pick up the slack, the financial...?

[1140]

We have obligations, and one of my colleagues in Burnaby mentioned yesterday about the massive amount of contractual obligations, running into the \$60-some billion, that this government has incurred. It's funny how the conservative governments always talk about being tight-fisted financially, but then they "spend like banshees," to quote my wife.

We're going to have to pick up the slack there. I don't know how much that's going to be. We have obligations with the private developer to build that bridge, and they're obviously going to hold us to it. Perhaps if, when, the Port Mann bridge development happens, the Golden Ears Bridge will be used more than it currently is. But as it now stands, it's being underutilized in terms of the need to meet our financial obligations.

It mentions in the throne speech, too, about electric vehicles. I like that. People know that the electric car was killed by the big automakers in the '90s, and it's absolutely time that it be resurrected. I'm not sure what role British Columbia can play in that, but I hope that whatever we can do, we will do. I encourage the government for that.

Talking about hydrogen-powered vehicles.... I mean, hydrogen power seems like, on the face of it, the perfect solution — no pollution. But it doesn't....

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

R. Cantelon: Well, it's with great pleasure and, may I say, no small part of enthusiasm and positive outlook that I make comments on the budget today. Following the explosion of warmth and good nature.... Some say it's nationalism, but I think it was a little different than some sort of jingoistic nationalism that we experienced during this great explosion of outpouring of goodwill during the Olympics. It really seems to have taken place, a transformational experience for people who were there.

It's been compared to some events like Woodstock but in a much more positive vein. I think all the citizens of British Columbia should be heartened by the positive and the confidence of the people of British Columbia, because certainly, we saw an outpouring of goodwill to everybody.

We had an inkling of that. Certainly, my constituency, representing Nanaimo, Nanoose, Parksville and Qualicum Beach, was fortunate to be the second stop on that wonderful tour of the Olympic torch. It was quite a different experience, something we didn't expect. I was in Nanaimo on day 2, when it came on a Saturday night to Nanaimo. Thousands of people gathered in Swya-Lana Lagoon Park, which had fairly recently been renovated as a Spirit Square by actions of this government and was very warmly received as a great facility in that community for purposes just like this.

There was something special in the air. There was almost like an awe and reverence as the torch went by. People young and old, whether they touched the torch or got their picture taken with a torchbearer.... It was truly a different experience.

You know, the light of the torch itself really embodies a hopeful spirit of mankind, essentially. Basically, the idea of the Olympics was: "Let's fight it out on the athletic field rather than fight it out with wars." Somehow that spirit of peaceful negotiation to resolve our differences in other methods seemed to transcend everybody. People got caught up in it. It was just awe and experience. People were deeply moved by the experience of seeing that torch.

It shouldn't have come as a surprise, although I think everyone would agree that in the initial first couple of

days.... There was, of course, the terrible tragedy event of the death of a luge rider in the first day and some technical glitches. I think you could sense in the press and in the media that there was sort of an initial anti-Olympics cynicism and criticism that seemed to start up about the Olympics. "This is just going to be one of these, and we'll pick away at your foibles."

But that's not what happened, as we all know now. What happened was a wonderful transforming experience for people who were there.

[1145]

I was over for a couple of events. When I say events, I hasten to add that I didn't go to any of the athletic events, but I was there for a couple of promotional events. I know my members opposite thought that there's no need to go over. I was at a tourism event, where we met with tourism people and encouraged people to experience beautiful British Columbia — to come, to visit, to invest in British Columbia.

I was at a forestry conference, a forestry luncheon — again, the optimism in the room that we seemed to be turning the corner, that things seemed to be moving forward in the forest industry at long last. We know it's a long way to go, and we know there's much to be done, but we can sense that things are moving forward, that there's optimism.

So at the end of the day, it was just like a bright light. I think of some recent movies where the speakers sort of hold up a flash, and it eliminates all previous thoughts. It was like all negative thoughts were banished, and the cynicism dissolved into adulation for what happened during the Olympics. The members opposite, I know, can't deny that. Certainly, it was a real feeling, a palpable feeling.

I like to think that the citizens of British Columbia are ready to move forward. I believe that this throne speech gives us an excellent platform, building on the successes we've had in sound fiscal management of the economy of British Columbia — that we will be able to fulfill the expectations and the hopes of our young people, our children and our grandchildren, without saddling them, as we'll learn perhaps later today, with incalculable debt that will be a burden to drag down their hopes and aspirations.

There are many, many things. I'll touch on a few if I may, Madam Speaker. I was certainly encouraged by the clean energy act that's mentioned in the budget. Again, I represent a constituency, Nanaimo to Parksville in the Nanaimo regional district chaired by Joe Stanhope, that's been very forward-thinking in clean energy.

On the Island we're very sensitive to the fact that we produce probably less than a third of the power needs for Vancouver Island, that we have to import it through cables, which isn't always a popular thing for people living near power lines sending the power to Vancouver Island. But it's a necessary thing for us to have the energy.

They've made some innovative moves. They've been capturing the gas for some time now, the methane gas seeping out of the landfill in Cedar, and converting the methane into power. And with power generation, that puts diesel energy, electric energy back into the grid. They're also now capturing the same methane gas from the sewage treatment plants, capturing that and converting that into electrical energy, clean electrical energy.

They've developed a plan now where they're recycling. Over 60 percent of everything that used to go to the landfill is now being recycled. So on the Island, I'm proud to represent people and proud to represent the constituents who are very concerned about the environment, very concerned about greenhouse gases and very in tune and forward-thinking in how we manage our resources and manage our waste.

There are also other industrial moves afoot. The International Composting Corporation located in south Nanaimo has an innovated patented process to compost any kind of organic material waste into, basically, a carbon-like material, which is certainly used for fertilizer.

They've recognized that they produce more of that than they can use and are now looking — and they've been recognized by our government with grants — to convert that into power through gasification and creation of methane, which will then be turned into power and put back into the grid. They were recipients of millions of dollars — well, I think it was about \$1.8 million worth of grants — to run a pilot project.

Of course, this is all green material, organic material that eventually would decompose, ultimately into carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide. That will all now be green energy converted into electrical power. That's on Vancouver Island.

There are many other locations on Vancouver Island. Up in Campbell River they're looking at other technologies. On the west coast they're considering wave technologies. There are many green energy initiatives that are very interesting and, I think, groundbreaking and world-leading in their technologies. We look forward to the energy and the imaginations in the industry of Vancouver Island and people moving these initiatives forward.

It's been of necessity, because I think we all have recognized that the economies on Vancouver Island have been tied for so many years to the forest industry and that we've seen declines in the forest industry over a number of years. The need to diversify was an imperative, and they have diversified.

Other things that are mentioned in the budget — they'll be embraced by the citizens of the central Island — are the new film tax credit. For many years, they've created an industry in attracting filming companies to come forward and film on Vancouver Island, and this new tax credit will make that even more possible.

[1150]

But I'm very encouraged that they're looking at, basically, developing a critical mass to expand the production capability in the central Vancouver Island area. I believe that this new tax measure will encourage that to move forward and will look to some more development of studios and more quantum leaps forward in job creation. So there are many things that are happening.

I really do believe that this wasn't just an episode. I think this was an expression — the Olympic expression, if you want — of the innate positive "We can do it" nature of the people of British Columbia. We can, we will, and we're going to do it.

The initial economic numbers for the Olympics were extremely positive. I saw on the news the other day that the Visa bills for people from offshore, foreign visitors, were \$90 million during that 17 days. It's an amazing, quick injection of cash into the economy. Not only that, some \$30 million of real estate seemed to have transacted with offshore buyers. This is just the beginning, though. Those are just teasers, tasters of what the exposure we've had to the world will create for our economy.

Billions of people watched us, and billions of people were enthralled, not only with the beauty of British Columbia — of course, no question they'll be attracted to it — but they were also impressed with the people that were there — yes, the people. The people were positive. They were confident, and I'm sure that they'll continue to be confident based on what this throne speech projects and offers for them.

It does offer a platform that encourages positive movement forward in our economy. It encourages the people to take responsibility for their own actions, to have confidence in the future. That's a very tenuous thing to try to create, to try to develop. Basically, underwriting all of the investment in the future is confidence in the economy. That is why we continue to move forward with a very stable, predictable fiscal pattern that we'll hear more about today.

There are also many, many things I liked in the budget. I'll comment on a few — certainly the family-with-children property tax deferral. The economic downturn, the crisis that we've endured and we're coming through now — there are signs of hope and progress, but there will be many who are still affected. This will enable young families to protect the family home by deferring their

tax bill. It'll make it easier for them to weather this economic crisis.

It's something you can turn on, turn off, carry on, carry forward with indefinitely or just use as a temporary measure to give them relief from financial pressures. I think this throne speech is far-ranging in its implications.

The significant capital investment. We're making \$180 million investment into integrated case management. That will basically enable various departments in the provincial government to work on the same platform, to be able to share information, to run parallel systems without having to go through onerous cross-checks of information and so forth.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

The emphasis too — I have to mention this is, again, where our community has been very forward-thinking — on early learning, on opportunities, on choices for children's education is extremely important. The investment in our children is of critical, paramount importance to the future of our province and to the country, indeed.

There are many reasons to be positive, to share the enthusiasm that we experienced, to share in the glow of the moving forward of this wonderful place that we live in, British Columbia.

Mr. Speaker, I'd be more than happy to proceed for some time about this, because I'm full of this energy and enthusiasm about how wonderful this province is and how great it's going to be given the elements that are built into this throne speech to enable us to move forward. But I regret that, noting the hour, I will cede my place and move adjournment of debate.

R. Cantelon moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. B. Penner moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: This House stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 11:55 a.m.

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