



Second Session, 39th Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT OF  
**DEBATES OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, March 4, 2010**  
**Afternoon Sitting**  
**Volume 10, Number 11**

THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

ISSN 0709-1281

PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

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

**SECOND SESSION, 39TH PARLIAMENT**

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
Honourable Bill Barisoff

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Premier and President of the Executive Council .....	Hon. Gordon Campbell
Minister of State for Intergovernmental Relations.....	Hon. Naomi Yamamoto
Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance.....	Hon. Colin Hansen
Minister of State for the Olympics and ActNow B.C.....	Hon. Mary McNeil
Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation .....	Hon. George Abbott
Minister of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development .....	Hon. Moira Stilwell
Minister of Agriculture and Lands.....	Hon. Steve Thomson
Attorney General .....	Hon. Michael de Jong, QC
Minister of Children and Family Development and Minister Responsible for Child Care .....	Hon. Mary Polak
Minister of Citizens' Services and Minister Responsible for Multiculturalism and the Public Affairs Bureau .....	Hon. Ben Stewart
Minister of Community and Rural Development.....	Hon. Bill Bennett
Minister of Education and Minister Responsible for Early Learning and Literacy.....	Hon. Margaret MacDiarmid
Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources.....	Hon. Blair Lekstrom
Minister of State for Mining .....	Hon. Randy Hawes
Minister of Environment.....	Hon. Barry Penner
Minister of State for Climate Action.....	Hon. John Yap
Minister of Forests and Range and Minister Responsible for the Integrated Land Management Bureau.....	Hon. Pat Bell
Minister of Health Services.....	Hon. Kevin Falcon
Minister of Healthy Living and Sport .....	Hon. Ida Chong
Minister of Housing and Social Development .....	Hon. Rich Coleman
Minister of Labour .....	Hon. Murray Coell
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General .....	Hon. Kash Heed
Minister of Small Business, Technology and Economic Development.....	Hon. Iain Black
Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts .....	Hon. Kevin Krueger
Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.....	Hon. Shirley Bond

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Leader of the Official Opposition.....	Carole James
Deputy Speaker.....	Linda Reid
Assistant Deputy Speaker .....	Claire Trevena
Deputy Chair, Committee of the Whole .....	Harry Bloy
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.....	E. George MacMinn, OBC, QC
Clerk Assistant .....	Robert Vaive
Clerk Assistant and Law Clerk.....	Ian D. Izard, QC
Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees.....	Craig H. James
Clerk Assistant and Committee Clerk.....	Kate Ryan-Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms .....	Gary Lenz
Director, Hansard Services.....	Jo-Anne Kern
Acting Legislative Librarian .....	Peter Gourlay
Legislative Comptroller .....	Dan Arbic

## ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS

Abbott, Hon. George (L)..... Shuswap  
Austin, Robin (NDP)..... Skeena  
Bains, Harry (NDP)..... Surrey-Newton  
Barisoff, Hon. Bill (L)..... Penticton  
Barnett, Donna (L)..... Cariboo-Chilcotin  
Bell, Hon. Pat (L)..... Prince George-Mackenzie  
Bennett, Hon. Bill (L)..... Kootenay East  
Black, Dawn (NDP)..... New Westminster  
Black, Hon. Iain (L)..... Port Moody-Coquitlam  
Bloy, Harry (L)..... Burnaby-Lougheed  
Bond, Hon. Shirley (L)..... Prince George-Valemount  
Brar, Jagrup (NDP)..... Surrey-Fleetwood  
Cadieux, Stephanie (L)..... Surrey-Panorama  
Campbell, Hon. Gordon (L)..... Vancouver-Point Grey  
Cantelon, Ron (L)..... Parksville-Qualicum  
Chong, Hon. Ida (L)..... Oak Bay-Gordon Head  
Chouhan, Raj (NDP)..... Burnaby-Edmonds  
Coell, Hon. Murray (L)..... Saanich North and the Islands  
Coleman, Hon. Rich (L)..... Fort Langley-Aldergrove  
Conroy, Katrine (NDP)..... Kootenay West  
Coons, Gary (NDP)..... North Coast  
Corrigan, Kathy (NDP)..... Burnaby-Deer Lake  
Dalton, Marc (L)..... Maple Ridge-Mission  
de Jong, Hon. Michael, QC (L)..... Abbotsford West  
Dix, Adrian (NDP)..... Vancouver-Kingsway  
Donaldson, Doug (NDP)..... Stikine  
Elmore, Mable (NDP)..... Vancouver-Kensington  
Falcon, Hon. Kevin (L)..... Surrey-Cloverdale  
Farnworth, Mike (NDP)..... Coquitlam  
Fleming, Rob (NDP)..... Victoria-Swan Lake  
Foster, Eric (L)..... Vernon-Monashee  
Fraser, Scott (NDP)..... Alberni-Pacific Rim  
Gentner, Guy (NDP)..... Delta North  
Hammell, Sue (NDP)..... Surrey-Green Timbers  
Hansen, Hon. Colin (L)..... Vancouver-Quilchena  
Hawes, Hon. Randy (L)..... Abbotsford-Mission  
Hayer, Dave S. (L)..... Surrey-Tynehead  
Heed, Hon. Kash (L)..... Vancouver-Fraserview  
Herbert, Spencer (NDP)..... Vancouver-West End  
Hogg, Gordon (L)..... Surrey-White Rock  
Horgan, John (NDP)..... Juan de Fuca  
Horne, Douglas (L)..... Coquitlam-Burke Mountain  
Howard, Rob (L)..... Richmond Centre  
Huntington, Vicki (Ind.)..... Delta South  
James, Carole (NDP)..... Victoria-Beacon Hill  
Karagianis, Maurine (NDP)..... Esquimalt-Royal Roads  
Krog, Leonard (NDP)..... Nanaimo  
Krueger, Hon. Kevin (L)..... Kamloops-South Thompson  
Kwan, Jenny Wai Ching (NDP)..... Vancouver-Mount Pleasant  
Lake, Terry (L)..... Kamloops-North Thompson  
Lali, Harry (NDP)..... Fraser-Nicola  
Lee, Richard T. (L)..... Burnaby North  
Lekstrom, Hon. Blair (L)..... Peace River South  
Les, John (L)..... Chilliwack  
Letnick, Norm (L)..... Kelowna-Lake Country  
MacDiarmid, Hon. Margaret (L)..... Vancouver-Fairview  
Macdonald, Norm (NDP)..... Columbia River-Revelstoke  
McIntyre, Joan (L)..... West Vancouver-Sea to Sky  
McNeil, Hon. Mary (L)..... Vancouver-False Creek  
McRae, Don (L)..... Comox Valley  
Mungall, Michelle (NDP)..... Nelson-Creston  
Penner, Hon. Barry (L)..... Chilliwack-Hope  
Pimm, Pat (L)..... Peace River North  
Polak, Hon. Mary (L)..... Langley  
Popham, Lana (NDP)..... Saanich South  
Ralston, Bruce (NDP)..... Surrey-Whalley  
Reid, Linda (L)..... Richmond East  
Routley, Bill (NDP)..... Cowichan Valley  
Routley, Doug (NDP)..... Nanaimo-North Cowichan  
Rustad, John (L)..... Nechako Lakes  
Sather, Michael (NDP)..... Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows  
Simons, Nicholas (NDP)..... Powell River-Sunshine Coast  
Simpson, Bob (NDP)..... Cariboo North  
Simpson, Shane (NDP)..... Vancouver-Hastings  
Slater, John (L)..... Boundary-Similkameen  
Stewart, Hon. Ben (L)..... Westside-Kelowna  
Stilwell, Hon. Moira (L)..... Vancouver-Langara  
Sultan, Ralph (L)..... West Vancouver-Capilano  
Thomson, Hon. Steve (L)..... Kelowna-Mission  
Thorne, Diane (NDP)..... Coquitlam-Maillardville  
Thorntwaite, Jane (L)..... North Vancouver-Seymour  
Trevena, Claire (NDP)..... North Island  
van Dongen, John (L)..... Abbotsford South  
Yamamoto, Hon. Naomi (L)..... North Vancouver-Lonsdale  
Yap, Hon. John (L)..... Richmond-Steveston

## LIST OF MEMBERS BY RIDING

Abbotsford-Mission ..... Hon. Randy Hawes  
Abbotsford South..... John van Dongen  
Abbotsford West ..... Hon. Michael de Jong, QC  
Alberni-Pacific Rim..... Scott Fraser  
Boundary-Similkameen..... John Slater  
Burnaby-Deer Lake..... Kathy Corrigan  
Burnaby-Edmonds..... Raj Chouhan  
Burnaby-Lougheed..... Harry Bloy  
Burnaby North..... Richard T. Lee  
Cariboo-Chilcotin..... Donna Barnett  
Cariboo North..... Bob Simpson  
Chilliwack..... John Les  
Chilliwack-Hope..... Hon. Barry Penner  
Columbia River-Revelstoke..... Norm Macdonald  
Comox Valley..... Don McRae  
Coquitlam-Burke Mountain..... Douglas Horne  
Coquitlam-Maillardville..... Diane Thorne  
Cowichan Valley..... Bill Routley  
Delta North..... Guy Gentner  
Delta South..... Vicki Huntington  
Esquimalt-Royal Roads..... Maurine Karagianis  
Fort Langley-Aldergrove..... Hon. Rich Coleman  
Fraser-Nicola..... Harry Lali  
Juan de Fuca..... John Horgan  
Kamloops-North Thompson..... Terry Lake  
Kamloops-South Thompson..... Hon. Kevin Krueger  
Kelowna-Lake Country..... Norm Letnick  
Kelowna-Mission..... Hon. Steve Thomson  
Kootenay East..... Hon. Bill Bennett  
Kootenay West..... Katrine Conroy  
Langley..... Hon. Mary Polak  
Maple Ridge-Mission..... Marc Dalton  
Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows..... Michael Sather  
Nanaimo..... Leonard Krog  
Nanaimo-North Cowichan..... Doug Routley  
Nechako Lakes..... John Rustad  
Nelson-Creston..... Michelle Mungall  
New Westminster..... Dawn Black  
North Coast..... Gary Coons  
North Island..... Claire Trevena  
North Vancouver-Lonsdale..... Hon. Naomi Yamamoto  
North Vancouver-Seymour..... Jane Thorntwaite  
Oak Bay-Gordon Head..... Hon. Ida Chong  
Parksville-Qualicum..... Ron Cantelon  
Peace River North..... Pat Pimm  
Peace River South..... Hon. Blair Lekstrom  
Penticton..... Hon. Bill Barisoff  
Port Coquitlam..... Mike Farnworth  
Port Moody-Coquitlam..... Hon. Iain Black  
Powell River-Sunshine Coast..... Nicholas Simons  
Prince George-Mackenzie..... Hon. Pat Bell  
Prince George-Valemount..... Hon. Shirley Bond  
Richmond Centre..... Rob Howard  
Richmond East..... Linda Reid  
Richmond-Steveston..... Hon. John Yap  
Saanich North and the Islands..... Hon. Murray Coell  
Saanich South..... Lana Popham  
Shuswap..... Hon. George Abbott  
Skeena..... Robin Austin  
Stikine..... Doug Donaldson  
Surrey-Cloverdale..... Hon. Kevin Fleming  
Surrey-Fleetwood..... Jagrup Brar  
Surrey-Green Timbers..... Sue Hammell  
Surrey-Newton..... Harry Bains  
Surrey-Panorama..... Stephanie Cadieux  
Surrey-Tynehead..... Dave S. Hayer  
Surrey-Whalley..... Bruce Ralston  
Surrey-White Rock..... Gordon Hogg  
Vancouver-Fairview..... Hon. Margaret MacDiarmid  
Vancouver-False Creek..... Hon. Mary McNeil  
Vancouver-Fraserview..... Hon. Kash Heed  
Vancouver-Hastings..... Shane Simpson  
Vancouver-Kensington..... Mable Elmore  
Vancouver-Kingsway..... Adrian Dix  
Vancouver-Langara..... Hon. Moira Stilwell  
Vancouver-Mount Pleasant..... Jenny Wai Ching Kwan  
Vancouver-Point Grey..... Hon. Gordon Campbell  
Vancouver-Quilchena..... Hon. Colin Hansen  
Vancouver-West End..... Spencer Herbert  
Vernon-Monashee..... Eric Foster  
Victoria-Beacon Hill..... Carole James  
Victoria-Swan Lake..... Rob Fleming  
West Vancouver-Capilano..... Ralph Sultan  
West Vancouver-Sea to Sky..... Joan McIntyre  
Westside-Kelowna..... Hon. Ben Stewart



## CONTENTS

Thursday, March 4, 2010  
Afternoon Sitting

Page

### Routine Business

Introductions by Members.....	3167
Statements (Standing Order 25B) .....	3167
Community social services workers	
M. Karagianis	
Suppliers to Olympic Games in Vancouver and Sochi	
D. Horne	
Hazelton and Hockeyville competition	
D. Donaldson	
Vernon Winter Carnival	
E. Foster	
Pacific Rim Whale Festival	
S. Fraser	
Paralympic Games and Torch Relay	
S. Cadieux	
Oral Questions.....	3169
B.C. Hydro rates	
J. Horgan	
Hon. C. Hansen	
Internet gaming and problem gamblers	
S. Simpson	
Hon. R. Coleman	
N. Macdonald	
ICBC revenues to government	
B. Ralston	
Hon. C. Hansen	
M. Farnworth	
Air quality tests in Prince George	
R. Fleming	
Hon. J. Yap	
Coroner report recommendations on farmworker deaths	
R. Chouhan	
Hon. M. Coell	
Investigation into farmworker deaths in Langley	
A. Dix	
Hon. M. Coell	
Government support for tourism industry	
S. Herbert	
Hon. C. Hansen	
Tabling Documents .....	3175
Property Assessment Appeal Board, annual report, 2009	
Petitions .....	3175
S. Fraser	
R. Fleming	
D. Donaldson	
Tabling Documents .....	3175
Public Service Benefit Plan Act, annual report, 2008-2009	

## Orders of the Day

Budget Debate ( <i>continued</i> ) .....	3175
M. Karagianis	
S. Cadieux	
L. Popham	
D. Horne	
H. Bains	
Hon. M. MacDiarmid	
S. Simpson	
Hon. G. Abbott	

THURSDAY, MARCH 4, 2010

The House met at 1:35 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

### Routine Business

#### Introductions by Members

**R. Cantelon:** This year the British Columbia legislative internship program celebrates its 35th anniversary. Every year ten brilliant young British Columbians are accepted into the program and experience the executive and legislative branches of their provincial government.

Today I'd like to introduce the legislative interns who are now part of the government caucus research and communications: Ron Ahluwalia, University of B.C.; Heather Chatwin, University of Victoria; Kristopher Henderson, University of Northern British Columbia; Whitney Punchak, University of Victoria; and Rahim Mohamed, University of British Columbia. Please make them feel welcome in the gallery.

**D. Donaldson:** It's my pleasure to introduce two members of the Hazelton Bulldogs minor hockey team. They're up there in their jerseys — Nolan Barnes and Kaein Tait.

They're accompanied by Kristen Barnes and Jessica Tait, who are key organizers in the Hazelton is Hockeyville campaign. They work for the Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Education Society, and they're in town seeking support for a new ice arena for Hazelton. Would the members please make them welcome.

**Hon. M. Polak:** Touring the legislative buildings today and here to observe us at our finest are two groups of grade 5 students from Langley Christian School. They are here with their teachers Tim VanHemert, Linda Boersma and Annette VandenBrink. Would the House please make them welcome.

**J. Horgan:** We have a very special day today, Members of the Legislature. Joining us in the galleries are Sharon Brasho of Sooke and also the mayor of Leechtown, Bill Wilson. He's the first and only mayor of Leechtown. For those of you who don't know where that is, it's just north of Sooke, and it's only had one mayor. His name is Bill Wilson. He's here joining us today. Would the House please make him very, very welcome.

**D. Routley:** I'd like the House to help me welcome four people who aren't here. It's a little unfortunate, but Maisie Barnett, Neil Burns, Lynda Evans and Marianne Busch had planned to be here for lunch. Unfortunately, one of their party took very ill this morning. They weren't able to make it.

The reason I still stand up is that I had hoped to be able to welcome personally and wish personally Marianne Busch a very happy birthday. In her absence, could the House help me do that.

### Statements (Standing Order 25B)

#### COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES WORKERS

**M. Karagianis:** Today I'd like to recognize the enormous contributions of British Columbia's exceptionally dedicated 15,000-strong community social service workers. These workers provide a myriad of services to women, children and families, youth, people with physical and developmental disabilities, and First Nations.

They make sure that people don't fall through the cracks when they have a special need or when they are facing a crisis in their lives. They look after some of the most vulnerable people with compassionate care. They are truly unsung heroes.

Municipal councils across B.C. have joined with community social service workers to ask that March be made community social services awareness month. I support that call and encourage members to join me.

B.C.'s community social service workers are people like Rosemary Menendez, a personal development plan worker who provides support for homeless women at the Salvation Army's Belkin House. Roy Scafe works with five at-risk youth in a group home. Roy helps them in all aspects of their lives while providing a safe, stable environment for them.

Stephanie Seaman is an early childhood educator at Shaughnessy Heights Day Care in Vancouver. Stephanie helps children aged three to five explore, socialize, play and develop day-to-day skills. Larry Jandu works for Western Human Resources in Langley, working to — as he puts it — bring the people from the inside out. Larry even started a program for residents of the home to raise chickens so they could have free-range eggs, and now they have a small vegetable garden.

In my time with the community social service sector, I've had the pleasure of meeting some of these workers. They are a most passionate, dedicated and giving group of people, the best you will ever encounter. I'm so very grateful and proud of the work that they do. I hope that all members will join me in saluting the exceptional contribution of B.C.'s community social service workers and join together in the spirit of designating March as community social services month.

#### SUPPLIERS TO OLYMPIC GAMES IN VANCOUVER AND SOCHI

**D. Horne:** As our first week in this place draws to an end, the first week back from the 2010 Winter Olympic

Games, I thought that I'd get up and speak to yet another opportunity for B.C. businesses generated by our hosting the games, these fantastic games.

[1340]

Many local companies, including Cannon Design, Britco, Sandwell and many, many others.... The list is too long for me to go through them all today, although I'd like to, but two minutes is two minutes. From this, they've gained significant experience and significant expertise.

As many of you are aware, Sochi, on the Black Sea in Russia, will host the next Winter Games in 2014, and they had significant presence in Vancouver during the games. Not only did they have a large group of observers working closely with their VANOC counterparts, but they spent tremendous energy reaching out to our community, the suppliers of the Vancouver games and those that contributed to its success. In addition, the Sochi2014.ru World, located in the TELUS World of Science, was an exceptional place and showcased their vision and resolve.

I would also like to thank this time TELUS for their role in facilitating this, because as always, TELUS has gone way beyond and showed their support in the community in allowing this facility to be used by Sochi during the games.

As many of you know, I personally have significant experience in dealing with the Sochi Organizing Committee. Prior to my election I was very involved with their bids committee and the master planning, design, creation of promotional materials and other aspects of their bid.

During this past few weeks I spent tremendous amounts of time encouraging the many suppliers to Vancouver 2010 to meet and engage with the Russian delegation and build relationships, familiarity and to demonstrate and showcase their Olympic experience here during our games to enhance their chances of being suppliers to the Sochi games.

Following our Premier's lead when he signed an Olympic protocol for 2014 this last week with his counterpart, the governor of the Krasnodar region, to share information on games planning and cultural business opportunities, this protocol will further facilitate exploring 2014 business-related opportunities, trade and cultural exchanges.

#### HAZELTON AND HOCKEYVILLE COMPETITION

**D. Donaldson:** There are many stories about the Hazelton ice rink. One that sticks in my mind is how a visiting kids' team didn't come back after the first day of the tournament because their water bottles froze solid on the bench while they were playing. You can imagine how cold the little players were, let alone the parents in the stands.

That is the state of the rink built by volunteers more than 30 years ago. When it rains outside, spectators inside get wet. When it's 15 below outside, it's 20 below inside for the players. The arena is becoming unusable. Engineers recommend the structure be torn down.

A dedicated group of community members are working to build a new rink. A few of them are in the gallery today. They need support from the province and the federal government because they know that in a rural community, an ice arena is about the future. It's a gathering place. It's where old and young, men and women, First Nations and non-First Nations, doctors, school teachers, loggers and truck drivers mix and forge relationships which create the common ground that gets us through the rough times and enables us to take full advantage of the good times.

Part of the plan is entering the Hockeyville competition. Hazelton as Hockeyville attracted more than 1,000 stories submitted to its website, the third-highest total in Canada, the highest in B.C. The stories are heartening. They're about healthy activity, fun and building relationships that are at the basis of other activities, like commerce in the region.

Now we are waiting to see if Hazelton makes the final 12 communities in Canada. Regardless of the outcome, the effort has helped galvanize the community. But outside help is needed. It's time to invest in rural B.C. for a better future for all in the province.

Shall I say it, hon. Speaker? Shall I say it? Hazelton is Hockeyville.

#### VERNON WINTER CARNIVAL

**E. Foster:** From January 29 to February 7, Vernon and the entire North Okanagan were celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Vernon Winter Carnival. I'd like to say congratulations to Derek Hall, the chairman of the Winter Carnival Society, and his crew of hard-working volunteers.

Each year the winter carnival kicks off with a great event. On the Thursday evening my wife, Janice, and I were able to attend the Miss Silver Star coronation. I'd like to congratulate Vernon's new queen, Katie Annand; her princesses, Brittney Weatherill and Amy Soranno; and also Miss Congeniality, Tamsen Guidi. These young ladies will make excellent youth ambassadors for Vernon and the North Okanagan. I'd like to congratulate them on a job well done.

One of the most attended events of the carnival is the annual parade, which Janice and I were able to attend and actually take part in. With 120 entrants, it took over an hour to go by the reviewing stands — pipe bands, horses, fire engines, floats, all kinds of participants. As usual, a great event.

[1345]

Another highlight of this year's winter carnival, possibly the big highlight. The people in the winter carnival

committee changed their dates to coincide with the Olympic torch coming to Vernon for the big event. The torch came in, in the morning. It was carried into Polson Park by a young 13-year-old B.C. Select hockey player, Lannie Houle, who is the first First Nations player to play on the B.C. Select team. The thousands of people that were there took part, as I said, and watched the cauldron being lit.

I'd like to congratulate Vernon city councillor Mr. Jack Gilroy and Michelle Jefferson. They co-chaired the community spirit committee. They just organized a great event. It was, like I said, attended by thousands of people who thoroughly enjoyed it. To all the volunteers who worked on both of those events, thank you very much.

#### PACIFIC RIM WHALE FESTIVAL

**S. Fraser:** Well, it's that time of year again. From March 6 to the 14, Ucluelet, Tofino and the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve are hosting the 24th annual Pacific Rim Whale Festival, the greatest migration on earth — and one of the greatest mysteries as well.

They don't quite understand it, but the phenomenon of thousands and thousands of these two-legged land creatures, often clad in bulky yellow suits, covering the coastline of Clayoquot and Barkley Sounds floating in funny rubber vessels is too much to resist. This human spectacle attracts more than 20,000 grey whales to travel more than 16,000 kilometres, all the way from the Baja, just to see the greatest spectacle — the human migration — on earth.

Seriously, folks, this year's Pacific Rim Whale Festival bodes to be one of the best. In the heart of the magnificent Clayoquot Sound, Nuu-chah-nulth territory, you can see and witness 30-tonne leviathans — these grey whales — right off our own coast. It is amazing. The greys cruise into the area at about two to five knots, and they put on the greatest natural show of a lifetime.

If that wasn't enough, there are parades, pancake breakfasts, amazing interpretive events and fantastic seafood. There are extraordinary local artists and traditional storytelling and much, much more. For those more adventurous at heart, rent a longboard, take a lesson and hit the surf, because Tofino was just rated by *Outside* magazine as the best surf town in North America. You might find yourself in the water with the likes of Peter Devries, Canada's top-ranked surfer and winner of the 2009 O'Neill Coldwater Classic — very cold water.

No one should miss the 24th annual Pacific Rim Whale Festival, so mark it on your calendar, March 6 to March 14, Nuu-chah-nulth territory. Be there.

#### PARALYMPIC GAMES AND TORCH RELAY

**S. Cadieux:** Well, don't put away your red gloves yet. The party is hardly over. Yesterday the torch for the

Paralympic Games was lit on Parliament Hill, beginning the first-ever Paralympic Torch Relay across Canada. Over the next nine days the torch will make its way to B.C., along the way raising awareness for the games and fuelling the amazing Canadian spirit.

Over 600 people will share in the honour of carrying the torch as it makes its way to Vancouver's B.C. Place Stadium. Many of these torchbearers are previous and current Paralympians who have inspired people around the world with their determination, perseverance and, above all, amazing athletic ability.

I'd like to mention just a couple of the torchbearers from British Columbia, who include Sonia Gaudet, a member of the Canadian wheelchair curling team and the only returning member; Bruce Gilmour, an active member of the B.C. Blind Sports and Recreation Association and member of the 2010 Legacies Now disability advisory committee. I'm also proud to say that Sarah Hunter, a longtime Surrey resident, will be carrying the torch through Hope on March 9. Sarah competed in wheelchair tennis in two summer Paralympic Games, Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008.

Remember, if you're visiting Vancouver throughout the Paralympics, many of the national and provincial pavilions will continue to be open. So if you missed your opportunity to see the Northern Pavilion or hold a gold medal at the Canadian Mint, you can do so over the next week.

On March 12 the games are here again. Let's remember to cheer on our Paralympic heroes as they represent our province and our country. Go, Canada, go!

[1350]

#### Oral Questions

##### B.C. HYDRO RATES

**J. Horgan:** Yesterday we learned that B.C. Hydro has gone to the Utilities Commission to seek a 9 percent rate increase this year. This is on top of rate increases of 7 percent last year and 7 percent the year before that. The rationale from the Crown was that this rate increase was required to improve infrastructure and repair aging facilities.

The reality is that in the budget documents, B.C. Hydro is required to find 254 million additional dollars to transfer to the Minister of Finance to make up for his — I would suggest — fiscal folly over the past year. Will the minister stand in this place and tell ratepayers that the 9 percent increase on their bill is not just going to new dams — that it's going to pay for his mistakes?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** Actually, there are two elements to that. One element of it is fulfilling a policy that was brought in by the NDP government in the mid-1990s with regard to the rate of return that is expected from B.C. Hydro to the taxpayer.

The other element of it is actually to fund the significant capital investment that B.C. Hydro has to make if it's going to meet the energy demands of British Columbia for the future. Unlike during the NDP years, all of those decisions are subject to review and approval by the B.C. Utilities Commission.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member has a supplemental.

**J. Horgan:** Unfortunately, the minister is ten years late and about \$250 million short. The question is a simple one. This is a repeating pattern for this minister, whether it be the HST, whether it be increasing MSP premiums.... Now it's hydro rates.

Over and over again, rather than choose the course of least resistance — go to the corporate sector and make them pay for the profits they're making, go to the banking sector and make them pay for the profits they're making — instead you go to consumers. Instead, you go to ordinary British Columbians and take more and more money out of their pockets. It's not just 9 percent this year.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**J. Horgan:** It's not just 9 percent this year. Hydro is expecting a 13 percent rate increase next year and 7 percent the year after that — hundreds of millions of dollars from ratepayers' pockets into the minister's pocket to pay for his fiscal folly. Will he stand and admit to the people of B.C. that it's not just aging infrastructure — that it's mismanagement by his government?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** It's actually interesting today. Another day, and we have yet another financial policy pronouncement by the Energy critic for the official opposition, which I guess actually helps flesh out a little bit of the comments he made on February 9 when he said: "We have to find revenue to offset that from other taxes."

I gather, at a time when the province of British Columbia is being recognized globally for having some of the most competitive tax regimes in the province — one of the reasons why investors are interested in coming to British Columbia, one of the reasons why companies globally are interested in creating jobs in British Columbia for British Columbia families — this member stands up and suggests that we should be hitting those very job creators with new and additional taxes. I fundamentally disagree with him.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member has a further supplemental.

**J. Horgan:** For the edification of those on that side of the House, you're in favour of an HST. We on this side of

the House are fundamentally opposed to the HST. The members on the other side....

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**J. Horgan:** The members on the other side....

Interjections.

**J. Horgan:** They may bow down to fictitious investors....

**Mr. Speaker:** Member, just take your seat for a second.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.  
Continue, Member.

**J. Horgan:** The minister may well want to bow down to fictitious investors from some point somewhere else in the world. We on this side of the House will put our constituents ahead of that every day of the week.

[1355]

Simple question: will the minister stand in his place and admit to the people of British Columbia that their hydro rates are going up because he needs the money?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** It's actually interesting, coming from this member who was an executive assistant to an Energy Minister in the late 1990s when special directive No. 2 was issued by the NDP government of the day. It didn't go through a BCUC hearing. It actually just gave an order from cabinet to B.C. Hydro to send more money.

What we are doing is following the policies that were set out in the 1990s around a return on equity that is expected from B.C. Hydro to the shareholders, who are the people of British Columbia. All of the increases that are being proposed by B.C. Hydro are subject to review of the B.C. Utilities Commission, unlike what happened during the NDP government.

#### INTERNET GAMING AND PROBLEM GAMBLERS

**S. Simpson:** At a time when the Lottery Corporation acknowledges that British Columbians are "in the worst economic situation since the Great Depression," the B.C. Liberals are trying to get people to gamble more. While cutting programs and spending on public services, the Liberals are approving a \$347 million expenditure by B.C. Lotteries to enhance gambling, particularly through the Internet.

Can the minister explain the B.C. Liberal vision that says having more British Columbians and in particular young people spending their money on Internet gambling is the best for the future of our province?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** This is a \$2 billion corporation which has asked to modernize its equipment and upgrade its stock from time to time. That's why it's allowed to have that type of money in its operational budget. In actual fact, any business would make an investment in its inventory and its electronic network at any given time. That's why it's there.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member has a supplemental.

**S. Simpson:** Over 150,000 British Columbians identified by the B.C. Medical Association as being problem gamblers. Expert after expert stating that Internet gaming is the most risky form of gambling for people who have a problem and particularly for young people.

The response of this government is to further cut the gaming policy and enforcement branch by another 10 percent since September, as well as to invest over a third of a billion dollars in enhancing that gaming. No wonder, by the government's own numbers, that only 17 percent of British Columbians have any confidence in how this government deals with problem gambling and that every year for the last three years, support for gaming has dropped in this province.

Can the minister tell us when revenues at any cost, including exploiting some of our most vulnerable citizens, became a B.C. Liberal great goal?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** To the member opposite: I'll actually listen to your opinion on gaming the day you actually recognize the fact you still haven't paid back the charities you stole from in Nanaimo back in the 1990s.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members. Members.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Don't lecture me, Member. Don't lecture me, Member. Two Premiers resigned under your regime over gambling.

**Mr. Speaker:** Minister. Minister.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Nothing has ever happened under this jurisdiction, and the reason is because we have actually professionally managed this file for the people of British Columbia in a way it should be managed on behalf of the people of British Columbia.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members. First of all, I want to advise the minister to be more careful with his words. Secondly,

this is the second day that we've gone into this bantering back and forth. If we want question period to end right now, we'll continue with it.

Member for Columbia River-Revelstoke has the floor.

[1400]

**N. Macdonald:** We'll go to the Minister of Finance on the same topic and try to raise the standards here a little bit. This government ran for office on a promise to limit the expansion of gambling and a clear promise not to move into Internet gambling, but this is the exact opposite of what is happening. The government knows the damage that is going to take place for problem gamblers. At the same time, they're reducing programs in this budget.

So the question is: how can the minister justify such a shortsighted and desperate cash grab?

**Hon. R. Coleman:** Any British Columbian today could go on anywhere up to 2,000 websites and gamble on websites that are not legal in this province and spend money. The highest percentage of problem gaming that comes on the Internet comes from unauthorized sites and sites that don't have control.

The reason we've gone to Internet gaming and some of the aspects we've done in gaming is so we can actually give a place for people to legally do this and not be actually abused by these types of operators around the world. We have the funds in place to take care of problem gamblers in British Columbia. We have a line in place for them to call. We have counselling for them anytime they need it, and we'll continue to have that going into the future.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member has a supplemental.

**N. Macdonald:** This budget cuts programs that are supposed to support those people. This budget aims to increase Internet gambling, and there was a time....

The minister stands up and talks about illegal gambling and Internet gambling. This is a statement that you made in this House, the current gambling minister. He said that the incidence of problem gambling is the highest in things like illegal gambling and Internet gambling, and those are things we fight to stamp out.

Well, some fight. The goal in this budget is to increase it by 300 percent, and at the same time that you are creating those people with gambling problems, this budget takes away the supports.

The question I have for this Minister of Finance, who created this budget: how can the government possibly justify that direction? It is indefensible. Stand up and defend it if you can, but it stands indefensible.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** When I made the comment on Internet gaming, I was actually commenting about the

sites that I referred to a minute ago. The fact that a teen-aged kid in this province could take their parents'...

Interjection.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** ... Visa card and go on line and gamble at some place in Barbados or over in the Cayman Islands or somewhere like that on line.... Why not have a legal thing so people could do this legally in the province?

You have to be excluded. You have controls in place. It reduces the issues of problem gambling on the Internet if you actually have it in an environment that is controlled and managed by the provider.

In addition to that, I know.... The member over there just thinks that they.... Well, we could talk about illegalities in gaming, but then we might go over your line, Mr. Speaker, with reference to the history of the NDP.

But with regards to this, I do know this — that when poker was introduced into gaming centres in British Columbia, a number of illegal gaming centres run by organized crime in this province shut down.

#### ICBC REVENUES TO GOVERNMENT

**B. Ralston:** In its budget the government proposes to take \$778 million from ICBC customers over the next three years, taking it from ratepayers and transferring it to the government's books. ICBC has used some of this money to give ratepayers rate reductions, but the B.C. Liberals appear to want to take this option away.

Coming at this time, the only conclusion that a reasonable person can draw is that the Finance Minister is using this to patch some of the holes in his budget caused by the budget deception that the B.C. Liberals have created over the last year. Why isn't the government prepared simply to level with the public and say why it's decided to scoop the \$778 million now?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** The member, I think, is under the mistaken notion that this transfer of dollars to the shareholder actually results in more bottom-line revenue for the province. It does not. These are revenues that have already been reflected in the consolidated financial statements of the province over the last number of years as this surplus capital has been accumulated within ICBC on the optional coverage side.

[1405]

ICBC divides its insurance into two categories — basic insurance for which they have a monopoly — and they have among some of the best and lowest rates of car insurance for basic insurance of anywhere in North America. That is not being touched.

On the optional side of coverage, where we have mandated that they must compete on a level playing field

with the private sector on the provision of optional insurance, they have accumulated surplus capital over and above what would be required by the North American standards.

It is entirely appropriate that the provincial government representing the shareholder, which is the taxpayers of British Columbia, ask for those dollars to be transferred into the consolidated revenue so that we can reduce what would otherwise be borrowing requirements of the province.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member has a supplemental.

**B. Ralston:** Well, clearly the Minister of Finance has very little, if any, confidence in the ICBC board of directors. The government appointed the board of directors. Mr. Turner is the chair. Why doesn't the minister leave it to the ICBC board of directors to make the decision how large their cash reserves should be, rather than by enshrining it in the legislation and forcing them to transfer it to the government's books?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** It's not the government's role to determine what the cash reserves should be. It's not the ICBC board's role to determine what the cash reserves should be. These are actually dictated by international standards within the insurance community.

The reserves that the ICBC had on the optional coverage were far in excess of what those national and international standards would require. Therefore, that cash surplus is being directed to the benefit of the shareholder.

I should also point out to the member that over the last five years, on the optional insurance side ICBC has reduced those costs by 17 percent. There is no part of this decision and this move that will have upward pressure on insurance rates either in the basic insurance side or the optional insurance side.

**M. Farnworth:** This government is transferring HST costs to consumers in British Columbia, has increased MSP premiums to consumers in British Columbia and has increased hydro rates to consumers in British Columbia. Now, with this \$780 million unprecedented cash grab, they are taking away the opportunity to reduce optional coverage and other coverage even further.

Why did the minister choose to tell motorists in British Columbia to take a hike, instead of allowing the board the option of giving them further rebates?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** We have an excellent board at ICBC, and this government has full confidence in them. We work cooperatively with them on these issues. I can tell the member that there is nothing in this move that will trigger an increase in either the basic premium rates for motorists in British Columbia or the optional rates in British Columbia.

What the option that British Columbia motorists have today that they did not have ten years ago is there's actually competition for optional coverage in British Columbia. Motorists in British Columbia can buy that optional insurance coverage from ICBC if they wish, or they can actually go to a private sector provider and buy that optional insurance. That's a competitive marketplace.

We'll ensure that as long as government maintains a level playing field, which is what we are, British Columbia motorists are going to get the best rates possible on optional coverage.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member has a supplemental.

**M. Farnworth:** What the government has done is just swooped in and scooped \$780 million faster than a hawk in a chicken coop. Can the minister stand in this House...? It's really convenient that all of a sudden, in one of the worst budget times in this province's history, they now decide they need to scoop \$780 million.

[1410]

Will he stand in this House and table the documents of when he started having the discussions with ICBC that they were overcapitalized and that they needed to transfer the revenue to the province of British Columbia? Will he table that in this House? Will he commit to doing that?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** It's interesting that the opposition would express opposition to this move, because this actually reduced the borrowing cost for taxpayers in British Columbia. This is a huge net benefit. When you've got in one part of your enterprise.... In this case, ICBC has surplus cash. Meanwhile, the province of British Columbia is actually going out to markets to borrow money at market rates. It makes sense, on behalf of the shareholders and the taxpayers of British Columbia, that we actually utilize this excess capital to make sure that we can offset our borrowing requirements and thereby save taxpayers' dollars.

#### AIR QUALITY TESTS IN PRINCE GEORGE

**R. Fleming:** Air quality tests from the summer of 2008 showed dangerous levels of formaldehyde near playgrounds and neighbourhoods in Prince George. No air quality advisory was issued despite levels being 20 times higher than the provincial standard, and today, 18 months after these tests, no follow-ups have been done on unsafe levels of a toxin linked to cancer and asthma in children.

According to government officials, there's no money to do these follow-up tests. So my question is to the Minister of Healthy Living and Sport. She's responsible for setting air quality standards in the province of British

Columbia. Does she think it is okay for her government to keep families in Prince George in the dark about potential threats to their health?

**Hon. J. Yap:** On behalf of the Minister of Environment, I'll take this question on notice.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member has a supplemental. Is it a new question?

**R. Fleming:** Mr. Speaker, I have a different question, but it is to the Minister of Healthy Living and Sport, who is responsible for setting air quality standards in the province of British Columbia.

I want to know when — because she has co-responsibility for this — she was first made aware of the air quality situation in Prince George and whether she thinks it's acceptable for Prince George residents or any residents in British Columbia to wait 18 months to follow up on reports about dangerous levels of toxins in the playgrounds.

**Hon. J. Yap:** Again, on behalf of the Minister of Environment, I'll take this question on notice.

#### CORONER REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS ON FARMWORKER DEATHS

**R. Chouhan:** This coming Sunday, March 7, is the third anniversary of the roadside accident killing three female farmworkers on their way to work. The RCMP recommended 33 criminal charges against the driver and owner of that van.

Last December the B.C. coroner forwarded 17 recommendations to this government. To the Minister of Labour: will the minister commit today in this House to implement immediately the full set of recommendations from the coroner to prevent future accidents?

**Hon. M. Coell:** I actually will be meeting with the families next week, and I hope the recommendations from government will be in the next few weeks.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member has a supplemental.

**R. Chouhan:** That's very hopeful — that that will happen. But let's go over some other information. Since 2001 the B.C. Liberals have treated farmworkers as second-class citizens. Many of the safeguards to protect farmworkers were removed. In 2003 another farmworker was killed in an unsafe van. The B.C. Liberals neglected all of the coroner's recommendations about that accident. In 2008 the three mushroom farm workers lost their lives, and the other two were severely injured.

It has been three months since the coroner has issued these recommendations. I understand the minister is go-

ing to meet with the families, but I hope his review was done, because there were very straightforward recommendations. I would like to ask the minister when these recommendations will be implemented to prevent future accidents.

[1415]

**Hon. M. Coell:** I know the member would agree with me that any loss of life is unacceptable in the workplace. The coroner made a number of recommendations to a variety of ministries. Those recommendations are being handled through my ministry. I hope to have a report back on how those recommendations will be dealt with in the next few weeks.

#### INVESTIGATION INTO FARMWORKER DEATHS IN LANGLEY

**A. Dix:** To the Minister of Labour as well. The minister, of course, knows that there was a terrible accident in Langley as well in September 2008. We still don't have the initial investigative report into that accident. The anniversary is coming up. He knows that people in the community have really reached out to the families in this case. I know that in the past he's met with those families.

Can the minister today give us an indication of when we'll see that investigative report and whether he would support a coroner's inquest into that incident as well?

**Hon. M. Coell:** I thank the member for the question. I did meet with those families as well.

WorkSafe B.C. is investigating this terrible incident. I would hope that within a couple of months, that report would be available for us and also available for the coroner to review.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member has a supplemental.

**A. Dix:** Just on that, the minister is saying "in a couple of months." This is a question that the families frequently ask me. Can the minister explain why it's taken so long, what the circumstances of that are, why he believes now it will take additional months — we're 18 months into the process now, and this is just the first investigation — why he thinks it will take so long and whether at the time that he receives that report, he will make it available to the families at the same time as he makes it available to the coroner?

**Hon. M. Coell:** I appreciate that question as well. WorkSafe B.C.'s investigation is probably the most complicated they've ever done, the most time-consuming and most intricate. It involves a number of ministries, a number of the municipalities, and they're winding that investigation up. I would hope that within the next

couple of months, we'd have it available. Of course it would be available to the families immediately.

#### GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR TOURISM INDUSTRY

**S. Herbert:** When the HST was introduced, the Minister of Tourism told the tourism industry that he would work to help them and that he would work to support them to make their way through it. The Council of Tourism Associations predicts the HST will cause up to 10,000 job losses in that industry.

So they watched the budget with much anticipation. And what did they find? Nothing. Not one bit to help their struggling industry. My question is to the Minister of Tourism. Why should the tourism industry believe this government at all when they're actually cutting tourism marketing funding?

**Hon. C. Hansen:** You know, we've just come off an incredible 17 days of Olympic marketing, where images of British Columbia have been broadcast around the world.

Not only have we, in this budget, committed to maintaining the tourism marketing track that we otherwise would have seen, we also put \$39 million into tourism marketing last September so that we could fully maximize and benefit from the Olympic spotlight.

In addition to that, in an HST world you're actually going to see the hotel room tax come down from 8 percent to 7 percent, which is going to be a big benefit to hotel operators around the province. We have also made the commitment that for those communities that elect to take advantage of this opportunity, they can tap into the extra 2 percent additional hotel room tax for their local and regional tourism marketing initiatives as well.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member has a supplemental.

**S. Herbert:** Now is not the time to rest on our laurels. Now is the time to aggressively reach out to people across the world to bring them here. When you look at any other tourism jurisdiction and you look what happened after Olympics, they regretted that they cut back on their tourism marketing.

[1420]

But did the B.C. Liberals learn from them? No. In fact, the B.C. Liberals followed those jurisdictions and have cut tourism marketing. On top of that, what did they do? They got rid of Tourism B.C.'s industry-led board. They got rid of the award-winning Tourism B.C. Oh, and what else did they do? They introduced the HST — the HST, which is going to cost the industry up to 10,000 jobs.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**S. Herbert:** Do the B.C. Liberals have any solutions for the tourism industry? Faced with a high American dollar, faced with what the Sauder school of business says is one of the worst times for tourism in terms of the international markets, what Central 1 Credit has said could lead to, actually, declines in tourism after this budget....

**Mr. Speaker:** Can the member pose the question, please.

**S. Herbert:** My question, again, to the Minister of Tourism: when will this government get it and actually support the tourism industry?

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**Hon. C. Hansen:** That's exactly what this budget does. It makes sure that we can continue with the funding that goes into tourism marketing in the years to come. We've made sure that we've rolled out \$39 million of additional money for tourism marketing, and — guess what — the NDP voted against that \$39 million of additional marketing.

We had 17 days of the world's spotlight on British Columbia. Tourists from around the world have been enamoured by what British Columbia can offer, and the NDP, over the last number of years, have done everything possible to undermine that initiative and to undermine the success of the Olympics.

On this side of the House we supported the Olympics. We helped make it a big success, and we're going to help make the tourism industry a big success.

[End of question period.]

### Tabling Documents

**Hon. B. Bennett:** I am presenting the annual report of the Property Assessment Appeal Board for the year 2009. This exciting report can be reviewed by members on the board's website at [www.assessmentappeal.bc.ca](http://www.assessmentappeal.bc.ca), effective tomorrow.

**S. Fraser:** I seek leave to present petitions.

**Mr. Speaker:** Proceed.

### Petitions

**S. Fraser:** I have petitions from my constituents in Alberni–Pacific Rim asking the government to halt the implementation of the HST.

**R. Fleming:** I would like to present a petition collected by Mr. Bill Oin, a constituent of mine, calling on the government to restore funding to social programs, particularly for people with disabilities so that they may live independently in our province.

**D. Donaldson:** I rise to present a petition.

**Mr. Speaker:** Proceed.

**D. Donaldson:** This petition is in the form of over 800 postcards collected by two eight-year-old boys in Hazelton calling on this government and the Premier to support a new ice arena for the Hazeltons and all surrounding communities.

### Tabling Documents

**Hon. B. Stewart:** I'm happy to stand and present to the House today the public service benefit plan annual report for the fiscal year 2008-2009.

### Orders of the Day

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Mr. Speaker, continued debate on the budget.

### Budget Debate

*(continued)*

**M. Karagianis:** I'm very happy to take my place here in responding to the budget that was tabled in the House this week. I would like to first use the words of others rather than myself in describing the initial impacts of this budget on the province.

[1425]

[L. Reid in the chair.]

I think it's very telling, in fact, that the news headlines on the day after the budget was tabled actually give us a huge clue as to how it will impact the lives of British Columbians.

I actually am looking at one of the articles published in the *Globe and Mail* on Wednesday. The headline reads: "Gimmicks and Tricks Can't Fix the Deficit." I thought it was very succinct. The writer of this article summed it all up.

"Faced with the need to restore its battered fiscal credibility, the B.C. Liberal government has instead chosen to resort to sleight-of-hand measures that create a distraction from the unfolding political debacle of the HST and the future peril of a blowout deficit. In short, the government has just tabled the gimmick budget.

"The Finance Minister already faces questions about his credibility as a finance manager, fallout from his insistence in last year's election campaign, in the face of overwhelming evidence, that the province would not head into a deficit, and the subsequent stumble on the snap introduction of a harmonized sales

tax in the summer. The budget does nothing to restore the aura of trust that a Finance Minister requires."

Another article in the paper — this from the Fraser Institute, often singing the praises of this government — says that this is "significantly more critical, saying the budget missed several opportunities and did not strike the proper balance. 'We're seeing massive increases in spending. We're seeing unnecessary deficits. We're seeing a legacy of increased debt for future generations and no real focus on making B.C. more competitive through tax cuts.'" That from the right-wing think tank.

Another article says, "The Liberals' HST Spin Gets Faster and Faster," and goes on to say: "The HST double-cross inflicted on British Columbia voters after last year's election triggered some of the lamest excuses in spin jobs I've ever seen in government." That from Mike Smyth.

Vaughn Palmer says: "A restraint budget, a spendthrift budget, plus a budget whose only new idea was a gimmick." Paul Willcocks says: "A tough time if you need government services." The *Times Colonist* says, "The capital forgotten in the budget," and later on: "Layoff notices coming for civil servants."

These articles go on to talk about the priorities of this government that I believe are detrimental to my community and are hurting people across British Columbia. Once again, we see that the government has taken an opportunity and squandered it.

For nine years we have seen a growing issue of poverty in this province — families struggling to make it from payday to payday and a brand-new categorization of poverty called the working poor where even when two family members are out working in the workforce, a family is still forced to go to a food bank for the last week of the month to make it from payday to payday.

We have seen the increase of a divided society where the few wealthy are far divided from the rest of us, where what used to be the middle class is now tottering on the edges of working poverty. I think we have seen nine years of failed theories, failed fiscal management from a government that has now delivered us a budget that creates no vision for the future of British Columbia, actually sees no way forward for us in a time when we know there are fiscal restraints worldwide that will affect the outcome of the lives of families in this province for many years to come.

Instead, what we have seen is a nine-year legacy of chaos in the health care sector. Whether by design or by accident, this government has managed to create so much turmoil within the health care industry in this province that a myth has grown around the costs of health care and its impact on the welfare of every other aspect of government.

I say that is absolute nonsense. Health care as a percentage of GDP has altered very little in the last 20 years. What we have is a government that has continued to

spend less and less on other things and disproportionately made health care look like the unaffordable service in this province.

Coupled with that, not only do we have chaos in the health care industry; we have chaos in the education of our children across this province. We have a government that has continued to fail, year after year, to come up with real solutions to ensure that education in this province is a thriving and healthy service for our young people.

[1430]

Coupled with the social services cuts that have gone on since the day this government was elected and continue even through this budget process that we're engaged in right now, I would have to say it's no wonder that we have a cynical electorate that in the last election did not turn out to vote in the numbers we've seen historically.

Why should they? They have watched for almost a decade as chaos, mismanagement and wrong priorities have in fact jeopardized all of the very fundamentals of our society here in British Columbia — health care, education, social services — at the expense of the well-being of the citizens of this province.

When we went through the last cycle of an election here, there were a number of promises made by the government. Those promises were broken literally days after the election. Again, this creates more cynicism within the electorate.

We talked a little bit here, in the comments I read earlier from pundits and from the media right after the budget was tabled, about the HST, probably the most hated move that this government has undertaken. In fact, it may be the thing that galvanizes people to finally make a fundamental shift in how they vote in the coming years.

It's certainly at this point gathering communities together and pulling people together of all political stripes to stand up and say no. But again, we have a government that has failed consistently to listen to its electorate, to listen to the people of the province — in fact, to show any kind of support or care for communities, for their needs and for their voice to be heard.

Eighty percent of British Columbians say no to the HST, and we have a government that continues to cover its ears and say: "I cannot hear you. This is going to be good for you. We're just going to shove it down your throat."

Decisions this government has made that are very evident in this budget, that I think are going to be most harmful to my constituents and British Columbians right across this province, are in fact going to level more costs on to taxpayers, more costs on to families that are already struggling from payday to payday — families that have seen job cuts, cuts to education, cuts to health care, more costs all the time levied onto their shoulders. And what do we have now? We have a government that

has come up with tax hikes in the form of hydro rates that will go up 29 percent — 29 percent in the coming three years.

We have a government that has offered a solution of property tax deferral as a way to get cash into people's hands. In fact, we have a government that's now encouraging more debt onto the backs of families who often will be forced into using this technique because they have no other choices — those families who are struggling to make it from payday to payday and having to access the food bank at the end of the month. They may see this as an alternative.

What will it do? In reality, anyone who even knows simple math knows that year after year, a deferral of tax payments means you will owe increasing levels of debt as time goes by.

For those people who are stretched right now in their ability to obtain credit, who are paying over 70 percent, perhaps, of their income in shelter costs, this additional debt may in fact add to them a burden that will disallow them from buying a car, will disallow them from borrowing money in the future because they will have accrued this huge debt.

It only takes a few years of tax deferral to have a \$10,000 debt hanging over your head. Is the government actually saying that much like seniors, who could take a tax deferral and at the time when they sell their home to retire or go into assisted living could sell their home and cover that...?

Is the government actually suggesting that young families who have just scraped together the money to buy a home should, in fact, jeopardize that and all of their equity and their future and the security for their family by going into further debt so that in five years, they're forced to sell their house to pay off an accrued tax debt? That to me seems so incredibly irresponsible.

When I look at the number of cuts that are coming that are going to affect families, it makes me very, very ashamed that I live in a province that repeatedly goes after the most vulnerable in this province as a way to scrape back money, based on really poor fiscal management on their part. We have a government that has made that choice.

[1435]

When we look at the kinds of services that are going to be cut across this province, as the critic for Children and Families I am deeply, deeply distressed by the cuts that are now going to be foisted onto social service agencies that are already stretched as thin as many of the working families in this province. Yet these organizations are now being told they have to find savings. They have to find a way to take a cut. Millions of dollars are either being shuffled from one place to another within government or outrightly cut from these services.

When you look at the effect of some of those services.... A residential treatment program for youth that

has helped more than 500 youth throughout B.C. with their addictions — cut. A community kitchen program for seniors and others living on low incomes — cut. A 50 percent reduction to a program for people living with HIV or hepatitis.

A community-based counselling program for people with mental health, a hundred people a year served — cut. A wraparound program for people at risk of losing their housing that served more than 450 adults and 500 children a year — cut. A 12-week support program for people experiencing mental health crisis — gone. Loss of 500 or more employment placements and jobs created every year for people facing mental health and addictions challenges — gone.

That's the priority of this government. In tough times, when we all know that the economy has affected everyone in our society, this government's priority coming out of this budget is to go once again after the most vulnerable and ensure that communities will feel that pressure.

The B.C. Association of Social Workers has done a really magnificent job of laying out the impact to communities of cuts within the Ministry of Children and Family Development. I know there is an equal list that spreads right across government around the kinds of services — educational, health care and social services — that are being once again trimmed under this government.

I think the list here paints a disturbing picture of further stress and strain that's going to be put on families as they try and not only thrive and raise their families in this tough economic environment, but now they're going to have to do it with less services, with less options and with a government that, in fact, does not seem to particularly be concerned about how these impacts are going to affect ordinary people.

We hear in this House every day all kinds of glowing reports about how communities are thriving and flourishing under these cuts. I'm not sure sometimes if I live in the same world as government members when I hear them talk about their communities, because I know in my community these cuts are deeply hurtful.

I see mental health services stripped away from Esquimalt Neighbourhood House, which has managed to do miraculous things in the community with very few dollars, which leverages every single penny that comes into their hands to help the community and offer a variety of services that help everyone in the community. They have seen money stripped away that offers vital mental health supports, but those are gone. And more will certainly be coming down, as we see the impacts of some of these cuts really felt by communities.

You know, \$10 million being cut from community social service programs. I'm sure we will see over the coming months exactly what that means in communities, in front-line working communities — their ability to access services as these close down. We'll see exactly

how that affects communities, families, children and seniors across this province.

I was very disappointed in the budget to see that my community has once again been left out of the infrastructure investments that this government has made repeatedly in the Lower Mainland and has failed repeatedly to make here in my community.

We have a need for a replacement for Belmont High School in the Western Communities. The community got together, and the school districts put together an exceptional business plan. They leveraged all kinds of opportunities to put together a very attractive, very feasible business plan — a great investment for the government to make in schools in the Western Communities. But, alas, we're not going to get those schools this time either.

[1440]

Transportation continues to be at the top of mind and top of discussion right across this region, and the government, despite seeing good business plans for transportation infrastructure expansion here — like commuter rail — once again has left us out of the equation.

In fact, we saw that the federal and provincial governments got together, put some infrastructure projects together and made a big announcement — none of them here for the south Island. Belleville terminal. We've been asking repeatedly for upgrades to these facilities. We deserve just as much investment here in the south Island as the Lower Mainland and other communities, and yet we are repeatedly left out of that.

Look out the door, the front door of this building, and you can look at the kind of infrastructure investment that's needed here. The government has repeatedly ignored the needs of infrastructure investment here.

I would say that my view of this budget is that the government has got it wrong. I think they have got their planning completely backwards from what should really be happening now and long term into the future. I think the government has no vision at all for what the future should look like in British Columbia.

I believe after nine years of watching government decisions and watching the follow-through, watching to see what actual declarations in the throne and budget speech mean when they become real programs and seeing how very little they resemble one another once legislation is passed or budgets are passed, I think the government plans right off the end of their nose. I think they plan in a very reactive way.

It's very evident to me and certainly to writers and people I talk with in my community and to the media and to anyone paying attention to the actual language of the budget and what its implications will be that we have lost our way in British Columbia, that we have a government that did a fine job of surfing the wave of affluence that resulted for the last number of years from a very enriched resource economy.

Once that changed, once that began to alter, the government faltered and had no way of recovering, no vision, no sound fiscal plan for far into the future. And we've seen in repeated budgets, this and the budget that was tabled only a few months ago, that the government is floundering around.

There was a time here when, you know, the joke on the street was that the world would end after the Olympics because the government never talked about anything past the Olympics. Well, here we are. We're past the Olympics now. We are past the Olympics and looking at a budget that should be painting the way forward for us. We do not see that. What we see is repeated cuts. We see gimmicks and trickery around trying to sell us a hated sales tax that's coming on board.

I think we had an opportunity to really seize upon the opportunities here as the economy slowly begins to recover. We could actually be investing — like real investment — in the future, in our families, in our children of the future. We could take this opportunity now to do that.

We could ensure that every individual, every person who seeks an education in this province will get the very best education opportunities — not the cuts, not the downloading that has occurred over the last nine years here but real solid investment and good education opportunities for our children and for new citizens to this province and for our post-secondary education sector that would, in fact, allow us to create a very competitive economic environment long term into the future, a sustainable investment in education that would allow our children to compete and to create and to be the new economic drivers of the future. We could actually do that.

Instead, we get caught up in all of this shortchanging and downloading onto communities and school districts. I think at this point we're on the brink of an opportunity that could, in fact, make the future less of a roller-coaster ride where we are simply blown one way or the other by global conditions. The cost of copper, what's happening in the oil and gas sector, what's happening in the U.S. suddenly buffets us, and our economic security is affected by that.

[1445]

But if we were the masters of our own future by investing right now in healthy families, in well-educated families, in well-educated children who will then, with their creativity and imagination and education and confidence, take us forward into the future....

Strong families need to have a good health care system that is reliable, that is not as crippled and broken and mismanaged as we are currently seeing. We need a public health care system so that every person in this province can have health care when and where they need it.

I've heard the government members talk about that since they ran for election in 2001, and they have failed

to deliver on it for nine years. But the fact is that a good, well-funded, well-managed public health care system is a cornerstone of a healthy future economy. It would be the envy of the world. We have been the envy of the world until we began to incrementally cripple our health care system playing around with privatization, playing around with failed theories about how to grow a good health care sector for the private corporate interest rather than for the public good.

If we think about offering families strong communities where they can grow their families and have security about the kinds of services they need so that no matter whether they have a special needs child, an autistic child or individuals who need some supports in order to go out and seize the best opportunities available to them.... If we put those in place, we will be a better society.

Instead, we have a government that continues to whittle away at services for the most vulnerable as if they are somehow a lesser resource in this province. I say they are not. Healthy communities surrounding strong families is in fact the best investment we can possibly make in our future, the very best investment.

We talk a lot about sustainability. Unfortunately, it's become one of those words that's a little bit hackneyed, and that is really unfortunate, because the concept of sustainability for our environment and for the essential part of a community, I think, is the other piece of our future that needs investment and needs to be a top priority.

If we have a good health care system, a good education system, a solid and thriving and secure social justice system in this province, and then we have a clean environment where we are moving forward in the future and being leaders in the world around real sustainability.... I really despair the fact that that word gets so overused that it is eventually going to be meaningless to all of us.

In fact, that is the other piece of the future that the government has no vision for, that the government has utterly failed us on. The government slapped on a gas tax and called that the great greening, yet every single action they have taken since doing that has been completely counterintuitive to any sustainable green future in this province.

One of the articles that I looked at here talked about how the government has chosen to give huge breaks to the banks rather than look after the vulnerable and families in this province. It goes hand in hand with the fact that we also see a reliance on the oil and gas industry as being the only economic opportunity of the future. Apparently, that is the only direction in the future that according to this government is going to be a solid economic base.

[1450]

I would say a green, clean future, in fact, is our other greatest opportunity that we are missing. We are mis-

sing all of the possibilities around making a fundamental change in this province.

Part of the outcome of a really good education.... And I want to go back to that, because I really think that's the fundamental here that's missing in this budget. Part of a good education is preparing our children for a future that they can embrace, for a future that will allow them to use all of the creativity, all of the imagination that they possess to take us forward into a green and clean environment that's part of our continuum.

We have a healthy community with a good public health care system, with the very best education opportunities for every single person who seeks an education in this province. We have a social justice system, social services that support and cradle people to allow them to reach their potential even if they have barriers to that.

Then we give them an opportunity in a green and clean future and say: "The sky is the limit on how you develop that future. You will be the future. Your imagination and your creativity as you embrace that will actually create a new economy that's not about cyclical change, that's not about devastating every resource that we can lay our hands on." That is our habit, which is being perpetuated by the kind of reliance this government has put on very specific and not-green industries in this province.

I've talked with business across this province, and I know that they, too, see the opportunities here for a greener future, a great economic opportunity there for them. In fact, I would say that this concept of good education, strong families, healthy communities and a green, clean province is the very best business case we could possibly make.

Let's just put aside all of the value discussion around why we should do things because they're the right thing to do and because we are a caring society. Let's put some of those things aside for the moment and say: "Yes, we all think that's all motherhood and apple pie." We hear it from both sides of the House — that everybody's engaged in and committed to this idea of looking after families and children and making them most important.

But let's just talk about a simple business case. A future, a vision for a future in British Columbia should contain good public health care; an exceptional education system; social services that support families; and green, clean technologies. In fact, then we would have a future economy that we can invest in now, for the long term, that would not be as volatile in the future, that would be a real, sustainable future for British Columbians to embrace, to be enthusiastic about, to have an ownership in. We have none of those things currently under the government.

We have had nine years of either rhetoric on some of these topics, backed up by really poor action.... We have declarations, grandiose declarations, but you only have to go through this budget to see that, once again, this budget is reliant on a burden being put on average, or-

dinary working people in this province that they cannot sustain.

Where the government thinks that this is a good, visionary plan for the future, I don't know. It's a mystery to me that they would in any way be able to justify that. As long as all of our investment is about an inch deep and superficial, we will fail. We fail to have a vision in British Columbia under this budget, and we deserve better.

[1455]

**S. Cadieux:** First off, this is my first opportunity to address the House in this session. This session marks only my second session as an MLA, so again, it is an honour and a privilege to be here to represent the people of Surrey-Panorama. I certainly wouldn't be able to do it without the support of my husband and my family and my friends, as I'm sure all in this House would echo. I would like, of course, first off, to offer them my humble thanks.

I would also like to mention how fortunate I am to have two outstanding people in my constituency office. They continue to work tirelessly on my behalf to represent me when I am here. They do that to assist our constituents with the utmost of grace, diligence and patience, and I would like to thank them very much — Sharon Crowson and Manjit Gill.

Honestly, I am so excited. Over the past three weeks, and really over the entire length of the Olympic Torch Relay, we've seen Canadians come together and celebrate just being Canadian. I think that shows that Canadians recognize how lucky we are to live in a country and in a province of plenty, of freedoms, of peace and of beauty.

And I believe. I believe in the power of British Columbians to drive our economy and our province into the future with innovation, determination and pride. We have an enormous opportunity to do the right thing and profit both economically and socially from it through partnerships that will create a strong future for B.C.

The past few weeks have been a fabulous party. Canadians have celebrated like never before. A unity was found, colours proudly worn and flags draped in glorious pride. Yes, the games were held in Whistler, Richmond and Vancouver, but the fun was had through TVs, iPods, iPhones, curling rinks, ice arenas and neighbourhood pubs, at schools, on the buses, and certainly at Holland Park, in Surrey. The Olympic flame was a symbol that drew us together as Canadians and as citizens of the world, a symbol of peace and perseverance.

"Do you believe?" — the question posed so many times on TV. Now I ask: can you believe? Can you believe that anyone who saw B.C. through the coverage of these games could say to themselves: "I don't want to visit B.C."? The world came, and I believe they're going to be back.

I was fortunate to attend a number of business events over the games period, and the people I spoke to were excited about B.C. They were excited about the pros-

pects of expanding business in B.C. It was wonderful to be able to share some of the Olympic excitement, Canadian pride and B.C. hospitality with them. After all, one of the major benefactors of the economic spinoffs of the games is the hospitality sector.

Truthfully, we have many things to offer the world, and the world has many places to get the things they need. It might be wood. It might be coal. It might be technology. It might be power. It might be gold. It might be people. We need to cultivate relationships and business. We need to be the salespeople for this province — for our resources, for our knowledge. We know B.C. is best, and we need to keep telling others.

These games were a fabulous opportunity to be able to tell that story. Economic partnership memorandums of understanding have been signed with foreign governments, including a protocol of intent with Russia's Krasnodar region to share information on games planning, cultural outreach and business opportunities.

A three-year action plan with South Korea's Gyeonggi province to focus on collaboration in biotechnology, green energy, marine leisure, digital media, culture and tourism. It will promote personnel exchanges with an emphasis on government-to-government secondments.

We also announced a \$24 million expansion of a wood pellet plant from Prince George and a ten-year deal with Europe for pellets. These are good things for B.C.

Significant announcements were made by major airlines — Emirates adding daily service to Vancouver, creating more than 300 jobs, \$30 million in economic spinoffs and 50,000 new travelers to B.C. Air China announced that they'll introduce three new direct flights a week, for a total of ten direct flights between Beijing and Vancouver, with Prince George as their alternate airport. This will connect B.C. to 123 destinations. Huge economic impact. We are taking that momentum, and we are moving forward.

[1500]

The Finance Minister delivered a solid budget with a much-needed vision for future generations. It highlights this government's unwavering commitment to revitalize the economy, create jobs and provide a strong start for our youngest citizens — our future.

Fiscally conservative decisions are hard, tough, and yet they are the right decisions to maintain strength as a province. It is leadership in challenging times to be responsive to new realities.

I've heard a lot of concern over the reductions last year to arts and culture funding. These were absolutely essential, albeit very unhappy decisions. They were made so that despite unprecedented economic challenges brought on by the global economic environment, we could continue to support the most vulnerable in our society. I support those decisions.

Thankfully, this year much support to the arts has been included in the budget. This government is provid-

ing over \$30 million in 2010-11 to support arts groups and artists. It includes \$10 million for this year through the new 2010 sport and art legacy, which will enhance opportunities for all British Columbians in the arts, including participation in music, theatre, visual arts, dance and digital media. There's \$7.9 million in grants funding through the B.C. Arts Council, \$1.5 million in earnings from the arts and culture endowment and \$11.5 million in gaming grants for arts and culture.

This is evidence that despite challenging times, despite the fact that we are still recovering economically as a province, despite lower revenue projections, despite all of this, our government is committed to the long-term health of B.C.'s arts sector and recognizes the key social and economic benefits that heritage, arts and culture play in our society.

We certainly saw that, as well, over the last few weeks and are continuing to see that now as productions and concerts and programming continue as part of a 2010 Cultural Olympiad. I'm proud to be attending at least one of these new projects, specifically one titled *SPINE* announced today — the second play that will be produced by Realwheels, a theatre company in Vancouver headed by a friend of mine, James Sanders.

As an integral part of the celebration in the 2010 Winter Games, the province invested in B.C.'s arts and culture community by investing \$20 million to create the arts legacy fund. The endowment supported arts and cultural activity leading up to the games. Since 2002, \$4.1 million in earnings has been distributed to arts and culture organizations. That's no small amount of money. This government has provided \$16 million to 2010 Legacies Now to support the arts. We've invested more than \$5 million through that in 400 arts and culture community projects around British Columbia. That's fantastic.

Another \$1.3 million was invested in the Cultural Olympiad through the Arts Council special projects. This was the first time there has been a three-year Cultural Olympiad leading up to a winter games.

Despite the misleading words of the opposition, we have been and continue to invest in the health of arts and culture in B.C. in my community and in those communities throughout the province. I encourage all of us as citizens who support the arts to continue to support the arts and recognize the part that we all play in the success of those organizations.

Speaking of health, the budget also puts health centre stage. My constituents and the people of Surrey city-wide will benefit from this. In fact, they're witnessing right now the expansion of Surrey Memorial, a hospital providing essential care in our community, and a new out-patient hospital to supplement the acute and trauma care at Surrey Memorial and to expand surgical space for Surrey patients.

Yes, once again, health care takes centre stage in the budget, a place it will hold with an additional \$2 billion

over the next three years. Yes, an additional \$2 billion. No one on the opposition side thinks that's enough money. What's the magic number they're looking for? What's the fictional number that will support all health care and not take away from other sectors? There isn't one. Demand will always outstrip supply unless we find new efficiencies, new innovations and new partnerships.

[1505]

We're seeing partnerships thrive. We're seeing partnerships with the federal government, the municipal government, local businesses and charities.

Surrey Memorial Hospital Foundation, for example, is helping to provide essential equipment for the neonatal unit. This is possible because we have people like Kulwinder Sanghera from ReD FM and Tony Singh of Fruiticana and a board of tireless volunteers, like Bruce Hayne and Ralph Berezan, who join with caring companies, like two of those that happen to be working on the Surrey Memorial expansion, Bouygues Building Canada and Bird Construction, who have both made \$64,000 donations to the hospital foundation to buy one fully featured isolette, which is a neonatal bed.

All of these people and all of these companies believe in this province. They believe in important investments and in doing their part. Kudos to all of those people and those organizations.

What about the amazing welcome Surrey gave to the world at Holland Park? The mayor, Dianne Watts, and council, especially Coun. Linda Hepner, who chaired the 2010 spirit committee for Surrey, and all of the volunteers who envisioned a celebration site and brought it to life, providing free-to-all shows, activities, the RCMP Musical Ride for the full period of the Olympic Games — a wonderful celebration, a great venue. Hundreds of thousands of people took part.

The mayor and council and local businesses used this venue and the games as an opportunity to showcase Surrey to our neighbours near and far, to invite business and partners to think about Surrey as the next place to invest and build their businesses. This is an incredible economic generator, the benefits of which we will continue to see for many years. Of course, what I liked most about the Surrey celebration site was the multicultural nature exhibited. It showcased Surrey's diversity through food, through music and through exhibits.

There's a rich history and strength in the city that cannot be minimized. B.C. was built by immigrants who worked hard and thrived and are very successful business people in the community. Surrey is no exception to this, with current leaders in our community like Daniel Igali, Satnam Johal, former MLA Gulzar Cheema and so many more.

Our multicultural strength was demonstrated by a fantastic welcome to the Olympic team from India, raising thousands of dollars to provide uniforms and a legacy for training programs. I can only imagine how

leadership and initiative from Surrey's Indo-Canadian community has gone to help strengthen our relationship with that nation as a whole. That taking initiative is what B.C. is known for. It's because of citizens like those and this B.C. government that we will continue to lead and welcome new opportunities to B.C.

Every year we welcome new British Columbians from all over the world to our province to work and to live, and 33 percent of the population in Surrey-Panorama is from other parts of the world. The EmbraceBC program is just another example of how we support these diverse groups and sectors in promoting multiculturalism and eliminating racism to create welcoming and inclusive communities. The throne speech promises that we'll continue to work to make life easier for people to embrace B.C., to work towards improvements in the residency opportunities for foreign-trained medical students, and we see this now reflected in the budget.

It is also important to recognize the importance of strategic investments. Some of them are obvious — infrastructure, like the Canada Line — and others less obvious but still vital — investments in families of today and in the schools for our kids, for the leaders of tomorrow.

As we heard in the throne speech and was demonstrated on Tuesday as the Finance Minister outlined the budget, education remains a priority because the future is our priority.

In my riding and, truthfully, in Surrey as a whole, we have even more reason to recognize this. We're a rapidly growing city. We're young, and around 30 percent of Surrey's population is under age 30. It's simple to recognize that we will benefit from our investments in our kids in strong starts for their future and in providing them with the best options for optimizing their unique talents through education that is responsive to children's needs, to providing options for post-secondary and advanced education close to home and to maximize opportunities for partnerships that enhance those opportunities.

[1510]

In Surrey-Panorama we have amazing teachers. We have inspiring students. This budget is for them. We will be providing an additional \$150 million over three years to fully fund teachers' wages and benefits and to offset other cost pressures.

We recognize this. We will provide \$110 million to school districts between now and March of next year for annual facilities grants, because we do recognize the need for these. In addition, per-pupil funding for students in K-to-12 is increasing from \$8,200 in 2009 to an estimated \$8,301, the highest ever in B.C.

I mentioned in this House last week that I visited TE Scott Elementary for their Olympic assembly, where two youngsters stood up and read essays about why it's good to live in B.C. and in Canada, the opportunities that being Canadian represent and the values that

we hold dear: freedom, peace, respective cultures, the strength of our diversity and the beauty and bounty of our environment.

I was also honoured to attend a grade 5 performance recently of a musical titled *A Salmon Tale* at Crescent Park Elementary. It was a play the students helped to create to tell the tale of B.C. salmon — their life cycle, their natural and man-made threats to survival — after which the children answered questions about how they felt and what they'd learned. Their answers were simple and clear: "We all have a role to play."

That's why I'm proud to represent the voters of Panorama and especially the kids that are not yet voters — the future of this province and this country, who so poignantly and simply state the obvious, things that often seem to get lost in adult discussions of pros and cons, costs and opportunities, politics and policy. It reminds me that decisions we make now are not as important for today as they are for our future, when the effects will be borne.

I am excited about this budget and our commitments to support families and children. The 21st-century family is different, different from the family most of us knew and certainly different than the ones some of our planning seems to favour.

In my parents' generation, most people thought a family was a husband and a wife raising 2½ children living in a single-family home in the suburbs. That's no longer the case. The unmarried now outnumber the married. Common-law relationships, including same-sex couples, single-parent families — especially those headed by men — and single-person households continue to increase, according to the 2006 census figures. It's not uncommon for a gay couple to be raising children. These patterns foreshadow difficulties for the economy when we see labour shortages and living standards decline.

Of course, we're happy to see that we recognize different family structures and different opportunities and focus on the well-being of children. But in so many families, the primary caregiver also works outside the home, and although family remains a major source of informal care and support, the presence of an extended family that can care for children can no longer be taken for granted, as many seniors are now working longer, living further away, travelling and enjoying their higher-than-normal life expectancy here in B.C.

So families today have different challenges — from mortgages to day care, children splitting time between two households, and all the other challenges that every family faces. We need new tools for supporting families.

This budget adds \$26 million over three years to support child care programs that assist low- to moderate-income families with the cost of child care. It also introduces a new tool in the household budget toolbox: the family-with-children property tax deferral option.

Wow, that's a mouthful. It will be an option that gives B.C. families with children under age 18 another tool, the right to defer their property taxes, similar to the option already available to seniors or those facing financial hardship.

Another tool, the extended family program, will modernize and improve upon the Child in the Home of a Relative program to provide increased assistance, broader supports and new safeguards for children, because there are families where children are cared for by relatives other than their parents, and these children and families are dealing with emotional and financial challenges as a result of this. This is another step that our government is making to help B.C. families.

My nephew is six. He's been using a computer since he was two. He's a hundred times better than me at video games. He could use a VCR before he was four, and now he's in grade 1, and I expect the skills he'll have to have and certainly need when he graduates will be entirely different than those I had.

[1515]

The world is evolving — in technological terms, faster than we can fathom even. The skills tomorrow's workers will need will be increasingly about the ability to adapt, to weather rapid change, to search for answers, to sift through and discern what information they need out of vastly different amounts of information available to them. That's why, despite our great education system, we need to look for improvements, things that we can do to enhance learning and skill development, to recognize and challenge excellence, to support and create specific learning environments for different learners.

We have the talent. Our teachers and administrators are exceptional. We have the infrastructure. We have the creativity. We just need to act. We need new partnerships with the private sector and parents that will enable the establishment of neighbourhood preschools. We need to provide families with new, voluntary options for public and private preschools so that they can have access to what they need close to where they live.

We need to place emphasis on parental involvement and tailoring the education system to individual needs and passions. We need to provide greater choice and diversity centred on students' special interests and talents. We need to provide voluntary full-time kindergarten for five-year-olds, and we will ensure this is in place in September and fully funded by 2011. Why do we need to do that? Because people need options. They need options for child care. They need options for learning.

We need to make sure that the funding reaches the classrooms so that, in concert with local governments, neighbourhood learning centres can integrate neighbourhood needs with available capital resources and underutilized space. Seven-day-a-week facilities management is fundamental to providing critical community services, and I think that's incredibly important.

When we have infrastructure needs and we have capital requirements and we have unused space, we'd better first think about using the space we have. Smarter approaches will allow resources to be focused on student learning needs.

These are all important measures that will help us embrace a 21st-century learning environment. I hope to see us building on the fantastic opportunities offered by 21st-century technologies to maximize efficiencies. We need to make sure we're maximizing dollars for student learning, and we need to continue to do this because kids matter and education matters. We're committed to ensuring that opportunity is here for young British Columbians. We have plentiful resources, an innovative mindset in British Columbia and resourceful people.

What has been so disappointing to me in my time here is the fact that, sadly, as in so many other things, the opposition comes out against a budget like we have here. The opposition opposes a plan — even a strong and innovative plan like this budget details.

I do understand that the opposition's job is to oppose, but opposition without substance is not helpful. I find it very difficult to understand, in this House where we all sit for the same ultimate purpose — to govern on behalf of all British Columbians and to make the best decisions we can for today and tomorrow — why it is that the opposition does not take the opportunity afforded to them through these debates to provide an alternative position, some strong and reasoned points, suggestions on how to improve programs that are in place or proposed — not simply to do more and to do it in some other way that is undescribed.

I for one believe that no idea is perfect. Ideas improve from debate and from collaboration for incorporating other points of view, other experiences, from fine-tuning and from positivity, believing in possibility. We saw this over the last few weeks — what the power of positivity, community, dreams, vision and action can achieve. We create, and what we can create we can be.

I encourage the opposition to seize the day — *carpe diem*. Chart a new course, set a plan, or better yet, see the future that this budget is building and help us make it happen. We will not be driven off course. We will be bold, for those who are counting on us to do what is right — the kids, the future leaders.

With that, I would like to conclude my remarks on this budget.

[1520]

**L. Popham:** It's an honour and a privilege to rise in this chamber and deliver my response to the budget. There's something quite different about the first time that I responded to the budget last fall and delivering a response today. There's less nerves, less innocence, less fear and much less hope that anything I say will be heard by the other side.

But regardless, it's my responsibility....

Interjections.

**L. Popham:** Did you hear that? It's my responsibility and my job to deliver a response and a response that reflects my own philosophy allowing me to stay true to myself, the philosophy of my party, and a response that reflects the values of my constituents in Saanich South.

I stand here today, like all of you, as a servant of the people, and to those whom I serve in Saanich South I extend my humble appreciation for placing your confidence, your hopes and your vision for a better community in me.

I would like to extend my congratulations to all our Olympic athletes who have competed and our Paralympic athletes who are about to compete. From coast to coast, Canadians are proud of your fierce work ethic, your tireless dedication and your grace under pressure. We saw a lot of gold shining in Vancouver this winter, something we can all be proud of as British Columbians.

But it's time to talk about something that we can't be so proud of as British Columbians, and that's the budget. We're on the edge of the end of the golden decade — a decade fraught with promises undelivered, a throne speech and a budget speech littered with platitudes undelivered and five lauded, great goals consigned to the dustbin of forgotten promises.

When this government says that we must leave the past behind and embrace new solutions for this new century, when this government says byzantine bureaucratic practices have no place in the 21st century, when this government says standing still is not an option and makes lofty promises of a tomorrow — one with our eyes wide open and our sights set on the future — I must ask: what year do they think this is?

Who do they think has had their hands on the levers of government year after year for the past decade? We are 1/10 down the road to the next century. By all accounts, I say that we're well on our way. Now is not the time to start shuffling your feet, rubbing the sleep from your eyes and lifting your gaze from your navel to set your sights on the road called 21st century.

This government clearly missed the turnoff to the 21st century a few years back. They've failed to make B.C. the best-educated, most literate place in North America. They've failed to make B.C. a model for healthy living and physical fitness. They've failed to lead the world in sustainable, environmental management. They've failed to build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk and our seniors. Five great goals, five empty promises and a decade of missed opportunity.

It's interesting to reflect on how the 2010 budget addresses these goals and how unbelievably they've missed the mark.

Goal 1: education and literacy. Recently, I had the opportunity to visit grade 5 students at Cordova Bay Elementary School in Saanich South. There I saw the future — a new generation of innovators, thinkers and leaders in the world of tomorrow. The unlimited potential of youth is the unlimited potential of our future. And if children are the future, then teachers are the stewards of what lies ahead.

I was fortunate that day to meet a fantastic practicum student from the University of Victoria, Rachel Waters. Therein I saw a young, optimistic face of tomorrow's educators. But as class sizes grow and funds are cut, as schools and school boards are shortchanged.... A refusal to accept the funding formula in a way that benefits children shows an unauthentic way that this government waxes on about how they value education.

As teachers and soon-to-be teachers aren't given the support they need for our children's needs, then we as people, as a society and as an economy are setting our province up to fall behind in the future. We will lose our competitive advantage for the 21st century — which this government just realized was upon us — while sacrificing our children's futures in the name of what?

[1525]

Once upon a time, literacy was a much-celebrated goal of this government, yet as the chapter closes on the decade, we see literacy fall from the page. What happened to the Premier's literacy initiative? Not a mention. Not surprising given the cuts to literacy programs and a 22 percent cut in library funding. The word "literacy" didn't even make it to the final cut.

In order to compete in the international marketplace, B.C.'s future cannot be mortgaged with bigger class sizes, school closures and more and more burdens placed on the backs of educators and support staff. These are problems that have directly impacted our community in Saanich South, and our Saanich school board is faced with problems that are almost unsolvable. Yet the government fails to listen to them.

With bloated class sizes, cuts to important funding for our kids and more school closures to come, the future is uncertain for budding teachers like Ms. Waters or for thousands upon thousands of kids across the province and those in Saanich. As those elected to serve the people, I think the people deserve a lot more.

Goal 2: healthy living and physical fitness. Well, the people sure aren't getting more in this area either. This government's goal was to make B.C. a model for healthy living and physical fitness. Instead, in a baffling and frankly ridiculous move, they plan to penalize healthy living and physical fitness by taxing it with the HST and then putting that money into health care. How odd.

The B.C. government plans to raise taxes on cycling by charging you 7 percent more on bicycles and bike-related equipment under the HST. That is backwards thinking. In fact, another Saanich South MLA once had

a thing or two to say about taxing bicycles. In his 1981 budget, Hugh Curtis, Finance Minister to Premier Bill Bennett, rose in this chamber.

Interjections.

**L. Popham:** Just wait. It's going to get better and better. I look so young because I ride a bike, actually.

In his speech, he set a "born in Saanich South" precedent that has been followed for almost 30 years, exempting bicycles from the PST because it is "consistent with a healthier, quieter and more energy-efficient society."

[C. Trevena in the chair.]

A lot has changed since 1981, but you cannot honestly tell me that the Social Credit Party of 1981 was more concerned about a healthier, quieter and more energy-efficient society than the members opposite today. Well, actions speak louder than words, and this government's actions are yelling at British Columbia that they don't care about that at all.

**Hon. K. Krueger:** You're getting harsher.

**L. Popham:** I'm going to get a lot harsher. Hang on. Put in your ear plugs.

Goal 3: the environment. If we want a more environmentally friendly province, perhaps the governing party ought to have stuck to their goal to lead the world in sustainable environmental management. Instead, the people of B.C. are taxed with the HST on bikes, one of the greenest and most sustainable forms of transportation around.

Interjection.

**L. Popham:** Wrong direction.

In Saanich one of the things we're most proud of is our fabulous trail system, which was fought for, built and protected by strong Saanich South New Democrats. As a cyclist, I treasure the many benefits of this jewel in Saanich. It was infrastructure investment that allowed for easy transition from car to bike as commuters make their way downtown — really important infrastructure investment.

But today we see the funding for cycling infrastructure being cut by 60 percent. This makes no sense if you're committed to a sustainable vision, a vision for our province where dedication to the principles of sustainability secures for present and future generations the benefits of a healthy environment and a decent and just sustainable society. This type of funding implies that this government is greenwashing.

What we see instead is old-fashioned politics. We see no investments in alternative infrastructure coming

to greater Victoria, a region that needs to make some sustainable transportation decisions before we end up making some irreversible choices.

Instead of investment in our environment, we see partnerships and investments with the federal government to build an overpass over the Pat Bay Highway into our airport.

[1530]

Well, I've got something to say about that. I've done a lot of polling in the last little while, and nobody was actually having trouble getting into the airport. That's not a sustainable choice. That's money that could have gone into green transportation investment, transportation modes that could have frequented the airport and thus decreased the capacity needs for the road infrastructure.

But it was all about being shovel-ready. It's all about old-fashioned blacktop politics. If we were playing that game properly, we should have used that money to solve a safety problem. Just up the road in Saanich South at Sayward and the Pat Bay Highway, we see one of the most dangerous intersections in this region. But that wasn't a priority, and I have no idea why. I would like to see the checklist this government uses to make things a priority.

In a new decade — a greener, sustainable decade — we cannot afford to penalize positive choices people make with tax hikes to cut popular and vital programs. The government has decided to make it harder for people to make these choices.

From taxing the spokes off cyclists to keeping the clunkers on the road, this government's transportation strategy is far removed from their great goal of leading the world in sustainable environmental management. There is no commitment, no investment and no second thought to developing a comprehensive, sustainable transportation strategy for this area. There would be tangible benefits to Saanich South residents.

With higher taxes on bikes, no incentives to trade in the old clunkers for new ones and no options for light rail, my constituents are resigned to long, long waits sitting in rush-hour traffic that get longer every six months. Since fuel costs are exempted from the HST, pretty much nullifying the carbon tax, it appears that's exactly what this government wants.

A move forward towards light rail would be an immense benefit. It would reduce congestion, reduce carbon emissions and reduce costs to all commuters, all of which would improve our quality of life. Investment in light rail right here in Victoria would directly benefit Saanich South by creating job opportunities. That's one of the differences between blacktop and alternatives. Alternative transportation infrastructure makes for long-term stable jobs, and that's what this province needs.

Now is the time for such investments. This government's cure for the economic downturn is clear: inaction,

lethargy and a return to the same failed politics and policies that got us into this mess. They're encouraging international trade and abandoning our own province and our own people. Their carbon footprint is getting bigger by the second.

Speaking of jobs, B.C. has an opportunity to live up to the other great goal, No. 4 — leading Canada in job creation. Provincewide, more than 100,000 full-time jobs have been lost. There is a face to each and every one of these jobs. They are our mothers, our fathers, our sons and daughters. They're our parents, our kids, our friends and our neighbours. They support families, and some-day dream of supporting their own families.

They are faces in Prince George, Kamloops, Surrey, Comox, Vancouver, Victoria and Saanich — 100,000 people. That is roughly the equivalent of every soul living in the member opposite's entire constituency of Surrey-Cloverdale, combined with every person in the Premier's own back yard of Vancouver-Point Grey. Those are real, human numbers.

While some of the communities are hit harder than others, it's clear that no community is safe. That's why we need a comprehensive employment strategy for this province — not a plan that forces people into the purgatory of long-term unemployment, but rather one that gets them working again in the economy of tomorrow. Investing in projects such as light rail transit here in the capital region would go a long way to stimulating economic growth, creating jobs and creating infrastructure for the future.

Investing in the knowledge economy by supporting new and emerging industries such as the tech industry would lay the groundwork of an economy of ideas and innovation for years to come. That's why I'm so proud that Saanich South is home to the Vancouver Island Technology Park. I recently had an opportunity to pay them a visit, and I was deeply impressed by the ahead-of-the-curve mentality. They need support.

The Vancouver Island Technology Park provides a plethora of jobs to my community and jobs in the capital region. So does the restaurant industry, which will be gravely affected by the HST, the same HST that bike shops are concerned about, the same HST that Butchart Gardens is concerned about — one of our largest employers in this region. They're considering whether or not they have to shut the door on their business after so many years of being a leader and an attraction worldwide.

[1535]

From wrong-headed to no-headed, this government has failed to support existing, emerging and new employment opportunities in our province.

**Hon. K. Krueger:** No-headed?

**L. Popham:** No-headed.

Interjection.

**L. Popham:** I know. I'm making up for lost time in this one — okay?

Goal 5, supporting the vulnerable. Yet as the working and middle class take the brunt of the downturn, taking it on the chin, it is our most vulnerable who are slipping through the cracks.

The Premier broke a promise to build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk and our seniors. He didn't just make that promise to you and me; he made that promise to Cooper Davis, a five-year-old boy with autism from Saanich South whose mom, Holly, calls him her special little dude.

In a startling move and an appalling breach of trust, this government cut funding to the EIBI program. Just what is the EIBI program? Well, according to one member of the opposite team, it's a Cadillac program. In reality, the EIBI program is an invaluable program that drastically improves the lives of many children with autism. It's troubling that the member for Langley would compare such a vital program to a luxury car. Autism is no luxury.

Does the word "vulnerable" mean anything to this government? For six years in a row B.C. has had the highest rate of child poverty in all of Canada. You can't polish that tarnish off the golden decade.

B.C.'s minimum wage has remained stagnant for years on end while the cost of living has drastically increased. Homelessness, by comparison, is also on the rise while employment insurance recipients have almost doubled. You can't buff those statistics off the golden decade.

As of New Year's Day this government took money out of the pockets of seniors in residential care homes by imposing a new rate of structure that saw patient fees increase up to 75 percent. One must ask: what's left over for prescription drugs, dental care, clothing and a host of other necessities? Happy new year indeed.

With cuts to seniors care, bed space and housing, seniors in Saanich South and across B.C. are not getting the respect that they deserve. You can't put a shine on their golden years after this golden decade.

I would like to address agriculture in our province. I am astounded by this government's lack of support for agriculture in a time when we need food security in B.C. This is not fluff and glitter. This is critical to our survival.

We have had the Premier's pal Arnold Schwarzenegger telling us that the world, as far as agriculture goes in California, is in really big trouble. Their groundwater is mixing with salt water, making it poisonous to irrigate the crops. No crops, no food and no exports into B.C.

The lack of support for agriculture is irresponsible. Not only is it abandoning our potentially strong economic driver in our province, it is also setting us up for

failure when we must turn to our province for sustenance. With another 4 percent cut to agriculture in this budget, it's obvious that this government has no plan for our future. They are setting us up to starve.

For the past decade this government has been chipping away at the agricultural land reserve. We see 14 percent cuts to the Agricultural Land Commission coming down the pipe over the next two years. Acre by acre, we've seen one of the most successful land use planning initiatives in the history of our province become relegated to the status of a dwindling bank account to be drawn upon at a whim yet never replenished. At the same time, they have pulled support for farmers — two more strikes against this government.

This government has failed to support agriculture time and time again. I'm not alone in my thinking. Just ask the fruit growers in this province or the cattle ranchers. Time and time again they have warned us about their demise, and the government's response is to cut the budget.

No better example demonstrates this government's agricultural malaise than the halting of the Buy B.C. program in 2001. Shortly before its demise there were over 1,200 companies and associations using the Buy B.C. logo in their advertising and promotional materials — over 5,000 Buy B.C. products identified at major grocery retailers throughout the province. Buy B.C. supported a critical industry that directly served the economic and physical health and well-being of our province.

The Minister of Agriculture has confirmed his belief that this government ought to bring back Buy B.C. Yet there was not one single mention of this program in the budget speech. In fact, it might as well be called the goodbye B.C. program.

[1540]

From literacy to healthy living to....

Interjection.

**L. Popham:** I did that one myself.

From literacy to healthy living to the environment, jobs, our economy, B.C. agriculture and support for our most vulnerable, there was little solution in this budget speech. This government has failed to live up to the last five commitments they've made. So it's no wonder they produced this jack-in-the-box budget speech of platitudes which shied away from making clear, unambiguous commitments.

As we move into the next decade, let's readjust our thinking, look back at what we did not accomplish, and set our sights on what we can and what we should and what we must for the next. Let's not lose sight of the cost of the Olympic Games even as we revel in the triumphs. As we celebrate, let's remind ourselves that there are still promises undelivered, still people without jobs and income, housing or basic care. There are still businesses

and consumers that will be very hurt by the HST and children who will be hurt by cuts to crucial autism funding. There is still an environment ignored and literacy forgotten.

There are hundreds and hundreds of issues for thousands upon thousands of families in countless communities across this province. From the North Island to the North Shore, from Cariboo North to Saanich South, let us celebrate our Canadian pride, celebrate our Olympic triumphs, but let's not lose track of the promises we've made along the road.

Today the golden decade is a little duller, a little worn and a little cheap. After a decade of rhetoric, it's time to stand up and deliver. This government has had that opportunity in this budget speech. In fact, they've had that opportunity all along, but we're on the edge of the end of the golden decade of missed opportunities. When the people asked for a golden decade, this government sold them fool's gold.

**D. Horne:** It's with great pleasure that I stand today and speak in favour of this budget. You know, I was worried when I was about to speak next, because some have said that from time to time I can be fairly harsh. When the member for Saanich South, someone I would view as one of the most balanced, nicest, most wonderful persons on the other side, could deliver such a harsh criticism of our budget, then I can't worry.

I believe this budget is a continuation of the strong fiscal management and prudent vision of the future that British Columbia expects from our government. The budget sees our continued commitment to core values — health care and education — and continues our government's commitment to building the needed infrastructure and renews our commitment to sports and the arts.

Of particular note to those I represent is the continued steadfast commitment to the building of the Evergreen rapid transit line. Construction is now scheduled to begin on this line next year. Hopefully, we're going to have that completed by 2014. This is a project that's been ongoing for many, many years. It's something that's been promised to the northeast sector since the 1990s. It's something that my area has wanted and needed for many, many years, and I'm excited by the fact that we continue to move forward.

Locally, as we brought this budget forward, there were a number of naysayers that said they don't believe it's going to move forward. They don't believe that we're going to build the Evergreen line. Obviously, there's always negative energy around these things.

The difficulty is if we said that we were going to build the Evergreen line tomorrow and that we were going to start work on it tomorrow and that this is something that's new, I could understand that. But the fact of the matter is that we have a project office in place. We have

been doing the engineering. We have been doing the design work. We have been consulting with the community and putting the blocks in place in order to build this for some time.

This isn't something that we're about to build. This is something that this government is currently building. We're going to continue to do that, and it's going to be up and operational by 2014.

The importance of building rapid transit, of building infrastructure and of having these transit options available to British Columbians was seen in spades during the Olympics.

[1545]

If you took a look at the lines that we saw for the Canada Line, the lines we saw for the Expo Line, the lines we saw for the Millennium Line during the Olympics — people standing in line for almost an hour many times to be able to get on our rapid transit system — a system that is world-class, a system that will serve us well for many, many years in the future and a system that needs to continue to be expanded....

Obviously, the Evergreen line is part of that expansion and something that people in my area are very, very excited about.

I actually spent a lot of time on our transit system during the Olympics. It was actually a great way to get around. One of the things I noted, in the fact that the Evergreen line will be a huge improvement for my area, was the fact that in coming to Lougheed Mall, in coming to the Lougheed station and the Millennium Line that currently exists, the options for parking and the options for transit to get there didn't make that a terribly attractive option for people who live in my area.

Having the Evergreen line in place and the commitment to the environment that that represents, I think, is an incredible thing and something that this government remains steadfastly behind and excited about.

The last time that I stood in my place and spoke, I was speaking about the Olympics and what a tremendous success it was and what a tremendous success it represents for the province of British Columbia and all of the opportunities that we enjoyed during the Olympics. You know, I spent many, many hours with people from around the world. Many have spoken about the volunteers in blue jackets. I actually volunteered, and I have a blue jacket.

I spent a lot of time in the transportation group in VANOC and drove many people from around the world around our province. I can tell you that one of the most exciting things I experienced during the Olympics was the opportunity to bring a group from Switzerland up to Whistler to watch one of the competitions.

On our way back we stopped at one of the viewpoints along the Sea to Sky Highway with the mountains in the background — a beautiful sunny day, absolutely incredible. It was British Columbia at its absolute finest. It

was the picture-postcard-perfect moment, and we got a wonderful picture with the group. They were very, very excited — not only excited about being here this time but excited about coming back again, excited about the opportunity to perhaps find some business opportunities here in British Columbia and be able to come back.

Many times I spoke to different business groups and different people in the financial community, and they spoke of the fact that they liked it here. They'd made investments here before, but now they understand how beautiful it is. They'd love to be on a board of directors here. They'd love to have the opportunity to come to British Columbia, to come to Vancouver again and again.

It's because of not only the wonderful scenery and the wonderful opportunities that we have here but also because of the fiscal environment, the taxation environment, the pillars that this government has put in place in order to attract business, in order to make sure that business is sustainable here in British Columbia.

It's no secret to anyone listening that we're living in very difficult times. We've had a world economic downturn, which we haven't seen in decades, over this past year. It began in other countries. Nonetheless, obviously it's impacted us here in British Columbia and in this province. Last May, against the backdrop of this economic uncertainty, the people of British Columbia put their trust and confidence in this government to get this province through these economically challenging times.

I hear on the HST time and time again — the talk from the opposition and from the other side — the fact that if this were different or that were different, this government wouldn't be the government. Well, this government is the government because people believe in British Columbia that we are the best choice and those to be trusted in order to move this country forward.

I hear the opposition all the time. They talk about the fact.... You know, the funniest thing is that I actually met someone over the last couple of weeks.... There has been polling that's been out there, and it shows.... The poll that I saw before Christmas showed that 80 percent of people were against the HST.

I'd say that's on a backdrop of considerable misunderstanding of exactly what the HST is, but that being said, the most interesting thing that I found was.... I actually spoke to an NDP.... Basically, the NDP and the opposition look at it and say that the 20 percent of the people that are in support of it would be our supporters, which is how I assume they're coming up with the math that they would do so much better should the HST not move forward.

[1550]

That being said, I spoke to someone who was part of that 20 percent that was in favour of the HST. They came up to me. They were actually a huge NDP supporter, and they were so excited about the HST because they said

they've actually looked into the facts. They found out that as a low-income earner, they were going to get a considerable HST credit back, so they were actually going to be further ahead after the HST than they are now. This was a wonderful thing, as they saw it, because the rich were going to get taxed.

There have been other reports that way as well, reports from some people that support the opposition on the other side. Obviously, the decision to move to an HST shows that we're not worried about the popularity of decisions and that basically this government moves forward with what's best for British Columbians.

I can tell you, on the HST, that when I first heard about the HST last summer, which was only a few days before its implementation, I listened to what it would accomplish, what it would deliver. I'm like those opposite. I had an open mind and said: "Does this make sense?"

In looking at it and looking at what it will contribute to business in British Columbia, what it will contribute to the economy in British Columbia, what it contributes to forestry and all of the other industries in British Columbia, it's clear. One thing is clear for certain, and that is that this is the right move. This is something that is going to make British Columbia strong for the future, and this is something that we must do. And it's not that we must do it because it is bad; it's that we must do it because it is the right thing for us to do.

You know, it's interesting. I've observed that the NDP, as well, are constantly changing their numbers when it comes to the HST. I'm not certain whether this is just being bad with economic facts or just bad with math.

Last August, which I've pointed out before, the Leader of the Opposition was asked by Opinion250.com what the impact of the HST would be on the average B.C. consumer, and she said: "We are thinking it's looking like the family budget could well be in thousands of dollars a month." As I pointed out back last fall, for her statement to be true, the average British Columbian would need to spend \$171,428.57 per year on goods and services not previously covered by the PST. Obviously, that's not an average British Columbian.

The opposition's point man in the Chinese media also said last August.... He wrote that a family of four within the Chinese community would pay an extra \$1,800 on HST, and then in December he wrote in the Chinese media that a family of five would pay an extra \$2,688 in tax after the implementation of the HST. The last figure would require the family to spend \$38,400 on goods and services not already covered by the PST.

It's no wonder, with all of these statistics, why people are so worried. Let me provide some comfort from this unalarming reality using real statistics based upon typical consumption patterns provided by Statistics Canada.

These are the facts of what the HST will cost the average family. Once personal tax measures related to the

harmonized are taken into account, a family of four earning \$30,000 will save — and let me emphasize that — \$552 a year. A family of four earning \$60,000 a year will pay an extra \$134, a bit more than \$10 a month — certainly not the thousand dollars that the Leader of the Opposition....

Interjections.

**Deputy Speaker:** Member. Member, would you just...? One moment.

Could all members just keep their remarks a little bit quieter. I know that this is causing some concern, but all members have the opportunity to talk about this.

**D. Horne:** I'm having fun, Madam Speaker.

A family of four. Okay, a family of four earning \$60,000 a year will pay an extra \$134, as I've said, so we're talking a little bit over \$10 a month — you know, not an awful lot.

[1555]

A family of four earning \$90,000, probably sort of your average middle-class family, will pay an extra \$210. That's less than \$20 a month.

Then you look at seniors and low-income earners. A seniors couple earning \$30,000 a year will pay a grand total of — and wait for it — \$2 in extra tax over the course of a year, based upon normal consumption patterns.

These statistics are from Statistics Canada, remember, and are certainly a far call from the apocalyptic sums bandied about so carelessly by those opposite. I know that the media is....

Interjections.

**D. Horne:** Basically, as I've said before, 80 percent said that, based upon the misinformation provided to them by those opposite, and I don't blame them. This is the difficulty. If you actually look at the reality of the situation and not the Leader of the Opposition running around.... You know, my understanding is that the Leader of the Opposition is today in Kamloops on a mission to....

Interjections.

**D. Horne:** Ten people — ten whole people. I guess that's 80 percent. Is that 80 percent? I don't think that's 80 percent of Kamloops, unfortunately, but ten people showed up to see her. Then she was on the radio, and she got three callers. Oh, the first caller was in favour of the HST. Oh, and the second caller was in favour of the HST. Oh, and the third caller didn't call about the HST.

So you know, that was just fantastic. That was a fantastic event, and I understand that she's going to do that all over the province. I'm really looking forward to her

visiting other communities. That's just going to be an absolutely incredible thing.

One of the things that we can say about our HST....

Interjections.

**D. Horne:** One of the things I can say about our HST is that it will make our companies more competitive — more competitive in Asia, more competitive in Europe, more competitive in the United States, more competitive around the world. As a result of this competitiveness, our province will become a more attractive place for investors.

Put these two benefits together, and the most important benefit of all is that we see in British Columbia more well-paying jobs for British Columbians, more revenue for government to strengthen our health care and education. This move will create jobs — hundreds of thousands of them. British Columbians might pay a bit more in the short run, but the returns they will see in the long run and the services they will receive as a result of the government revenues that we will receive will far outpace this.

I'll close my comments on the HST by saying to the members opposite that I know — and we've just talked about this — you've embarked on a quest to find seven members of government, seven of our MLAs, against the HST. Let me save you some time and some trouble. I know this will come as a shock to you. Let me save you a little bit of time. I know I'm not on the list, but I am firmly in favour and supportive of the HST. So this will not be one of the seven.

You know, I spoke before about the benefits of the Olympics, and one of the things.... I know that the member opposite was quite concerned the last time I spoke about the Olympics and the benefits of the Olympics, and the Leader of the Opposition.... I actually spent some time because I wanted to make sure that I was not.... I was confused, and I wanted to make sure that I understood completely the Leader of the Opposition's position on the Olympics, with the Olympics being such a great thing and, obviously, all of us seeing the benefits of the Olympics and the wonderful time that we all had not only bringing the people here but the 3.5 billion people that watched the Olympics on the TV.

I have to say that, well, in the beginning the Leader of the Opposition said, "I didn't support going for the bid in the beginning," which she said in 2003 on CFAX. But I must apologize. By last year she had actually changed that position, and I'll quote again from the CBC Radio on January 12, 2009. She said: "I am a pragmatic politician. The Olympics are going to be here, like it or not. I wasn't there when the decision was made, but like it or not, the Olympics are coming to British Columbia."

[1600]

I'm sorry. That's obviously resounding, resounding support for the Olympics. I recognize.... I want to make

sure that I was more clear. I feel, obviously, the opposition leader's words have come full circle. I apologize if there was any unclarity in what I said before.

Basically, this budget does many things for many British Columbians. Not only do we talk about the benefits of the HST, but obviously there have been significant benefits on the personal income tax side too, if you take a look at what this government has accomplished since 2001, in reducing taxes more than 120 times, benefiting both businesses and persons in British Columbia.

The majority of taxpayers in British Columbia have reduced personal income taxes by at least 37 percent. An additional 125,000 people no longer pay any income tax. Including the measures introduced in September and, again, with the increase of the personal exemption to \$11,000 in this last budget, obviously the number of people not paying taxes is going up yet again.

I think that's a significant key. You talk about paying taxes. Those that make the least — obviously it's important that we support them and that we make sure that they don't suffer the tax burden that they just can't pay for.

I'd like to go through a couple of numbers for individuals and how much less taxes they pay. Individuals making \$15,000 now pay over \$400 less than they did in 2001. Those earning \$20,000 now pay less — \$700 less than they did; for \$40,000, over a thousand dollars less; \$50,000, over \$1,500 less than they did; \$60,000, almost \$2,000 less. And an individual earning \$70,000 now is almost \$2,300 less than they did in 2001.

Obviously, these tax reductions are important. They're something that contributes greatly to our economy. They're something that contributes greatly to our financial stability, to the consumer mood that we have and the fact that British Columbians remain confident in their government and confident in their financial stability over the long run.

Even with the global downturn — you know, British Columbia was not sheltered from that — we certainly are in a far better position than many, many areas of Canada, than many, many areas of the world. If you take a look at the position that British Columbia is in compared to many of the provinces of Canada.... You just have to look to our neighbours to the east in Alberta. If you look to Ontario, you look to many of the provinces within Canada, we are in an enviable position.

We are in a fantastic financial position compared to many of the provinces in Canada. I think that talks to our strong fiscal management and our strong Minister of Finance and Premier and the work that they've done to put ourselves in the position that we are.

The underpinning current of our economy, the real driving force behind British Columbia and the creation of jobs and the assurance that people have the lifestyle that we all enjoy and have come to count on comes from small business. This government continues to support

small business. We continue to make sure that small businesses have the tools that they need.

The burdens that they face, the difficulties that they might have.... We've obviously lowered the rates of income taxes substantially for small businesses over the last number of years. We've made many measures in reducing red tape. We have made sure that the small business tax threshold was increased and will be increased to \$500,000.

[1605]

Basically, not only are we making sure that small businesses benefit from these measures but also that the general corporate rate, which attracts larger corporations, has been reduced down to 11 percent with further reductions to 10.5 percent planned this year and then further reductions the following year.

That being said, one of the things that I found most amusing over these budget debates.... I heard the member from the Cowichan Valley stand up. I know that on CFX Radio earlier in February the member for Juan de Fuca has also spoken about the shifting of the tax burden, the shifting of the burden to big business, because you know, big business, as the member from Cowichan Valley described it, was evil and couldn't be understood and was sort of this horrible leviathan, basically, that was just taking things over.

I did a bit of research after I heard that. I wanted to make sure that, indeed, this was the case. You know, the one thing that I find most amusing is that by attacking what the opposition would call large corporations — big business — and taxing them.... Basically, in Canada many of the companies we would consider big business, our banks — the Royal Bank, the Bank of Montreal, the Bank of Nova Scotia — some of our large oil and gas companies, some of our large forest companies, some of these large publicly-traded companies that would be considered big business....

I find it hard to understand why, when the largest shareholders of these companies are pension funds and people's retirement money, by going after them and making them less valuable and making them less profitable and making them so that basically.... By saying what you're saying, by saying that you are going to attack big business, what you're saying is that you're going to take and destroy the pension income of teachers and the pension income of members of the BCGEU and pension income of all British Columbians.

So this is who owns them. These companies aren't owned by all of these.... These companies aren't owned by these entities in space. These companies are owned by Canadians, by British Columbians, by our RRSPs, by our pensions. This is our future. This is what British Columbians are counting on to retire.

By going after these companies and saying, "Oh, we're going to tax them. We're going to go after them," all you're saying is: "We're going after British Columbians'

pensions plans. We're going after British Columbians' RRSPs. We're going to make sure that when British Columbians retire, the money that they thought was there, the money that they hoped was there, isn't going to be there anymore." You know, these companies aren't going to be as profitable. These companies aren't going to have the money to expand. These people aren't going to....

This is a twofold argument. Not only do these large corporations create jobs for British Columbians, but these are owned by the people of British Columbia. It's not some ambiguous thing in space.

This is the difficulty. One of the things that I always like to say.... The other thing that really worries me is that we talk about cuts all the time. All I hear on the other side is cuts, cuts, cuts. The difficulty with it is that as legislators, we are elected to manage the public purse. We are elected to ensure that we spend the money that people pay in taxes, that people deliver to us, to our trust, in the best way possible.

That's what this budget does. We need to make tough decisions. That's why we're here. If money grew on money trees out on the lawn, none of us would need to be here, because there would be no decisions to be made. We could just say, "Yes, yes, yes," and spend money all over the place. The difficulty is.... And you go through all of the system. What is a priority today may not be a priority in five years.

[1610]

I like to tell a story about a young child who goes to his father, and he says: "You know, Dad. I have had an allowance for \$10 for many, many years now, and my friends and I would really like to go to a movie. We'd like to go to a movie every week. There's this movie club that's coming up, and I'd really like to go to the movie. The movie costs \$5 a week. I already spent all of my \$10.

"I've looked at what I'm spending my \$10 on. I spend a little bit of money on savings so that I can buy some video games, and I spend some money on candy and my lunches. And I spend.... You know, every Friday I go with my friends, and I spend three of the dollars on a milkshake. When it comes all together, I'm already spending all of my \$10, so I really need the \$5 more."

His father thinks about it for a while, and he says: "You know, I'm sorry. These are tough times, and while I can't afford to give you \$15 a week, I'm going to give you \$12. So I'm going to give you an increase of \$2."

The kid goes away, and he thinks this is great. He goes off, and he starts going to the movie every week. The difficulty is.... Is that an increase of a movie or...? In what is decided in the end, he decides he's going to give up his milkshake for \$3 because that's the \$3 that makes the equation work. So is that a cut of a milkshake, or is that an increase of a movie?

This is the difficulty that we face in all of these things. It's that we have to make decisions. We have to make

tough decisions, and we have to decide what's best for British Columbians.

On that note, Madam Speaker, I wholeheartedly support the Minister of Finance's budget. It's been a very wonderful afternoon being able to stand in my place and give my response, and I thank you so much and thank this House.

**H. Bains:** It is always a privilege and honour actually to stand here in this House to represent my constituency, who put their faith in me to bring their issues into this House so that we could have a debate on those issues, and possibly there is a solution to them.

In order for me to be here, there are many people that actually put a lot of effort and time of their own to help me win the election, the most recent one in 2009. I want to thank my constituency assistants Emily Zimmerman and Simrit Chhabra, who I would say are the best in the province — keep me out of trouble, and they do a fine job serving the needs of the constituency.

Then there is Janice Macdonald, who comes in and helps us out. Most of her time is voluntary time, and she helps out the other two and helps the constituents. As a result, many people out there do get very good service out of that office, and I'm really happy about that.

I stand here today to oppose this budget. There are many reasons that I would oppose this budget. I was hoping that there might be something in there that I could stand here in support of, but there isn't much. When I look at what my constituency is consisting of, what kind of constituency mine is, the demographics of my constituency.... I have people who work in the forest industry. Some of them are still working, but most of them are not.

I asked myself when I go through the budget document here: "Is there anything for those laid-off forestry workers?" I could not find anything. Is there anything for those who actually have jobs so that their jobs are protected? I'm disappointed to say that there's nothing in it for them either. They're at the whim of this government's policies, and they could be in the same lineup as those who are laid off right now because of the policies — most of them because of the policies of this government.

I don't know how many people on that side actually have experience in the forest industry, but if you go back and see what this forest industry has done for this province and what kind of forest industry we had at one time.... British Columbians were proud of the forest industry that we had because that industry was the engine that drove the economy of this province. This government drove it down over the last seven, eight years.

[1615]

It started in 2003, and you would know, Madam Speaker, because you come from that region of the province where the communities are forestry-dependent,

largely speaking. Their industry is devastated, and many of those communities are uprooted. Thousands of those forestry workers who once worked in this proud industry no longer have jobs.

They could stand there and blame the United States and the United States economy. Yes, there is an element of that for those layoffs. There is no question. But largely speaking, most of those layoffs occurred because of the ill-advised Forestry Revitalization Act that was brought in by this government. Once, the forest industry and those companies were required to process those logs right here in British Columbia to create jobs for British Columbians. That link is no longer there, thanks to the Liberals.

Now these companies are free to take our raw logs anywhere they wish and to process them anywhere they wish or to sell them anywhere they wish, and that's what is happening today. The record amount of raw log exportation took place in the last eight years — period. There was a time when up to 4.5 million cubic metres of logs were being shipped per year out of this province. That's the equivalent of about ten sawmills working two shifts. Every year they allowed those raw logs to export from here. Then there were cut control provisions. Those are gone as well.

They don't understand that those logs and those forests belong to the people of British Columbia and that they must be used for the benefit of British Columbians. They have no concept of that.

They must be used to create jobs for British Columbia, but they thought the best thing they could do was to please their friends, CEOs of those forest industries. "You scratch my back, and I scratch your back," and that was the deal being made out there. "You pay into our election campaign and put us in a position to win the election, and we will give you whatever you want. We'll give you the forest industry." That's exactly what they did.

The CEOs came through. They gave a record amount to elect these people. And in return, what they got.... The forest industry that belonged to the people of this province was given to those CEOs, and CEOs are running to the bank. CEOs are running to the bank, and yes, they are elected here. That's not what governments are supposed to be about. They are supposed to represent people. They're supposed to work for the benefit of the people that actually elected them. We have not seen that here for the last eight years.

Madam Speaker, there's nothing. Those forestry workers were looking up to this government. "Maybe now they will come in, and they will help us in transition, because thanks to them, we have lost our jobs." The federal government came in with \$129 million.

Our Forests critics, current and previous, continually reminded the Liberals on the other side that the forest industry workers are being ignored by you, that they

need your assistance now, that the government should come to their aid, but to no avail. This government continued to ignore them, and they still are ignoring them. There's nothing in it for them.

Why would I support a budget that has nothing for the constituents of mine who are working in the forest industry, who are now laid off from the forest industry? There's nothing in it for them.

[1620]

Madam Speaker, there's nothing in it for the students, our students who like to enter into post-secondary education. I'd like to talk about it because we have a post-secondary education institution in my constituency, Kwantlen University College. Now it's called Kwantlen Polytechnic University. The first thing they did was allow those tuition fees to go through the roof, and many of those students are no longer in a position to afford those tuition fees.

Now what do you see in this budget? A 4.9 percent decrease in overall operating expenses from the February election budget to 2010-11, to this budget — a total decrease of \$109 million. At a time when more investment was needed in that sector so that our next generation is in a position to prepare themselves for the new economy — the green economy, the high-tech economy — that our province must compete in with the rest of the world to create more jobs here, they're cutting from that sector.

There's nothing in it for research and development so that we could actually start to talk about the new economy and what that economy would look like. How are we going to create jobs in that new economy? How do our workers coming out of those colleges and universities compete with the rest of the world? The rest of the world is way ahead of us in that area, when it comes to research and development. But this government chose to cut that.

Again, why would I support something that has nothing in it for those post-secondary education students? I thought: "Maybe there will be something for seniors." There are many folks who live in my constituency who are seniors. Many of them, actually, are stuck in Surrey Memorial Hospital. They're waiting to move into long-term-care facilities, because that's where they need to be, but there is no money to create long-term-care beds — another broken promise by this government. Remember that they said there would be 5,000 new long-term-care beds? Remember that?

Come to Surrey. They are actually cutting back. People are right now waiting in Surrey Memorial Hospital. You go to Newton Regency. They're told to shut down that facility. They have a facility there. There are beds out there. But your government is cutting those beds. They're forced to shut it down.

Madam Speaker, is that a good, forward-thinking policy? Certainly not. Therefore, there's nothing in it for them, so there's nothing in it for me to say yes to on behalf of the seniors.

We have a community that actually has a big portion of people who run their own businesses — small business operators. What are they doing to them? There are restaurant owners. There are hair salons there, truck drivers, taxi drivers.

If you come and talk to them, if you ever show some spine to come and talk to them, they'll tell you. Look them in the face and tell them that the HST is good for hair salons. Look them in the face and tell the taxi drivers, the truck drivers that the HST is good for them. Go and talk to those restaurant owners and tell them that HST is good for them. Show some courage and go and talk to them.

I know that you will not do that. You will not do that. Come with me, and I'll walk you through the Surrey-Newton area. Show me people who actually will support you. Eighty-two percent of the people are saying to you that you have got it wrong. True to form, they simply continue to ignore their plight. There's no way that I could support this budget, because there's nothing in it for the small business operators.

Before me today.... I looked at it. What is it in this budget? I looked at it, and I think, you know, the best I could describe it is the budget of deception.

[1625]

Before the election when this government was going around trying to get their new mandate, they put their platform together, and they told everyone that the maximum deficit would be \$495 million, not a penny more. Soon after the election it grew to \$2.8 billion, but if you add the money that is being received from the federal government, it's way over \$3 billion.

It is not that they didn't know that the budget was going to be way higher than \$495 million. They were warned by their own people — people who were appointed by this government to advise them on these numbers. They told them that they were wrong, that they were pessimistic. Actually, that was the word being used by the Minister of Finance at that time.

When the NDP critic stood up in this House and told them that those numbers are not realistic, that they are phoney numbers, we were told that we are fearmongering. But soon after the election — guess what — all of those people who told them that they were wrong were right, and the Liberals were wrong. They stole the election, basically, by hiding the truth from the public. How do you support that budget?

The member for Kelowna-Lake Country was speaking earlier today, and I quote him: "We must get past the usual name-calling, which leads to an inevitable race to the bottom and serves only to discredit all politicians." That's what he said — that this kind of stuff will discredit all politicians.

Let me tell you what I say. You know what discredits politicians? When you don't tell the public the truth. That's what discredits you.

I'll give you five examples of that that you — the Liberals on that side — have added to that cynicism. First, not telling the truth about budget numbers — \$495 million before the election, despite the fact that everyone told them their numbers are wrong, and right after the election, the real number came out. That's what discredits politicians — when you tell one thing before the election, and then you do something different after the election.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

No. 2, when you said that there will be no HST before the election. In fact, in writing you were asked that question. The Premier in writing told the restaurant industry — and, in fact, I believe it was the tourist industry as well — that there will be no HST.

**An Hon. Member:** Not true.

**H. Bains:** The Minister of Finance said that it's not true. The minister....

**Deputy Speaker:** Please direct all your questions through the Chair, Member.

**H. Bains:** Hon. Chair, the restaurant industry wrote to the Premier.

**An Hon. Member:** Wrote to the party.

**H. Bains:** Wrote to the party, okay. I'm being corrected. He wrote to the party, and what did the party write back? There will be no HST.

**An Hon. Member:** It didn't say that.

**H. Bains:** What did it say?

Interjections.

**Deputy Speaker:** Members. Members.

**H. Bains:** Not contemplated. All right. Not contemplated.

Interjections.

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, please take your seat. If all members would please allow the member that's on the floor to make his presentation. Thank you. Member, please continue.

**H. Bains:** Before the election everyone was told that we're not contemplating HST. After the election what they say now is that it is the single best thing that they could bring in to turn the economy around.

From there, they turned to HST being revenue-neutral. HST now, all of a sudden, is to help pay for health care. When those are the kinds of things that you say before the election and when you do quite the opposite after the election, that's the kind of stuff that discredits you as politicians. That's the kind of stuff that does it.

[1630]

Mr. Speaker, I'll give you another example. Before the 2001 election HEU members were told: "We will not rip up your collective agreements." But that's one of the first things they did after they got elected.

They also said that they would not sell B.C. Rail. Then they sold B.C. Rail. So I just want to correct that member for Kelowna–Lake Country. Those are the types of actions of politicians that discredit them. He is part of that group who actually played and added to the cynicism. They continue to do that. They continue to do that by saying that there are no cuts to any ministries.

I have a lot of respect for the member from West Vancouver. He stood up yesterday, and he tried to defend all those numbers. The member for West Vancouver–Capilano took different ministries, and he tried to say: "Well, you know, yes, we are adding more money here in this ministry. We are adding more money here in that ministry." I was hoping that he would put some objectivity into his arguments, but that was missing. He did not.

On one hand, it's easy for him to say that there is more money attached, but he forgot to add the cost that is off-loaded onto those ministries. For example, in the Education Ministry — the trustees associations are saying that it will take about \$260 million to deal with all the costs that have been downloaded onto them by this government, but this government is adding only \$112 million. What do you call that? That is a cut.

I can tell you that in my own constituency, in my own city of Surrey, the education board is facing a \$19 million deficit this year, largely because of this government's off-loading. Carbon tax credits. HST will be going on there now. Teachers' pensions and salaries. Now B.C. Hydro rates are going up. It adds to that deficit.

This is one city, one district, where you actually have growth in enrolment — 1,100 new students — but they are facing a \$19 million deficit. All the extra money that they talk about doesn't even come close to dealing with that deficit.

I would have hoped that the member for West Vancouver–Capilano would have stood up and that he would have put that kind of objectivity into it, but he failed to do that. I was disappointed, because I do have a lot of respect for that member.

I want to talk about some of the other areas that I'm really worried about and concerned. This government made a huge, big deal about climate change and trying to deal with it. But other than rhetoric and all those announcements, there's nothing behind it. One of the things they could have done is to help put together a

transit plan. They talked about a provincial transit plan. If you come and talk to the TransLink board, if you talk to those mayors, they'll tell you what's wrong with your approach.

[1635]

Again, it's all those announcements, but if you come down and look at the ground and what's happening out there.... The past CEO said: "If we don't get \$450 million in operating money, there will no Evergreen line. There will not be any expansion to any part of the transit system — no extra SkyTrain, no extra buses."

The buses we in Surrey could use — about 400 to 500 right now. None of that will be coming. They were simply put on life support. They had to go and raise the parking tax, and other measures were taken, to give them \$130 million.

People of that region, or for that matter anywhere, do not believe this government anymore when they say that the Evergreen line will be built, and they are going to start construction by a certain date, and it will be completed. Where is the money? When the reporters are asking that question to that minister, and the public and the mayors are asking that question, they're ducking it. The best they can do is duck.

The provincial money, the federal money.... Where is the TransLink money? There is another \$400 million that is assured. Without that money.... We're just talking about capital money. The capital money isn't even there. Then they need operation money. They have none of that either.

So all these promises being made for the last eight years — people are fed up with that now. They know exactly what you're up to. You make promises; then you break them.

Let me talk about some of the community groups who are actually doing a fantastic job in trying to educate these ministers and these Liberal MLAs about what is needed in those communities. CAW is doing such a fantastic job. They're trying to educate anyone they can reach about the need for public transit. They're doing it. The communities know what's needed. They understand it, except this government isn't coming to the table.

I want to talk about the project that is under construction right now — the Port Mann bridge and the Highway 1 expansion. If you look at what's happening out there.... The contractor was awarded the contract some time in 2008, I believe it was.

I looked at the rates for the truckers under this blue book that is actually agreed to by the government of British Columbia and the B.C. Road Builders and Heavy Construction Association and the union — the rates that are listed in there for a standard tandem truck, 14 cubic yard capacity or 15 cubic yard capacity. The rate is \$90. These are 2009 and 2010 rates. Even when you go back to that time when the contract must have been awarded, the rate was \$85.30.

But today those truckers are paid \$65. The cost to operate their truck is more than that. They're making six cents per hour with that rate. When you consider their fuel costs, insurance costs, maintenance costs, tires, financing and the purchase of the truck, they're making six cents an hour.

If that's the kind of position that you put those truckers in, guess what's going to happen? The first thing that goes is the safety, and those truckers are concerned. They're concerned to a point where they had a large meeting in Surrey, and they were angry.

[1640]

I wish the Minister of Transportation was there to listen to those concerns. I hope that the minister now knows those concerns and that the minister will deal with those concerns. Those truckers deserve to be treated with respect. Those are the people who build our province. We are treating them with total contempt, and that is not acceptable.

I want to talk about the other area that is of concern in this budget, and that is the safety and security of our public. I want to thank Sergeant Bentley, who runs and heads the Newton branch, and Inspector Garry Begg. They have done a fantastic job on an issue that I brought up and that the community brought up to them. It is about a substance called *doda*, which is quite addictive. This was being sold in the open in every store out there — not every store, but most of the stores were selling it. Finally, the police put their resources into it, and they raided one of those establishments. Now they're waiting for charges, pending the test from the lab.

I want to say thanks to them, because they are given very limited resources. In Surrey we have one of the lowest, on a per-capita basis.... For police officers in the country, we have 140 per 100,000, compared to 199 for the rest of the country. Vancouver, Abbotsford, Victoria — they all have higher numbers than them, and their workload is actually almost twice, when you compare that to the Vancouver officers. I want to say thank you to them, because they are doing a fantastic job in that area.

Mr. Speaker, thank you so much for the opportunity, and I really look forward to the next time.

**Hon. M. MacDiarmid:** It's a pleasure and an honour to rise to speak in the House today as the MLA for Vancouver-Fairview and as Minister of Education and Minister Responsible for Early Learning and Literacy. I'm rising today to speak in support of Budget 2010.

I'd like to start, really, at the beginning and thank a lot of people. First and foremost, I'd like to thank my family. My husband, Robert, is incredibly supportive, and without a really supportive spouse this is a very difficult job. Of course, it's quite easy if you have a supportive spouse. I would also like to thank my mother, Bette, and my brothers John, Don and Andy, who are also a great support to me, as well as many friends and colleagues. And I'd like to thank all of my colleagues here.

A few months ago I suddenly became extremely ill — in fact, critically ill — shortly after being in the House here. I had bacterial meningitis, which is very rare, and I had pneumococcal meningitis — rare, particularly in somebody in my age group, but certainly a critical illness. I was unwell enough that I actually didn't realize I was unwell. Fortunately, I was with family at the time and was rushed to hospital.

Thanks to the care that I received at Peace Arch Hospital, because I happened to be visiting in White Rock at the time.... Thanks to the care of the emergency room staff there and the intensivists, my life was saved. I am incredibly grateful to those people.

Because things were a bit complicated, I subsequently was cared for in other hospitals. I've experienced the health care system once again in an in-depth fashion, having been a patient at VGH as well as Royal Columbian Hospital. I can tell you that the fine care, the exemplary care from doctors, nurses, B.C.'s paramedics, pharmacists — all of the care providers that I had — was truly extraordinary, and I am really very grateful.

I'm also grateful to the support that I received from both sides of the House, some very kind messages. [Applause.] Thank you. There was a spirit of collegiality, and when I returned, many of my colleagues opposite welcomed me back.

[1645]

In fact, one was kind enough to ask me if I was actually fully recovered and if I was up to the task of a really good grilling by the opposition or if I was still in a weakened condition. I said, "Absolutely," and I think what I said was, "Hit me with your best shot," and so it goes.

There is a spirit of collegiality here which we don't often or always recognize. There is also an adversarial relationship from time to time, but we are colleagues, and I really do appreciate that.

Speaking generally, initially, about the budget and then in more depth later in my remarks, I'd like to say that this budget is very easy for me to support. The budget presented by the Minister of Finance will help us to grow the economy, and it will also protect core services — such as health, education — and help us to continue to take care of the most vulnerable British Columbians as we recover from an extreme economic downturn.

This budget is going to increase health funding by over \$2 billion over the course of three years, and we're also going to bring education funding to record levels once again. So this is the budget that certainly has my wholehearted support. In addition, there's \$5.3 billion committed to accelerated capital, and that is going to help British Columbians to find work and keep work. As many as 34,000 construction jobs will be provided in some 850 capital projects.

I'd like to talk about my riding, Vancouver-Fairview. I've got to start out by taking really serious exception to

some remarks made by the member for Surrey-Newton, which is that he said he has the best constituency assistants.

I'd just like to speak in favour of Chantal and Adrian, who daily provide wonderful help to anyone who calls, including people from other ridings who frequently, accidentally, contact our office due to riding boundary changes and the fact that we're really easy to get at off of Broadway. They also help people with matters that really don't have much to do with provincial politics, but they steer people in the right direction. They're pleasant, competent and really wonderful to have in the office.

Vancouver-Fairview is a very diverse community. On average, my constituents have a bit more education, and they are younger than the average British Columbian. Many of them are making contributions in health and in the sciences. They also come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and we have a large number of immigrants that bring lots of positive things to our riding and certainly help us to celebrate cultural events like the recent Chinese New Year.

The diversity that we have also contributes to the strength of the arts community that we find in Vancouver-Fairview, and this is a community that will undoubtedly grow stronger with the \$60 million set aside for arts and sport funding in this current budget.

My constituents are incredibly proud of the fact that we hosted the Olympics and, in fact, in Vancouver-Fairview was the new curling venue, which you will have seen if you watched curling on television — a wonderful facility. Of course, we're so proud that our Canadian athletes won gold and silver medals right in that curling venue. The venue is a great legacy for our community and for the whole sports community for curling.

My constituents are involved in a number of dynamic industries both inside and outside of the riding. In the constituency over 5,000 constituents are professionals of some kind, either teachers or professors or professionals in sciences, such as nurses and physicians. There are some fine companies in the riding, including Genome B.C. that's doing absolutely amazing research which will benefit not only British Columbians and already has, but people all around the world, and organizations like Inspire Health and Zymeworks which are, again, making great contributions.

Of course we have, as I mentioned, some great health providers, many of whom I had a recent opportunity to meet. We have in the riding the Children's Hospital, the cancer agency, B.C. Women's Hospital, G. F. Strong and VGH, just to name a few.

We're working to make VGH even better. I was pleased last year to be at the groundbreaking of a new seven-storey, 69,000-square-foot facility which is near VGH, and this facility will be named the Robert H.N. Ho research centre in honour of Mr. Ho's incredibly generous donation of \$15 million. This is going towards the pro-

ject as well as some partnering money from the federal and provincial governments.

[1650]

This facility is going to house researchers, physicians and others who work in three areas: prostate cancer, ovarian cancer and bone and joint health. They'll be looking, certainly, for new ways of treatment, but they're also going to be looking into prevention. I certainly know, after having practised medicine for almost a quarter of a century, that it's so much better when we look at prevention than if we treat the consequences of disease once they've occurred.

That's one of the reasons I'm so delighted to have the portfolio of Minister of Education, because I know from my work that one of the most powerful social determinants of health is, in fact, the level of education that we achieve.

Just the last thing I want to say about my riding, Vancouver-Fairview, is how delighted we are that we will soon be hosting the Paralympic Games as the curlers come to our riding. That's something that I'm sure all of us are looking forward to in just a couple of weeks.

Speaking about the Ministry of Education, I would like to take a moment to recognize many people who contribute to and are part of our education system. I'd like to recognize the trustees; the superintendents; administrators; support workers; of course, the teachers; and very importantly, parents and students — all of whom are an important part of our education system.

I'd also like to acknowledge and really thank the many people who work in the Ministry of Education. They're dedicated, they're hard-working, and they really believe in what they're doing. They make a great contribution to our system as well. Certainly, our system is based on the collaboration of many individuals, and that is one of our real strengths. We're really all working toward a single goal — and that is, the success of our students in their education but also in their lives.

The job of being the Minister of Education is certainly a very positive one. I do have people saying to me from time to time that there does appear to be this adversarial part of the job and that it must be difficult and perhaps stressful. But I find this to be a very positive ministry, and that's because of what we do, where we're going — and, certainly, thinking about the future of British Columbia.

As the minister, one of the things that I have the opportunity to do is to actually go to school districts and spend time meeting, certainly, with school trustees, but the most fun part of the job, I think, really is when I get into classrooms.

About a month ago I had the opportunity to go to the Kootenays, for two reasons. One was to be the government representative for the torch relay ceremonies there, which was a wonderful experience. So much enthusiasm in the small towns of Nelson, Trail and Rossland.

I also had the opportunity to go to three different school districts and do a number of different things. The first thing on our agenda in terms of the tours was to go to a brand-new StrongStart B.C. Centre in Robson and be part of the official opening. It had opened a little earlier, and as we were having the formalities at the StrongStart Centre in Robson, there were a few short speeches.

The children and parents kept coming in through a side door. At one point, one of the speakers was talking, and when he finished up, everyone was clapping. With that, a mom came in with her little one who was probably about eight or nine months old, and when he saw everyone clapping, he started to clap too. He was delighted to be there. It was his place. I don't know that the youngsters are really aware of how much they're learning, but they love the StrongStart Centre, and the parents certainly told me what a difference it's making in that community.

I then went to Mount Sentinel Secondary and had the opportunity to meet with a number of the students who had just come back from Haiti. As many of you will be aware, these high school students had gone to Haiti to do a special project — some volunteer outreach that's part of the quest program at Mount Sentinel. Tragically, the earthquake hit, and it happened to happen about just an hour after they arrived. These students went through — actually, they were in danger — some real struggles before they were able to get back to Canada.

I was absolutely inspired when I had the chance to meet with them. They're students who are so thoughtful. They're clearly good global citizens, and they're thinking forwardly. Even after this difficult experience, what they said was that they felt that the Haitians had really helped them and that they had been able to help each other as they really worked together as a team. They were strong and mature beyond their years, and spoke very highly, as well, of their teacher. It was really amazing to spend some time with them.

I then visited classrooms in Nelson, Grand Forks and Christina Lake. There were a couple of common themes there. I met children all the way from kindergarten and even some more StrongStart Centre students — so right down to the babies — and right up to grade 12.

[1655]

What happens in the classrooms? They still have chalkboards quite often, and in a couple of the rooms — several of them, actually — they had something up on the board. There were two main themes.

One was the torch relay. These students were studying the Olympics. They were learning about other countries. Some of the classes had actually adopted a country. Their teachers were really helping them to take advantage of learning about things like sustainability and being a good global citizen. Of course, they were excited about the Olympics to come and the medals that Canada might and, in fact, did win.

The other thing on many of the chalkboards was fundraising for Haiti. Right down to children who were probably six or seven years old, these students were already thinking way outside of the communities of Christina Lake, Grand Forks and Nelson. They were thinking about people in other parts of the world that had come across some really serious and tragic misfortune, and they were raising funds.

When I see students engaged in these kinds of activities, not to mention things like their own Olympics that they had in their classes and their schools, and their own torch relays, it really does make me feel very positive and very good about the future.

The other thing that always happens when I go to schools is I meet with teachers and principals. The principals invariably are so proud of the teachers and their accomplishments as well as the students in the school. The teachers also can't wait to showcase the talents of their students.

Quite often even the children in grades 2 and 3 will talk with me, and they'll have questions ready for me. Those are some of the most interesting and thought-provoking discussions that I get to have in my work.

So certainly, before I go to the classrooms, but when I come away from those classrooms, I'm really aware that we're fortunate to have in this province one of the best education systems in the world. By international and national measures, we come out on top or near the top. Our students really do excel. So we have a lot to be proud of and a lot to celebrate.

I constantly find the students really very impressive, just thinking about what they're capable of. They certainly represent so much of what is good and really positive in our education system. But we do have some work to do.

There are some areas that we definitely need to do more work in, and there are some areas that we need to work on so that all students will achieve and grow. In particular, our attention needs to be focused on some areas that will, I believe, provide the greatest long-term benefit for us in B.C. These are areas like our early learning initiatives, strengthening aboriginal education, providing greater supports for educators and improving flexibility and choice for our students.

In particular, in the next while we will be investing in early learning. We certainly reinforce these priorities in Budget 2010. Looking to the future, we have a commitment to education and a vision for the future of education in this province. We're certainly going to need to show prudent and progressive leadership if we want to go forward. We want to provide stability for our education system and continue to support it during this time when we know that we face challenges, and certainly there are global economic challenges that are unprecedented.

We are all aware that education is a vital public service. In spite of the fiscal challenges that we continue

to face, and in spite of the fact that we do have deficits last year, this year and for at least another year or two, we still have increased our education budget with this budget for the tenth year in a row.

We're able to continue to increase funding in spite of the demographic challenges that we face. I know that everyone is aware that enrolment is substantially down over the last decade, and it's projected to decrease again. We expect this to continue for at least two or three more years until it starts to rise again. But as we bring the students into full-day kindergarten, somewhat artificially we actually reverse this trend. So we'll have more students in schools in B.C. next year than we did this past year.

The education overall budget for 2010-11 is \$5.165 billion, which is an increase of \$136 million, or 2.7 percent, over last year. The funding to school districts will be \$4.6 billion, which is a \$110 million increase over last year. With this funding, we're providing funding for full-day kindergarten and for the contract that was negotiated between teachers and government.

[1700]

For the 2010-11 school year we'll be providing \$58 million for full-day kindergarten and the following year another \$107 million and also \$54 million to fully fund the 2010 teachers' wage increase.

Our focus is to invest in priorities that don't only help today, but they're really an investment in the future generation. We know that we have about 29 percent of students in this province who enter school now who are not ready for school. By various measurements — their physical, social, emotional development — they aren't ready for school. We know that there's a window of opportunity in the younger years, and if we miss that, it's really hard for those students to make it up.

If we're able to invest in the early learning, which is our intention to continue to do, building on full-day kindergarten, then we have a much better chance of helping those students to reach their full capacity, to reach their full potential — to excel in school, enjoy school and, hopefully, become lifelong learners.

We certainly want to focus on supporting the learning needs of each individual student to the best of our ability so that they're getting the support they need to succeed and so that they can realize their hopes, their dreams and their aspirations. We believe that we need to look at some new approaches to schooling in order to do that so we can better support teachers and allow them to better serve the diverse needs of students in British Columbia.

In the coming months we're going to work at developing a master teacher concept so that we can better support teachers in their efforts to improve learning outcomes for their students. We're also working to create programs that will help to set children on the path to success, as I've said, even before their first day in school.

I think many of us believe that the most precious natural resource we have in British Columbia is, in fact, our

children and that we need to do everything we can to give them the best possible start in school and life. So we really are focusing very much on our early learners.

That's why in British Columbia we're investing in our StrongStart B.C. centres, and we now have over 310 of these across the province. Some of them are operating in really innovative ways. The one that I visited in Robson runs from Tuesday to Saturday so that families where both parents are working can actually take advantage of that centre on Saturday when they have time free.

In 2008-2009 there were over 250,000 visits to StrongStart B.C. centres, with nearly 15,000 students participating. Parents — and children, if they have enough language to say so, but certainly the parents and caregivers — are saying that these are really making a difference, that not only are the children learning but the parents are learning about early development and things that they can do at home that will help with their child's success in school.

Two years ago we asked the Early Childhood Learning Agency to explore the feasibility of full-day kindergarten in the province, and we've committed \$151 million over the next two years to fully implement full-day kindergarten. I'm really delighted to say that starting this September we will have full-day kindergarten available as an optional full-day kindergarten for over half of the students in this province.

Starting in September of 2010 there will be about 15,000 students. Actually, there will be about 21,000 students starting because there already were almost 6,000 in full-day kindergarten around the province. So there will be 15,000 new spaces for full-day kindergarten, and there will be a total of 40,000 spaces by the following school year.

We're looking ahead because we know that just investing in full-day kindergarten and our StrongStart centres is actually not enough. So what we will be doing is focusing on early learning for three-year-olds and four-year-olds.

We'll be looking at new initiatives to see how we can develop a network of full-day playschools for three- and four-year-olds, which will be optional, again, as is the full-day kindergarten. In the coming months what we'll be doing is working to establish partnerships with parents and with the private sector so that we can best determine how we should go about providing this service for families.

Certainly, full-day kindergarten was welcomed by parents, and in some cases, it's oversubscribed for this fall. Parents are telling us that this is what they want, that this is going to be good for their family and their child, and everyone is looking forward to when we have fully implemented it.

In the case of full-day learning in a preschool setting for the three-year-olds and four-year-olds, our plan is to have this fully implemented within five years.

Anyone who has ever spent time with a child knows that they don't just learn at school; they're learning all the time. That's why you have to watch what you say around them from a very young age. They're always learning, and it's not just kindergarten to grade 12. There is learning that happens in the classroom, but there's a lot that happens outside. Certainly, from a very young age, and hopefully throughout our lives, we continue to learn.

Education being a lifelong pursuit, we need to make sure we have supports in our system right from pre-kindergarten through adults. That's what makes the contributions of our community partners throughout B.C. so important. Schools are central components of B.C. communities. Many people will tell us that the school is actually the hub, or the heart, of their community. Our vision is to further build on the schools' role in the communities through initiatives like our neighbourhood learning centres.

These are centres which will bring education and some community service together under one roof. It's a way for us to continue to have that school be the hub, or the heart, of the neighbourhood as well as to use some underutilized space that we have in our province due to the significant decline in enrolment we've had.

To date we've announced 11 such centres in eight different B.C. school districts, and we're working with boards of education and community partners so that we can incorporate this concept of neighbourhood learning centres in every new facility and every time we replace school space.

The ones that are planned to date will be including things like theatres, sports facilities, facilities for seniors, community facilities. Sometimes there'll be some health partners that will be part of the neighbourhood learning centre. There is a very diverse group of different services, including in some cases day care service, in the neighbourhood learning centres that are provided. So we're certainly excited about building this kind of model for our future in B.C.

We also have invested and will continue to invest significantly in infrastructure. In all of our school capital projects we emphasize providing the best possible learning and working environments for students and staff. That's why I'm really very pleased — and I know that our educational partners in the school districts are also pleased — that we'll be providing \$110 million of annual facilities grants to help districts maintain our schools. We are also continuing to renew facilities for students and staff throughout the province in many places in school districts.

A major component of that commitment of renewal is making sure the school space is safe. We're investing a total of \$1.5 billion to seismically upgrade schools as part of the most comprehensive seismic upgrade plan that's ever been undertaken by a B.C. government, and this is well underway. Over the past five years we've pro-

vided significant resources. So far there have been 64 seismic upgrades in schools that are complete, there are 29 underway, and there are another 25 that have been approved — so far a total of 118 projects.

Since 2001 we've spent more than \$1.7 billion to complete 80 new and replacement schools, 148 additions and 26 renovations as well as acquiring sites in 22 places across B.C. By the end of this school year we will have invested more than \$3.8 billion in school capital and maintenance projects around the province.

When we build these schools, we're incorporating innovative state-of-the-art technologies in the new schools so that they meet the highest degree of environmental design criteria. Every one of our new and replacement schools is being constructed to meet LEED gold or equivalent sustainable design standards, and the wood-first policy means that all school construction projects place a priority on using B.C. wood wherever possible, because as we know, wood is good.

I just want to talk briefly about the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games. They were, as we're all aware, an unparalleled success for Canada and for our province. I know we're all very proud of the country and of our athletes' accomplishments, and this has been talked about in the House.

These games were a great opportunity for B.C. as far as education goes. Right across the province teachers incorporated ideals from the Olympics into their curriculum. As I mentioned before, many schools had students who were studying other countries, who adopted a country and who took advantage of many other areas of learning lessons from the Olympics.

[1710]

There were students in 180 schools across all school districts that connected with the Olympic and Paralympic activities by making welcome cards. I don't know if you've seen these cards, but they're absolutely beautiful. There were almost 70,000 student-illustrated welcome cards so that every single athlete, coach and many of the officials that were staying in the athletes village could have a personalized welcome card.

Another thing that happened was the "Sharing the dream" webcasts. These started well before the Olympics and featured various Olympic athletes and others, and there were student reporters who did the interviewing. I participated in one of these where the students interviewed me briefly, but much more importantly, they interviewed Greg Mortenson, the author of the book *Three Cups of Tea*. The students had very interesting questions and discussions with Mr. Mortenson and then discussions among themselves.

This was actually being webcast right at that time to schools across British Columbia, to schools right across Canada, and we even had some schools around the world that tuned into these webcasts and participated — a great experience for the students. I was extremely

impressed by their reporting abilities. They were very competent.

They were a great learning opportunity. As of February there were over 8,000 downloads of webcast guides, resources and views of videos. At the webcasts that I attended, there were some visitors from London, the host of the next Olympics, who were very interested and who were going to be part of the turnover of the webcast. So lots of educational opportunities, and we're going to be passing the torch and sharing our Vancouver 2010 material with London shortly.

We are moving ahead. We're continuing to invest in education, and we're looking at paving the way for future generations while supporting our current generation of students. We've maintained record levels of investment to carry out our long-term vision for the future of education in this province, and it's my pleasure to support this budget for 2010.

**S. Simpson:** I'm pleased to have the opportunity to get up and spend a few minutes talking about Budget 2010.

Before I start to talk about the budget, as with many members, I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge some things in my constituency and some personal things that are important to my role here as a member in this place.

First of all, I especially want to acknowledge Cate, my partner, and Shayla, my daughter, and all of the challenges that they go through by having me be a member here. I know all members on both sides understand how difficult that can be with families and the responsibilities and things that families do to keep us here. I very much appreciate Cate and Shayla's commitment to me and support for me in what I do here, and it's something that I cherish very much.

I guess I'll be challenging the Minister of Education and my colleague here from Surrey over best constituency assistants. I'm happy to put up Brenda and Rachel anytime for that award. They clearly provide a remarkable amount of service for me back in Vancouver-Hastings. They understand the constituency.

It's a very complex and challenging constituency at times. There are people who face a lot of difficulties in Vancouver-Hastings, who come into the office looking for a place where they can get some support. Without exception, Brenda and Rachel provide that support to people every day on my behalf, and I very much appreciate that. I certainly know how hard they work, and I know how difficult it can be for them at times in that job. Day in and day out, they do that work.

As the Minister of Education said, they are also, I know, always more than willing to help people from other constituencies who find their way into my office for whatever reason, or to help guide them in matters that might be of a municipal or federal jurisdiction and

to make sure that they get the support they need in those areas. So I very much appreciate them and the support they provide.

As we all know here in this place, we have volunteers and supporters who help us day to day. They help to get us here, and they support us after we're here. Sometimes, you know, they give us heck for things they might not always agree with, but generally, they stay pretty loyal supporters.

[1715]

I have a great group of people around me in my constituency who both provide that support to me and the efforts that it takes to be here and to stay here and also provide good criticism when it's due on issues that they think that I should either be addressing in a different way or addressing more strongly.

So I appreciate that. It's great feedback, and as we all know, there's nothing more valuable than getting that constructive criticism from people who you know have your best interests at heart and are trying to do what's best for you and sometimes shaking a finger at you while they do it. And that's always a good thing.

When I look at this budget, I think about it in the context, certainly, of the province and my critic responsibilities and that, but I also think about it very much in terms of my own constituency of Vancouver-Hastings and what my constituency looks like.

As I've said before in this House, my constituency is quite diverse, quite complex. On one hand, it's very multi-ethnic. Forty percent of my constituency is Chinese-speaking as a first language. I have large components of other ethnic backgrounds in the constituency, and they clearly help to really frame the environment around Vancouver-Hastings.

It also is a constituency that has, I think, in raw numbers, the largest First Nation population in British Columbia — in raw numbers, not in percentage, but in just raw numbers of people. That's an interesting constituency, and as many members know here, the challenges faced by First Nations people who are off reserve, living in our cities, mainly in our urban areas....

They face a range of challenges that sometimes just, I think, fall through the cracks between what happens in the relationships between governments and our First Nations people that are largely land-based in our communities. I do think that there is a challenge here, and I know that they feel that challenge.

In my constituency I meet with First Nations groups in Vancouver-Hastings on a fairly regular basis through the friendship centre and other facilities — the housing groups there, the kids, the families and the kids that go to Macdonald School and our other schools in the area. I know that they sometimes feel that they're not part of the conversation in the way that they should be, considering kind of the raw numbers of what they make up in terms of our First Nations communities.

I don't think they always feel that they're being heard, and I think that they probably would aim that criticism across the board and not exclusively at governments but at their own leadership as well. That is a challenge. I know from speaking to members of the First Nations leadership that they recognize those difficulties, and I know that they want to address those matters too. But they recognize it's a very difficult issue.

In some ways, you know, we talk a lot about the issues, obviously, of land claims, of treaties, of those issues of resources, of supporting our First Nations communities. I think that we need to pay greater attention to the First Nations who are off reserve living in our urban areas and looking at how to support them in their own identity. I think that's a challenge that we all need to pick up and work harder on.

In my constituency, as well, I have, I think.... By demographics, I believe it is the second-poorest constituency in British Columbia. At the same time, there are areas of my constituency where houses regularly sell for a million-plus dollars, where people are very middle-class and have significant and good incomes, and then thousands and thousands of people who are in very difficult straits every day trying to deal with the challenges that they face, that their families face — very real challenges around health issues in the community, around addictions, around the pressures of poverty. We see this every day.

[1720]

Large numbers of small business in the community, and many of them struggle. They're challenged. As small businesses, they're working very hard to try to stay afloat. They faced, and as it has been acknowledged.... During the recent Olympic event there were challenges for some of our small business areas around the city and in the region. With all the attention and focus that came to the downtown core, to the Richmond core and that, where there was great excitement and a lot of resources invested.... I know that in places like in the Hastings and Nanaimo area in my constituency — I talked to the businesses there, the markets, those folks — they probably took about a 25 percent to 35 percent hit in their business over the period of the games.

I think most of them had planned for that. That didn't make it easier, but they had planned for it. They knew they were going to do that. They knew that was part of the reality of the games coming and one of the downsides to that.

It was a real challenge for them, and I know that in a couple of instances it was very difficult. Those were caused not just by things like the loss of street parking on Hastings Street, those kinds of losses, which generate a ton of business in the community. I know that they had difficult times. They also had flags in their windows, and they were supporters of the Olympics, but they were the people who paid part of the price for the Olympics. That is a reality of what came before us.

One of the other issues in my constituency — it probably is the issue that I see more than anything coming through the doors of my office — revolves around the housing question. It is a real issue. I have many families in the constituency who are on modest incomes and find it extremely challenging to be able to stay in the community because of the costs of housing and the availability of appropriate housing for families — often, younger families.

They have a real difficulty with that, and it's an area where I know they feel a frustration as they look for places to rent that are appropriate for them. They have great trouble finding that, and in some cases they end up in places that, after a short period of time, they realize for any number of reasons are not very appropriate. You try to find ways to help people to get out of those situations and to make their lives better.

When I look at this budget, I look at it partly through the eyes of those people who are in my constituency and the people who I'm here to represent. How does this budget, in terms of all the pieces of it, affect them? I think the budget has been called a number of things. It's been called a stand-pat budget. It's been called a number of things.

But I guess the thing that I would call the budget is.... I think if there's a disappointment around the budget, it's a sense of lack of vision related to the budget. It clearly is a budget that, I think, is reactive in terms of how it came to be. It really does go back to last February. It goes back to a budget that was put in place prior to the 2009 election, a budget where the Premier and the Minister of Finance told us consistently, leading up to the election, that we would have a \$495 million deficit, not a penny more.

"Guaranteed," I think, was the term the Premier used, even though, as has been said by other speakers, there was no shortage of people — economists, business analysts, others — who were raising flag after flag about that and saying: "Look, these numbers just don't make sense. All of the indicators say that \$495 million just is not on the radar at all as a reasonable number."

But the government held firm to that number, and all through the election campaign held firm to that number, even though it was pretty clear to everybody else that the number wouldn't hold up. Of course, what we know is that — and this became very apparent when we got to the September update — the deficit was more like \$3½ billion, potentially well over \$3 billion if you count out the \$1.6 billion of HST money, or a portion of that money, that was got from the federal government.

So you have a situation where the government also, in saying that it would be \$495 million, said: "That's very manageable. We don't anticipate cuts. We don't anticipate negative impacts, particularly on those people who are most vulnerable."

That was the argument that was made. Of course, we know all of that fell by the wayside so quickly in the September update, at the time when the government panicked. It was clearly in panic. That was shown in that update, in the way that the government responded in that update.

There is a cynicism in the province around the believability of the government on numbers after we saw that performance last February. Of course, there's also a cynicism, a much greater.... I think it's even more than cynicism. I think there's anger about what people saw as the clear betrayal of a commitment as it relates to the HST.

Before the election, both of the parties were asked for their positions, and both of the parties indicated pretty clearly to the Restaurant Association folks that the HST was not on the table. The government, the B.C. Liberals, have historically taken positions previously that clearly were opposed to the HST. A previous Finance Minister.... We'll remember Carole Taylor, when she was here, was clearly opposed to bringing the HST in at that time.

There's a whole bunch of good reasons why the HST doesn't make sense. But what happens, of course, is that within moments after the election, the HST is on table. The HST is on the table, and all of us, many of the people — the vast majority of people in the province — I think saw it as a betrayal. We saw it as a betrayal that was around \$1.6 billion and that, more than anything else, was about being bought by the federal government for \$1.6 billion.

The Minister of Finance has tried to tell us that this was something that was "not on the radar." I believe that was the term that the minister used. I think, actually, it was the Premier who said in August of 2009: "The fact of the matter is: it wasn't on our radar. We didn't engage in any discussions.... I wasn't thinking about it until after the election." That was the Premier's comment on CKNW in early August.

I think that there's some skepticism about that position, but regardless of that, if that is the case, it really does beg the question. Our Finance critic raised this matter in his comments to the budget before. This is the single biggest tax policy change that we have probably seen in this province, oh, maybe in decades.

The suggestion that a government that wants people to believe it is responsible and is acting in a thoughtful way would put this deal on the table without any due diligence, without having done the analysis specific to British Columbia — not looking around for some economist report from Ontario or the U.S. or wherever, an academic report, but had some analyses done as to what this actually means for British Columbia....

To have accepted the deal without having done that work is irresponsible. It's irresponsible in the extreme. It's not good public policy-making, and anybody who sits in this place — any thoughtful person around policy — would tell you that it just makes no sense from a pub-

lic policy point of view to have, in fact, done that and to have acted in such a way. That's the first concern.

What are the impacts of this tax, of this HST? What we know first of all, of course.... The government has told us time and again that the tax is largely revenue-neutral — largely. We now hear maybe it's going to lose a hundred-plus million dollars or something this year, but at the moment it's largely revenue-neutral. So then it becomes a question of a policy decision around a tax shift.

This is a shift of almost \$2 billion from the corporate community — lots of support from the construction sector. Lots of dollars going into the construction sector, but from the corporate community down to consumers and small business people, largely in the service sectors and the service industries, it's a \$1.9 billion shift.

[1730]

Now, what we know is that that's a shift that has shocked people across the province in terms of both the betrayal that people feel from this government for the way it came about — I think that's probably the biggest thing — and then the actual impacts of the tax as well.

We've heard from the restaurant industry. We know that the restaurant industry has suggested that it could cost them upwards of \$750 million a year. Those are their numbers — as much as \$50,000 per restaurant, on average, to the cost of those restaurants. That's why we have such an active campaign.

Hon. Speaker, as you'll know — because you know some of the folks there, as certainly members on the other side will know — the folks who are leading that campaign are people who have always been pretty good allies of the B.C. Liberal Party, and they feel terribly betrayed. It's hard when your friends do you in, and that's exactly what they face.

That's a big sector. As much as the government likes to talk about or throw job creation numbers around, I notice that we don't see the analysis for British Columbia, the empirical studies and analysis that show where those numbers come from. They're just numbers that get flipped around by the government.

But we know there are an awful lot of people who work in the restaurant sector in the province. About 175,000 people or so are working in that sector, and they will be impacted. They will either be impacted by reduced numbers of jobs or, in many cases.... Many of those people, as we know, have pretty modest hourly incomes. They make a good amount of their income off gratuities, and we expect that gratuities will be one of the areas that takes a hit here.

They're not the only sector. My colleague from Vancouver–West End has done a great job of talking about the impacts on tourism. We know that the Council of Tourism Associations of B.C. say that this tax shift could cost upwards of 10,000 tourism-related jobs.

We've heard the government here and we heard the Minister of Finance today in question period — and

we've certainly heard others echoing this in their defence of the HST — talking about the effects of the Olympics on tourism.

[L. Reid in the chair.]

We all know the Olympics was a great event for tourism for the 17 days. We also know, and we've been told many times, that in other jurisdictions to take advantage of that requires a real investment. There may be an opportunity to take advantage of that in terms of having some sustained tourism advantage from this, but it doesn't come by actually putting the boots to your tourism sector. It comes by investing.

We know the budget, in fact, takes away from investments in the tourism sector, and we also know this tax will hammer the tourism sector as well. So right at the time when there should be an investment in making sure we go out and take advantage of whatever residual opportunities there are post-Olympics, we in fact have a budget from the government that will take us in exactly the opposite direction.

The Real Estate Association and others have raised serious concerns about the impacts on new construction, particularly in the greater Vancouver area where prices are challenging enough as it is and where the \$525,000 levels don't necessarily cut it in terms of bringing those prices down. So we're going to see the impact there as well. The apartment rental folks have talked about increased pressures and increased costs that they'll face and how they want to deal with that.

Of course, I met the other day and I know the Ministers of Housing and Social Development and MCFD met today, I believe.... They spoke today to the Federation of Community Social Services associations in British Columbia, and we know that those groups are concerned. They have some exemption from the government, about 57 percent. They're looking for more. They're looking for at least a 75 percent exemption, and at this point they're not getting anywhere in terms of achieving that.

[1735]

That's because, as we know, those agencies almost in their entirety have very, very tight administrative budgets. They're very lean. They do drive their dollars into line services. That's where the money goes, and they simply don't have the extra dollars. That's compounded by extra pressures that are put on them by this budget and other pressures and compounded by the realities they face. I want to talk about that a little bit as part of my critic area.

The social services sector faces probably a three-pronged hit here. First of all, the government is reducing the support that goes to those agencies. I think 2½ percent was the number. What we also know, though, is that we have municipal pension plan contributions that it

doesn't look like are going to be funded. We have issues around the health benefit trust that right now look negative, although I know there are discussions ongoing around that. We have the HST and the impacts of the HST. So the cost pressures on those organizations are significant.

We also know that where many of those organizations look for resources outside of government dollars — with foundations, with private donations — those pots of money are also more challenged than ever. On top of that, you compound that by the reality that what you have are increased demands for the services of many of those organizations because of the very difficult economic times we're facing in our province.

Those agencies are in a big box, and it's a very difficult situation they face. These are the organizations that deliver a significant amount of the services that the people in our communities use — these services to children, to seniors, to families. You name it. They deliver those services, and you have to ask yourself: does it really make sense, from a public policy point of view, for a budget that tries to say it's about children and families to hit these organizations like this? I don't think it makes any sense at all, and the amount of money we're talking about is modest.

I talked to those organizations over there, and they tell me that as they wait, and they're waiting for the next month to six weeks to figure out what this all means.... They're saying they expect the hit on them to be more like closer to 10 percent than 2½ percent by the time we're done. Of course, they don't know what that is.

Part of the difficulty of this budget, as well, is the reality that this budget.... I remember when service plans used to actually give you information. That doesn't seem to occur much anymore in terms of telling you what's actually going on. The budgets are vague. It's very, very difficult for these budgets to be able to determine what the real impacts are on front-line services.

They're having to wait, and they will continue to wait to see what those services mean. But they are telling me that they expect those cuts to be closer to 10 percent, and that's devastating for organizations that provide those kinds of critical services in our communities.

The other source of money for many of those organizations, of course, is the gaming grants. Last February \$156 million was expended on gaming grants, with huge cuts to those grants heading into September.

The government reversed a portion of those — those on three-year contracts. They reversed those. I'm sure it was because somebody in legal, some legal counsel, told them they had a contractual obligation, so I think they brought \$29 million or \$30 million of contractual obligations and put them back on the table. But they continued those cuts. They also moved about \$70 million of core services out of other ministries into the gaming grants, and I'll talk about that in a minute.

We now are in a different place. We're now with about \$120 million of grants available there. So the cut today, from now to a year ago, is probably about \$36 million in cuts. It looks like environment is off the table, about 50 percent of arts and culture, maybe about 10 percent of sports, and we'll have to see what this means in terms of other organizations.

We'll also have to see what it means now that the government has obviously changed the funding formula around what was direct access, which was an annual program, versus bingo affiliation, which was an ongoing program. I know there are many organizations trying to determine what this will all mean for them. They'll start to see that over the next period of time, but there is a lot of uncertainty and a lot of anxiety about what that actually means.

[1740]

You know, the Education Minister, who spoke just prior to me, talked about.... I enjoyed her comments, and she talked about some of the challenges in schools. I guess that raises the issue....

I know the Education Minister is a pretty thoughtful person and a pretty bright person. [Applause.] Absolutely, absolutely. She's had a distinguished career, and she's now here. I guess that's one of the things that's a bit discouraging, though, when I hear the Education Minister, often in question period, get to her feet on these questions around cost pressures. The real issues are what the cost pressures on schools and boards of education are and where those pressures exist and how they exist.

That's not the discussion. The minister gets up and says \$8,000 a kid, whatever the number is, and just kind of rolls out the PAB message box time and again. It would certainly be good to have that discussion and hear the minister talk about what she believes the responsibilities of government are to deal with those cost pressures, and I'll be asking the minister this at some point. I'll get an opportunity, I'm sure, to ask this, but I'll kind of put it on the table now.

We now have CommunityLINK — \$60 million that was in the Ministry of Education in February, out of the Ministry of Education in September. Apparently it's back in the Ministry of Education today. That's an essential program in terms of food and nutrition programs, an essential program in terms of other supports for kids with challenges. The question, of course, is: is that going to get fully funded? Is that in? Is it \$60 million? Is that going to be funded in the same way it was last year?

I talked to people again with some of the agencies. As the minister will know, I'm sure, some of the schools fund direct staff. Some of them they contract out. People are uncertain what this all means for next year. Hopefully, the minister will clear that up for us.

Hon. Speaker, I see that my time is heading up. So what I want to say, I guess, in closing, about the budget is that the budget did not deal with the core issues of how

we create jobs and how we move forward. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the budget, and I look forward to enjoying the rest of the debate.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** It is a pleasure to rise and join the debate on the budget. My contribution, at least today, will be relatively brief as we're nearing adjournment time. But I know that members will listen with rapt attention, particularly those on the other side of the House, as I move through these very few minutes of budget speech.

I want to begin by thanking again my constituents from Shuswap for the opportunity to be a part of this Legislative Assembly and to participate in important parts of the legislative calendar like the budget speech. I am sure that any of my constituents from the Shuswap who deliberately or inadvertently have tuned into the budget speech will have been alternately fascinated and at times puzzled by some of the rhetoric they have heard from the opposition members of the House as they've made their contributions to the budget debate.

It has been a mixture of vitriol occasionally punctuated by unparliamentary language. It has been a debate where I've heard many things, but one of the things I have not heard to date — and perhaps I'm just being premature in my expectations — is a vision from the opposition about the kind of future that they would like to build for the province of British Columbia.

I suspect that it is difficult to articulate a cohesive vision when there are a variety of views that might come to bear within the opposition caucus. Unfortunately, that absence of vision is compensated for by frequently inflammatory rhetoric, which again, I think, tends to colour the debate that we have here.

[1745]

As an example, if members of the public had tuned in a year or two years ago, they would have heard much criticism of the pending Olympics. They would have heard great skepticism and sometimes overt criticism of the 2010 Olympics and Paralympics, but it has been a huge success, as you know, Madam Speaker. Now the opposition is squarely on side with the 2010 Olympics and basking in the reflected glory that comes from the successful games.

As well, as recently as a year ago and even during the election campaign of 2009, one would have heard from the NDP opposition great, strident moaning about the carbon levy. As I recall from my opponent in the provincial election, the carbon levy was something that was going to bring an end to life on this planet as we knew it. It was going to destroy all that was good in this province. The carbon levy was a terrible thing.

They went so far as to hold rallies outside gas stations. Sometimes up to a dozen people attended those rallies outside gas stations in populous places like Surrey and Salmon Arm to gather opposition to the carbon tax. Yet

remarkably, in the wake of the 2009 election, the NDP suddenly got religion, I think, on carbon tax or carbon levy.

Apparently they're now on side, although I've not heard that articulated on the floor of this House. It is something that I expect very soon to hear articulated on the floor of the House — how the carbon levy is now a very good thing from the opposition's perspective and how they've now taken on that as part of the mass religion among New Democrats.

What we will also be hearing — and this will be the predominant theme, I suspect, of the opposition's contributions to this budget debate — will be how the harmonized sales tax will bring an end to life as we know it in the province of British Columbia. That we will hear over and over again.

I know that the opposition leader and, I'm sure, many members of her caucus will be making their way across many corners of British Columbia in the fight against the harmonized sales tax. Again, I've heard that crowds of up to a dozen people have assembled deliberately or inadvertently in places like Kamloops to condemn the harmonized sales tax.

I think that if one looks at what is being proposed, the harmonized sales tax does mean the elimination of the provincial sales tax and the merging of that provincial sales tax with the federal goods and services tax. That's what's going to occur.

British Columbia and Ontario will become the fifth and sixth jurisdictions in the nation of Canada to become a part of the harmonized sales tax with the federal government. One might ask: why are Ontario and British Columbia and, previously, four other provinces a part of a harmonized sales tax?

First of all, it will ensure that British Columbia products remain competitive nationally. Again, I know that the members of the opposition disagree with this point, but the fact of the matter is this. If our manufacturers in British Columbia faced a 7 percent penalty in relation to manufacturers in Ontario, it would make it extraordinarily difficult for our products to be competitive with those of Ontario.

Similarly, a harmonized sales tax — or a value-added tax, as it's typically referred to — will make British Columbia's products more competitive internationally, and that again is hugely important. I know that the members across the way, as they condemn value-added taxes, at least for the moment....

[1750]

I'm going to be arguing soon here that in fact we will see again one of these remarkable reversals in the years ahead from the NDP. I think there will be very good reasons for that reversal by the NDP as they become supporters of value-added tax, and that is that British Columbia, Ontario and the other provinces in Canada that are adopting an HST or value-added tax join some

130 other nations across the world that have value-added tax versus retail sales tax.

Again, there's a reason why virtually every nation across the world has adopted the value-added sales tax. It's to keep their products competitive and try to ensure that their industries are competitive nationally and internationally. They don't have a penalty against the bottom line that is currently in the form, in British Columbia, of a retail sales tax we call the provincial sales tax.

So I guess the question one should address to the opposition is: why should we care whether British Columbia's industry is competitive? Well, there are many reasons for that. Most importantly, industry provides many, many jobs. Over two million jobs in the province of British Columbia come through the industry and the services that we have.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

If our industries become uncompetitive because of uncompetitive taxes, then jobs will be constantly in jeopardy, Madam.... Mr. Speaker. Pardon me.

There's been a shift here, which often signals an interest on the part of the Chair to see us depart for the weekend. So I'll try to bring this portion of my remarks to a conclusion expeditiously.

It is important to have competitive industries in British Columbia because of jobs, because of investment. We need investment in this province. I know the corporate capital tax was one of the high points for socialist opposition in the province. For everyone else, it was just an investment-killer, and we never want to see those days return.

It's important to have competitive industry because of the taxes that are generated to governments in British Columbia, Canada, municipally and so on as a consequence of the industries themselves as well as the jobs that are produced by these industries. Without taxes, it is extraordinarily difficult for governments to provide the services that are so important to our constituents in British Columbia.

I know there's a thesis emerging here, and I know that many members of the House have been listening with rapt attention to see the full flowering of that thesis. But I do note that the hour brings us very close to 6 p.m., and I know there is an interest by some in catching flights home and the like.

Interjections.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** No, just keep going?

They're just kidding, I think, Mr. Speaker. So I reserve my place in this debate and look forward to returning to this debate when the House sits again.

Hon. G. Abbott moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Abbott moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

**Mr. Speaker:** This House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. Monday morning.

The House adjourned at 5:54 p.m.

## HANSARD SERVICES

Director  
Jo-Anne Kern

Manager of Print Production  
Robert Sutherland

Post-Production Team Leader  
Christine Fedoruk

Editorial Team Leaders  
Laurel Bernard, Janet Brazier, Robyn Swanson

Senior Editor — Galleys  
Heather Bright

Technical Operations Officers  
Pamela Holmes, Emily Jacques, Dan Kerr

Indexers  
Shannon Ash, Julie McClung, Robin Rohrmoser

Researchers  
Jaime Apolonio, Mike Beninger

Editors  
Anton Baer, Aaron Ellingsen, Deirdre Gotto, Margaret Gracie,  
Jane Grainger, Betsy Gray, Iris Gray, Linda Guy, Barb Horricks,  
Bill Hrick, Paula Lee, Nicole Lindsay, Donna McCloskey,  
Bob McIntosh, Anne Maclean, Constance Maskery, Jill Milkert,  
Lind Miller, Lou Mitchell, Karol Morris, Dorothy Pearson,  
Erik Pedersen, Peggy Pedersen, Janet Pink, Amy Reiswig,  
Heather Warren, Arlene Wells, Glenn Wigmore

---

Published by British Columbia Hansard Services,  
and printed under the authority of the Speaker.

Printing Agent  
Crown Publications, Queen's Printer for British Columbia  
563 Superior St., Victoria, B.C. V8W 9V7  
Toll-Free: 1-800-663-6105 Telephone: (250) 387-6409  
Fax: (250) 387-1120 E-mail: crown@crownpub.bc.ca

Rates  
Single issue, \$2.85; per calendar year, mailed daily, \$396. GST extra.

---

[www.leg.bc.ca](http://www.leg.bc.ca)

Hansard Services publishes transcripts both in print and on the Internet.  
Chamber debates are broadcast on television and webcast on the Internet.  
Question Period podcasts are available on the Internet.