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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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SECOND SESSION, 39TH PARLIAMENT

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THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2010

The House met at 10:02 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. Coell: Continued debate on the budget.

Budget Debate

(continued)

Mr. Speaker: Member for West Vancouver–Sea to Sky.
[Applause.]

J. McIntyre: Thank you.

An Hon. Member: We've been breathless all night with anticipation.

J. McIntyre: I see that the opposition didn't rush back to hear my continuing speech. I'm feeling very sad. But with that, I will continue.

As we were concluding debate last evening, I had made and spoke to four areas that I think actually spoke to me personally — highlights of the budget. I'll just review very quickly.

[C. Trevena in the chair.]

They were: the continuing substantial increases for health care, which is now over \$2 billion since '09-10 alone and will now bring us up to almost \$18 billion in the next three years; the added support for children and families, which again, as I said, was important to me, certainly as a mother and in my role as the Chair of the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth; also, the new legacies for arts and sports, because I think we obviously want to build on the phenomenal success of the 2010 games; and then, of course, the renewed leadership on clean technology which, of course, is becoming very competitive and which will help us carry our economic agenda forward.

I spoke about health, and I will move on now to the added supports for children and families. It's especially important because this is really directed to low- and moderate-income parents. There's an additional \$26 million that's been allocated for child care subsidies, which offsets the costs for about 28,000 children in this province every month.

There's an additional \$22 million for full-time kindergarten in 2012, the third year of our budget cycle, to support this implementation, and we are, of course, still

committed to work with partners to open preschools for three- and four-year-olds over the next five years.

[1005]

We'd like to transform more schools into neighbourhood learning centres to serve communities more broadly and efficiently, using our public assets and capitalizing on the successes we've had to date. And there's a new extended family program in the Ministry of Children and Family Development, which represents an improvement on the previous Child in the Home of a Relative. It will be, going forward, more tailored to individual children in need, and they'll be adding more meaningful supports where warranted.

Of course, we have over time, over the last number of years, been adding financial supports through rental supplements to help people who need a hand up to stay in place. In fact, I can give you an example right on the ground in my constituency. One of the physical legacies of the 2010 games is a new affordable residential housing development called Cheakamus Crossing, which will be transformed from the Whistler athletes village post-2010.

This budget provides new opportunities, which seniors 55 years and over have been enjoying recently, that will allow homeowners with children under 18 years to defer their property taxes. They must have a minimum of 15 percent equity in their home, but they will pay the interest right at prime rate. I caution people. You have to think about whether this option is suitable for you at your stage and at your financial situation, but we are expanding options, especially for those undergoing tough times right now.

On to the arts and sports legacies. I think, as I said earlier, it's very, very important to capitalize on the biggest sporting event in British Columbia's history and to capitalize on the accompanying Cultural Olympiad, where we've been showcasing Canadian talent and diversity as well as our First Nations heritage. In this budget there's been \$10 million allocated for each of arts and sports for the next three years, totalling \$60 million.

This funding is particularly directed to youth sports, and some of the aspects that are under consideration that I think are very important are enhanced after-school programs, moneys for coaching development and looking at expanding KidSport, which is near and dear to my heart. I've been working with the folks up in Squamish to help that community adopt that, where children who are a little bit disadvantaged economically will have their registration paid for, for organized sports. I think it's a great program.

There's a sport-on-the-move program that we are looking at, possibly, to help school teams defray travel costs and looking also at expanding sports academies. Those are the kinds of things that could be considered for the \$10 million this year.

All told, the sports funding in this year alone is coming up to \$50 million. It's \$47.7 million — ActNow, \$14.8 million; through the gaming grants, \$22.9 million; and then, of course, this \$10 million new legacy.

Paralleling that, the arts funding that we're allocating is designed particularly to enhance participation across British Columbia. There'll be emphasis on aspects such as regional events and local incentives, perhaps, for mentors and interns that will help get people employment in the arts field. Also, they're looking at the possibility of new arts "incubators" that might help commercialize new innovations, and I think those might be applicable to things like digital and new technology in the arts.

All told, the arts funding is coming up close to \$50 million, with \$24.6 million through the ministry, \$11.5 million allocated through gaming and then again this \$10 million legacy. That's something significant that I was very glad we were able to find in the budget this year.

Lastly, the fourth point was the clean technology. I think it's very, very important that B.C. maintain our leadership on climate change. We're dedicating \$100 million — a huge amount of money — to climate action and clean energy development that will support new jobs and investment in local communities at the same time as lowering our GHG emissions. This is an industry that already employs 18,000 people in this province and contributes more than \$2 billion to our economy, and that's significant.

This \$100 million over the next three years is to be spent on things like transportation infrastructure, development of biofuels from wood waste, research and development on green power technology — things like wind, solar, geothermal and tidal — because we aim to be a green energy powerhouse.

I just wanted to read a brief quote here from Paul Kariya, the new executive director of the Independent Power Producers Association of B.C., who said the \$100 million announcement was "welcome news." He said: "This is about the economy and jobs, and we see that. It's clear that B.C. is preparing to power out of the recession and keep our spot as a global leader and innovator."

[1010]

I am very happy to report that the potential for these kinds of green power projects all exists in the constituency that I have the honour of representing. I have some great examples. The hydrogen highway basically runs right through the Sea to Sky corridor. Whistler now has the biggest fleet of hydrogen buses — 20 buses — in all of North America.

There are independent power projects being developed. One of the most recent ones, and very successful, is the one that Whistler-Blackcomb built on Fittsimmons Creek. They invested over \$30 million to generate energy to power their operations, and any surplus will, of course, go onto the grid. They're excellent examples of what we can do.

Another investment under the clean technology heading, which I'm delighted to report, is the additional \$35 million that we're investing in the successful LiveSmart program for household energy audits and retrofits for

things like energy-efficient appliances. That program was so successful that the \$60 million we allocated a short while ago was taken up in the first 18 months, and I'm very glad that we've been able to find extra dollars to continue that program.

Again, just a last point on this topic. Just two days ago the Minister of Small Business, Technology and Economic Development announced that nine of the top-ten-valued major construction projects in British Columbia all focus on clean energy.

These are just some of the highlights for me. There's obviously very much to report on a high-level perspective, and much has already been noted by many of my colleagues, including my seatmate here from West Vancouver-Capilano.

Suffice it to say, this budget keeps us on course to get us out of debt on a manageable track, but at the same time it still continues to stimulate economic growth. A strong economy is still the underpinning and still critical to support our social programs.

To that end, many commentators and pundits have acknowledged that B.C. is well positioned to attract investment in jobs. Our move to HST is a pillar in that framework, as it effectively lowers the taxes on new investment in this province by 40 percent. That is absolutely huge, and I would also like to read what the Investment Industry Association of Canada said about this aspect on budget day.

Ian Russell, their president and CEO, commented: "With the lower corporate tax rate and implementation of the HST, B.C. will have one of the most attractive business tax regimes in Canada, laying the foundation for future investment and growth. The expansion of the international financial activity program will be a catalyst to attract offshore business." Again, another endorsement in the long list of endorsements.

Now I'd like to turn to some of the observations on the many achievements and legacies for the West Vancouver-Sea to Sky constituency. Now that we've finally arrived at 2010 games time.

There have been many elected officials, their staff, businesses and residents who have been planning for most of this event for the past decade. We knew there would be a brilliant spotlight on the Sea to Sky region that's nestled between Vancouver and Whistler as the heart of 2010.

I'd like to start with the improved infrastructure. We are the fortunate beneficiaries of so many enduring legacies. It's almost, I have to say, an embarrassment of riches. As a tradition in my speeches, I would like to start by happily acknowledging the \$600 million safety upgrade on the Sea to Sky Highway that links most of the communities that I have the honour to represent.

I've had virtually nothing but compliments on the physical improvements and the new spectacular viewscapes, particularly the breathtaking view at the Eagle

Ridge interchange. The Minister of Transportation mentioned a couple days ago in her speech that families, travellers and commercial vehicles will see the accident rate decrease significantly on what was unfortunately a very notorious highway in B.C. That said, I continue to ask all drivers to please pay attention to the road conditions and the weather and to drive safely and responsibly.

The highway performed well during the 2010 games, I think, much to absolutely everyone's relief. Now that the yellow sticks are mostly removed, we will get on with returning to normal and finally get to enjoy the drive. I would like to thank all of the constituents, visitors, travellers and businesses for their patience and perseverance during the safety upgrade, but we have a magnificent outcome.

During the games we actually managed to get thousands of people out of their cars who commute from Squamish and Pemberton to Whistler. The challenge going forward will be for our communities to work with B.C. Transit to see how we can increase service on a permanent basis, and I'm glad to support any efforts in that direction. It's a high priority.

Another legacy — the sporting venues. We are so fortunate to have lasting benefits from the improvements to Cypress Mountain and to Whistler-Blackcomb, including the sliding centre, and from the creation of a brand-new Nordic park, the Whistler Olympic Park with three stadia designed for ski jump, biathlon and cross-country in the Callaghan Valley south of Whistler.

[1015]

I'm happy to say that those facilities will be used during the Paralympic Games, which begin this weekend. It is just a spectacular venue, and the world will get another chance to see it in action.

The resort municipality of Whistler estimates that they have over 20 legacies — including the athletes village that I just mentioned, which will be transformed into affordable residential housing. Many of the hundreds of units are already sold, so workers can actually afford to live in this international resort community, taking pressure off some of the local families. They will also have the Medals Plaza that will be greened over following the end of the Paralympics, and it will be turned into a permanent three-level gathering place for entertainment.

On the health front we also have legacies and provincial investment to be proud of in the Sea to Sky corridor: a new CT scanner facility in Whistler due to the generosity of General Electric, one of the 2010 corporate sponsors, and also due to the generosity of all the residents who have been fundraising for years, as well as provincial dollars. It's the same for the improvements to the Squamish hospital emergency department as well as Hilltop House for seniors adjacent to the hospital.

I'm sad to report that Dr. LaVerne Kindree, who was one of the icons in the community of Squamish, unfortunately passed away this year just before the grand

opening of both those facilities. He was absolutely an integral part to their success, and we all honour his contribution.

We have legacies in post-secondary education, as we now have Quest University, a fabulous facility with the most spectacular view up in Squamish, and Capilano University. We've been working hard on looking at their expansion in the downtown of Squamish.

We have new amenities for families, capital improvements for child care in Mount Currie, Pemberton and Squamish, which is now a hub for early childhood services. There's 24-7 funding for Pearl's Place transition housing and 24-7 funding now for the homeless shelter. Unfortunately, we have to have facilities like that in our society, but at least I'm very delighted that we can be providing help to the most vulnerable in society.

We have infrastructure grants from the combination of the federal, provincial and municipal grants that have been done as we've been trying to get people back to work. We have a huge range of those. They're not all the exciting projects, because they're for diking and sewer and water treatment, but we've also been contributing to trails and park upgrades and the new soccer and playing fields in West Van that will be now turf fields.

In addition to some of these infrastructure upgrades, we've also got increased opportunities for economic development. It's all linked, and the obvious starting point, certainly in my corridor, is tourism. Of course, by hosting the 2010 games, we just had the biggest advertisement for our region that anybody could ever have, with three billion viewers seeing us in some of the most perfect weather conditions.

We've had the sporting venues — I mentioned them earlier — and they will of course provide ongoing economic benefits as we have opportunities to host World Cup events and other events, going forward. That ranges all the way from Cypress in West Van to Whistler. We have the Railway Heritage Park and conference centre in Squamish, which is almost finished — again a great partnership between the provincial government, CN and a private donor. That will be up and running soon.

We have the Britannia mining museum, all the improvements that we've done to the concentrator building — again, a partnership with the mining industry and levels of government and private sector. Significant park upgrades, as I mentioned.

We have Open Skies that we've been working on, which will bring more tourists and visitors to the region. During the games, actually, I had the wonderful opportunity... As part of our business hosting program, we did a showcase for Pemberton and Squamish to highlight the diversity of the corridor and invited potential investors into the region to take a good and close look at what we're offering.

Of course, we also have cultural legacies — the music festivals, the art events that have received a boost during

the Cultural Olympiad, live site events, the free events at Whistler's Medals Plaza every night and the things going on in the Spirit Square in West Vancouver on a daily basis. We've had the wonderful opportunity to showcase local talent, and all of those will be legacies.

One of the most important legacies — and I've spoken about this a number of times in the House — is the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre in Whistler, which again was a partnership with the private sector, government and First Nations. It's a magnet for cultural tourism, particularly aboriginal, which is the fastest-growing part of tourism in the world. It instils pride and offers employment opportunities and a venue for hosting events for others. So it will be a magnificent legacy.

One of my poignant moments during the torch relay was a candlelight ceremony at the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre, where one Squamish youth handed the torch over to one Lillooet youth. It was a very, very poignant moment and spoke much about the benefits going forward.

That leads me to what for me, I think, is one of the most significant legacies over this whole decade and certainly during my five years as MLA. It is the growing recognition of the positive role of First Nations in this province and most certainly in West Vancouver–Sea to Sky.

[1020]

When Squamish and Lil'wat, which then became part of Four Host First Nations, gave their support of the 2010 bid, it was absolutely instrumental in being awarded the games. We have a direct number of legacies from that for both these nations. They received land for the accommodation they gave in doing the safety upgrade to the Sea to Sky Highway. They received some legacy lands in the resort municipality of Whistler.

Both nations had a significant role, along with the InSHUCK-ch, in the finishing off of the LRMP, the land and resource management plan, where we created Wild Spirit Places, conservancies and also areas for economic development for First Nations — the cultural centre that I just mentioned.

They've had a number of economic opportunities. Apprenticeships on the highway upgrade and in the forest. The asphalt plant that was just south of Mount Currie. The construction company that created a number of the venues in the Callaghan valley. In fact, I did report to the House a week or so ago that there were \$60 million of VANOC contracts to First Nations.

Also, First Nations have opportunity now in community forests. We have the first 25-year tenure, which is an equal partnership between the Squamish and the Lil'wat nations and the resort municipality of Whistler. That offers fabulous opportunities, going forward.

Also, First Nations are active partners in some of the green power development in the corridor. They are a partner in the Ashlu green power project, and the Squamish

Nation also recently, a few years ago, purchased a TFL, a tree forest licence, in the upper Squamish valley.

This list goes on about.... I have seen and have been blessed to see the benefits of giving First Nations economic development, to see their younger people engaged. For them, I know, since over half the population of First Nations is under the age of 25 years, this is all about the next generation, doing what we can do now to make sure that First Nations youth have every opportunity that we've been blessed with.

Out of these programs, we see the Squamish Nation has a youth ambassador program. Both Lil'wat and Squamish have been working with First Nations snowboard team. They have had work opportunities at the cultural centre, the apprenticeships I mentioned a few minutes ago. I think the participation in the torch relay.... There was a lot of youth in it.

I was both at Totem Hall in Squamish and the Joe Mathias Centre in North Van. To see everybody and see the First Nations youth in the red mittens and cheering on Canada and cheering on their own people as they embraced the importance of the Olympic ideals was an absolutely wonderful, wonderful.... The poignant moments for me.

John Furlong, in his closing ceremonies, was alluding to, I think, quite a famous quote now about the Canada that was and the Canada that now is. I think it really says everything about the impact of 2010 on us as a nation but certainly on our relations with First Nations.

One more thing about the First Nations and the direct legacy of the 2010 games is the Four Host First Nations aboriginal pavilion that was in downtown Vancouver, which I hope you all got to see. It had the theme "We Are Here." I know that the Governor General visited, amongst others.

Almost a quarter of a million people — 242,000 visitors — went through that pavilion, and I think it shattered even the highest expectations of their CEO, Tewanee Joseph, who I also have to tell you plays in a band called Bitterly Divine. They're great, and they have a CD out now. He's a multitalented individual. But he had hoped the province would be the site of the world's biggest potlatch, and in fact, I think they totally succeeded.

Our First Nations were showcased in a global spotlight, with stories and broadcasts going around the world daily talking about their sense of pride and accomplishment and their inclusion. They've had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to educate British Columbians, Canadians and the world about who they are and, I think, most importantly, where they are going.

The aboriginal artists, who included Squamish First Nations' exceptional artists Pam Baker and Rick Harry, took part in the Artisan Village and Business Showcase that was at VCC — again, just by the pavilion where, apparently, 85,000 visitors went through there. I was one of those, and I got to see Pam Baker's fashion show on

evening wear. It's just spectacular. We have so much talent.

Tewanee Joseph had reported that the games brought in \$160 million in direct benefit to aboriginal groups across Canada, and I think: "What could be better?"

As I conclude my comments today, let me emphasize what a privilege it is to serve the people of this spectacular riding that I think rose to the occasion on absolutely every level and revealed to the world all of our super, natural landscape; our physical and human resources; and talents in hosting an international event as significant as the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

[1025]

We are inspired by the values of the Olympic Games, the noble goal of sustainability, and we celebrate the diversity of cultures and our First Nations heritage. We are incredibly blessed in British Columbia and in this region, and we need to keep our economy strong so that generations behind us can experience and take advantage of all that we've achieved. I believe that this budget is yet another step on the course.

V. Huntington: I am pleased to rise on behalf of my constituents in Delta South to speak in response to the 2010-11 budget and to the direction the government has carved out for the coming year.

I've listened with a great deal of interest to the comments of other members in this House and must say that I cannot help but wonder if the government and the official opposition are actually referring to the same document. As usual, the debate is one of extremes, as seems to be the persistent and distressing case in this place. Either the budget gets everything right and reflects the government's startling wisdom, or it's a financial boondoggle and reflects the government's malice and ineptitude.

Would the world tilt in times as critical as these if we actually tried to seek the truth about our predicament? Would it stop turning if we found the maturity in this chamber to stop pretending that government makes only enlightened decisions, that every policy pronouncement is in the best interests of the public and that it's only this administration that is fit to oversee the provincial economy?

Or would our world stand still if we stop pretending that every government decision is a poor one, that every policy actively seeks the ruin of ordinary citizens in order to benefit a few insiders and that cabinet isn't fit to run a lemonade stand, let alone the economy?

Over the last 20 years both the parties in this House have served as government and as opposition. Both have delivered budgets. Both have criticized budgets. And in the irony that so often accompanies so much of politics today, both parties use precisely the same language to justify their spending decisions.

On budget day we heard how the government has had to make difficult decisions in allocating funds in

these tough economic times. We listened ad nauseam as the government prattled on about protecting core services in health and education, investment in job creating and construction projects, positioning British Columbia for renewed growth and prosperity, and setting the foundation for the province we want for generations to come.

But listen, as well, to these quotes: "We've had difficult choices to make." "We are protecting health care, education and job creation," and "We are establishing a solid foundation for our future" and anticipate "improvement in the economy in this year and next." Who made those statements? It was the Finance Minister, all right — the NDP Finance Minister Andrew Petter in April 1997.

It's curious, isn't it? Two main political parties, two governments, each thinking it is best equipped to lead the province, each believing the other is simply not up to the task, but each displaying such a strikingly similar approach to their budgets that we can only conclude that both sides of this House desire fundamentally the same thing for British Columbians.

Both sides want jobs, economic growth, quality health care, a strong education system and a functioning social safety net, and I can assure you that this independent member wants no less. While we may disagree on how best to achieve our common goals, at the end of the day, we all share those same basic values.

I point this out for one important reason. I believe that the rhetoric flying across this aisle, the sheer vitriol, is distracting us from the much larger, more compelling issues that face our province and our country. There are storm clouds gathering on our horizon, but as the sky darkens, I believe this budget and the throne speech that preceded it will not shelter us from the coming deluge.

At one time we could count on the fact that our population was relatively young and growing quickly. During this time our cities expanded and various levels of government built the infrastructure crucial to sustain an expanding population and economy, but our population and built environments are aging rapidly.

[1030]

As we know, the first wave of the Canadian baby boom will reach age 65 in the next year or two. Over the next two decades seven million Canadians will reach retirement age, becoming service-using seniors instead of taxpaying workers.

In my riding of Delta South we're already witnessing the greying of the population, with the concomitant decline in children and young adults. Our cities face similar troubles. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities estimates that it will cost Canadian communities \$123 billion to upgrade and replace aging infrastructure. We can add to that all the other costs — the cost of health care, which increases exponentially as persons age, and the cost of carrying the government's debt, just to name two.

My point is this. At a time when we face ever-higher costs, our ability to pay is dwindling rapidly. We have become accustomed to a certain quality of life and to a level of service provided by government, but is it sustainable? Governments pin their hopes on ever-expanding economic growth, but are they chasing rainbows instead of noticing the looming storm clouds?

I think the government recognizes there's some kind of problem, but with this budget it is only treating the symptoms and not addressing the underlying condition. This government gave the people of British Columbia a speech about Olympic afterglow, some purposely confusing numbers to hide funding cuts and a pathetic attempt to sanitize the HST by linking it to health care spending. But what the public deserves is an honest and meaningful dialogue about the reality of our future and how it will unfold.

Things are changing, whether we want them to or not, and the question is whether 25 people at a cabinet table decide on those changes or whether the general public will participate in determining the face of our future. I remind the members: my presence here is a testament to what will happen if government continues to shut the people out of the process.

Without engagement, we will see more of what this budget represents. Instead of a slow and measured reduction in government support systems, we will experience the ravages of a flash flood. Decades of rising expectations are suddenly being replaced by job losses, school closures, mortgage failures, rising taxes, surgical delays, frightening retirements and degraded old age. Confidence is being replaced by confusion, anger, suspicion, fear and blame. It is a recipe for social disaster.

With uncontrolled and unexpected change, people become frightened and retreat, and communal values can be abandoned. Individuals and governments alike tend to look after their own interests first and the interests of those closest to them. Already our governments have shown how they are marauding for new sources of revenue to fill the vacuum left not only by the withering of our traditional income tax base but also by a corporate tax base hit hard by globalization and the redistribution of the wealth of industrialized nations to the Third World.

When the government's desperate support for any activity that generates revenues turns into a blind support for a corporate agenda, we are well on our way to a collision of fundamental values.

As a people, we have the mutual desire to protect the commons, our environment, our quality of life and our democratic institutions. We expect government to do everything it can to preserve those values. But the magnitude of the shifting relationship between ourselves and our government is uncovering that dangerous undercurrent that lurks in all rulers: righteousness; autocratic pronouncements and a move to oligarchy where corpor-

ate influence puts at risk our land, our fish, our wildlife, our water; where propaganda replaces truth and hiding the realities of a budget becomes the order of the day.

I don't want government to unilaterally invade municipal jurisdictions to satisfy developers. I don't want government to unilaterally decide that a fundamental element of Canadian federation — equalization payments — doesn't work for B.C. I don't want government to secretly request the dismantling of old and honourable legislation like the Navigable Waters Protection Act just to smooth the way for industrial development.

[1035]

I don't want government to unilaterally determine that container storage is more important than the best agricultural land in the world. I don't want government to unilaterally decide that we need quick and dirty environmental approvals to speed up construction, that we can fill pristine lakes with tailings and pretend we mitigated the devastation or let sea lice kill our wild fish while the guilty party gloats to shareholders that the reduced supply of salmon is increasing the price of their farmed product.

What I do want is my government to have the wisdom to understand the social revolution that is occurring and the leadership necessary to guide this province through the difficult times ahead, to work with the people of this great province to ensure that the compassion central to our society does not waste away. I want a government that will do everything in its power to restore balance to its economic decision-making and preserve our understanding and belief in how democracy ought to function.

I offer the words of Robert F. Kennedy on balancing the economy with the quality of life.

"The gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither wit nor courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile."

As a fiscal conservative, I understand that we cannot continue to spend as if the world wasn't changing. I also understand, bolstered by the support of my community, that balancing budgets cannot come at the expense of our physical, social and cultural environments.

Sadly, the budget we speak to today underscores one thing only: the government does not yet understand what is needed from our leaders. The self-righteous style of government, the swagger, the unilateral decisions, the propaganda and half-truths — these are breeding grounds for unrest.

You may think it is an insignificant matter, but when you tell the people of Delta South that the protection of injured raptors is not a priority but that building transmission lines in their backyards is, you diminish our

community. And when you use specious arguments to defend your cuts, you insult our intelligence.

This budget fails us all, not merely by cutting gaming grants or playing silly shell games with reduced funding or dipping into income streams never intended for general revenue but by breaking bond with the people who sent us here. I understand that members constrained by their leaders and their Whips don't have the freedom to say what they truly believe and what they hear from their constituents. But I do have that freedom, and with it comes a humbling responsibility.

This is a time when we need bold and determined and dedicated governance. We must protect our values and institutions in the face of a social unrest and change so significant that the quality of life we have known will become a thing of the past.

Lest I leave this debate without offering a suggestion that could start this so badly needed dialogue with the people, let me propose to members of this House the following: that government activate a special and non-partisan committee of this House mandated to explore our new reality, that it define the issues facing the people of this land, that it develop a relevant and meaningful list of questions, and that it consider how best the members of this place can engage the people, how we can really listen to them, and how we can begin to act as the public servants we are in the most important discussion of our generation.

H. Bains: I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

H. Bains: In the House is a very prominent member of the Indo-Canadian community — a longtime friend and very successful businessman visiting us here today: Mr. Hardev Bal. Please help me welcome him to this great House.

Debate Continued

J. van Dongen: I'm pleased today to speak to the new budget tabled last week by the Minister of Finance. Despite the loss of \$3 billion in annual revenue caused by the global economic downturn, our province continues to support the key services British Columbians depend on, including health care, education and a variety of other social services.

[1040]

Over the past year and over the past decade our government has worked diligently at creating a province that continues to show growth and prosperity. It was just yesterday we learned that my community of Abbotsford has been named by *B.C. Business* as one of the five hot

pockets to watch for and invest in for 2010. I believe that we have our government to thank in part for this success. But no doubt Abbotsford's success is also due to our vibrant agriculture and agribusiness sector as well as our airport, our university, our new hospital and cancer centre.

The B.C. government has recognized that our city is growing rapidly and has invested millions in infrastructure projects that help our economy, our citizens and our business community. Our hospital has been replaced, an additional runway at YXX is being added, a new university has been established, and we are building two new Highway 1 freeway interchanges.

Budget 2010 lays out ways to make life better for all British Columbians. Job creation, more affordable housing and more support for children will continue to make our communities stronger and more livable.

As I rise to speak in response to Budget 2010, I would like to focus particularly on health care, education, families, infrastructure partnerships and the economy. But first a few observations about the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics.

The 2010 Winter Olympics was really our time to shine, to host the world and to show how hard our province has worked to create a lasting legacy. When I say "our time to shine," I mean it on a big scale. Three and a half billion worldwide television viewers are estimated to have tuned in to the games.

It's important to realize that every shot showed beautiful British Columbia. That's 47 percent more global television coverage of the Vancouver 2010 Games than for the Torino 2006 Olympic Winter Games, and it represents approximately 24,000 hours of coverage — coverage that even the largest marketing budget in the world couldn't buy. In every medals ceremony photos were taken of the medal winners with the words "Vancouver 2010" shown in the background.

On a number of occasions I visited Robson Square and the Richmond Olympic activity centre. I travelled on the West Coast Express, the SkyTrain and the Canada Line. Whether it was on transit, in the street or in the variety of incredible venues, British Columbia and Canada hit an Olympic home run.

Everyone around me was animated and excited. The air literally had electricity buzzing in it. I was impressed by the attention to detail displayed by the Olympic organizers, and I believe that John Furlong should be singled out for his outstanding leadership and the sense of purpose that he brought to the delivery of the Olympic Games.

On behalf of my constituents and the people of Abbotsford, I want to thank and congratulate John Furlong as well as the massive number of staff and volunteers for creating a legacy for everyone to enjoy. The volunteers in their distinctive blue jackets were incredible, as were our police officers from all over Canada

that assisted the RCMP and the Vancouver police department.

We are only two days away from the opening of the 2010 Paralympic Winter Games, and I'm confident that these games will also see the same level of success that the Olympic Games had.

I'd now like to talk about health care, the single most important service that we have as citizens. We are fortunate to have some of the best doctors and nurses and health care system in the world. Technology in our hospitals is up to date, and British Columbians have access to the latest in medical services.

[1045]

Our government continues to have a compelling priority to protect and enhance core services in health care, and we see this in Budget 2010. In fact, our health care services will get the largest increase in spending over everything else laid out in the budget: new funding of \$447 million plus the total budget increase on health care of over \$2 billion over the next three years.

Health care in our province will get 42 percent of all government spending. That is a huge amount of taxpayers' money — \$17.9 billion. But what do these numbers really mean — \$17.9 billion? It's a lot of dollars but difficult to comprehend.

Last year alone our budget covered more than 100,000 MRI scans and 459,000 CT scans in this province. We added thousands of beds for seniors in residential care, assisted living and supportive housing communities. An additional 1,743 beds were made available in the Fraser Health Authority alone. This budget is putting more than \$1 billion towards acute care services, like community, assisted-living and residential services as well as mental health and addictions services.

We're putting more dollars — \$514 million, to be exact — into the Medical Services Plan to fund increased volumes of visits to family physicians, specialists and laboratory services as well as into the recruitment and retention of specialists and family physicians, particularly in rural and remote communities.

I think we often take for granted the access to drugs that might help us live better lives. The province is allocating an additional \$145 million — that's more money — towards Pharmacare to cover increases in those services.

Last August the Abbotsford Regional Hospital and Cancer Centre celebrated its one-year anniversary. It is a state-of-the-art facility that serves more than 330,000 people in the Fraser Valley. It is clear that the province is improving patient care and giving those with diseases like cancer a chance at getting treatment closer to home. In cancer, as in a number of other diseases, British Columbia's outcomes are better than anywhere else in North America.

It is also clear that our community is benefiting from this modern, well-designed hospital with expanded ser-

vices that attracts doctors and specialists from all over the world. In 2008-2009 alone the Abbotsford Regional Hospital experienced more than 50,000 visits to the emergency department, a major increase from visits to the old MSA Hospital. More than 4,000 people were in-patients, and 130,000 people were treated at out-patient clinics. Best of all, over 5,000 patients received dialysis treatments close to home, a life-saver in itself.

Health care will continue to improve in British Columbia as it helps get nurses into the workforce sooner. To do this, the province launched an accelerated three-year bachelor of science in nursing program at the University of the Fraser Valley.

Our government is also supporting palliative care for children most in need through a \$2.6 million grant to Canuck Place children's hospice. Canuck Place provides care to more than 375 children with life-threatening illnesses, and their families, throughout British Columbia.

And now three organizations — Canuck Place; Abbotsford Hospice Society; and Matthew's House, operated by Communitas, formerly known as the Mennonite Central Committee — have signed a memorandum of understanding to build a campus of care that will provide new programs and services for residents of the Fraser Valley.

This campus of care will be located adjacent to the new Abbotsford Regional Hospital and Cancer Centre. The lands are owned by local government, who have agreed to lease the lands for the development of the campus of care.

[1050]

On this campus Canuck Place, Abbotsford Hospice Society and Matthew's House will each build separate facilities and provide services in their specialized areas. Canuck Place intends to build a children's hospice that will serve children with life-threatening illnesses, and their families, from all regions of British Columbia. We appreciate their choice of Abbotsford as a location, because 39 percent of all children in B.C. live within the boundaries of the Fraser Health Authority.

Matthew's House will offer long- and short-term respite for severely disabled B.C. children. The Abbotsford Hospice Society will build a facility to house its resource and support centre and ultimately a residential hospice for people aged 19 and older. This three-way partnership is a very unique model that will attract the attention of the health care community on an international level. We are extremely excited to have this significant partnership that will develop this collective project in our community.

Like health care, kindergarten-to-grade-12 and post-secondary education is a big priority of our government. Annual K-to-12 spending in British Columbia is over \$5 billion, and post-secondary is over \$2 billion. In this budget \$150 million of new money will be given to school boards over three years to fully fund teachers' wages and benefits and to offset other cost increases.

Between now and March 2011 we will provide \$110 million to school districts in annual facilities grants to provide maintenance for schools and playgrounds. These capital grants had been suspended for one year at the height of the recession because many school boards had reserves that they could rely on in the short term.

Overall per-pupil funding will increase to \$8,300, the highest ever in British Columbia's history. Active management of all our school facilities can contribute to providing critical community services that meet the needs of B.C.'s families affordably. In partnership with local governments, neighbourhood learning centres will integrate neighbourhood needs with available capital resources and underutilized spaces.

In Abbotsford school district 34, 11 StrongStart B.C. centres have been opened. Not only do the StrongStart B.C. programs use underutilized school spaces, they give parents access to early learning for their infants, young children and even the parents themselves.

We're also funding a new \$69,000 pilot program that will assist immigrant and refugee youth in the city of Abbotsford to transition into our community. In January school district 34 began providing in-school support services like individualized counselling and training courses to at-risk immigrant and refugee students in grades 8 to 12, helping them overcome learning and school-adjustment issues and develop connections in their new school and community.

B.C. is working to improve adult literacy by offering free tutoring programs, and 67 programs are receiving a total of \$2.4 million through the province's community adult literacy program and are expected to benefit close to 7,000 British Columbians.

British Columbia will become the first jurisdiction in Canada to implement a seal of quality for qualifying post-secondary institutions, thanks to the education quality assurance designation, giving students more tools in choosing a school and attracting more international students to our colleges and universities.

Budget 2010 will provide new investments to help young British Columbians excel in sports and to increase participation by all British Columbians in the arts. Over the next three years \$60 million will go towards the 2010 sports and arts legacy. Half of this funding will be used to enhance opportunities among all British Columbians in the arts — such as visual art, music, theatre and dance — and \$30 million will be used to increase participation in youth sport, including improved athlete and coach development.

[1055]

This budget has laid out a new property tax deferral program for homeowners with children under the age of 18. This option is the homeowner's individual decision and gives them the chance to defer their provincial and local property taxes so that they can focus resources on raising their family.

People can use the tool wisely at their discretion. It is there as an option for families. It puts families in a better position to pay their provincial and property taxes once their children are old enough and ready to move out or at some time in the future when they sell their house. Another \$26 million over the next three years has been set aside to support child care programs to help low- and moderate-income families with the cost of child care.

A strong, competitive economy is what helps to pay the bills. Our competitive income tax rates keep professionals and business investors in British Columbia, paying taxes, hiring people and making things happen.

As a result of income tax reductions since 2001, British Columbians earning up to \$118,000 pay the lowest provincial personal income taxes in Canada. For most taxpayers, provincial income taxes have been reduced by at least 37 percent since 2001. On top of that, an additional 325,000 people no longer pay any British Columbia income tax at all.

The corporate income tax rate in British Columbia is already among the most competitive in the world's major industrialized economies. In fact, in 2008 the small business corporate income tax rate was reduced from 4½ percent to 2½ percent, and our government remains committed to reducing the small business rate to zero by April 1, 2012.

In continuing our effort to boost tax competitiveness, we intend to eliminate the provincial sales tax, replacing it with a modern, value-added tax, the HST — like that of more than 130 countries in the world. The introduction of the HST on July 1, 2010, will be the lowest rate in Canada, at 12 percent. Every credible economist in Canada that has commented on our government's move towards a harmonized sales tax confirms that the HST is good economics and good public policy.

I know that all the farmers in British Columbia will be happy to just have to deal with one sales tax system rather than two systems with two different levels of government. I also know that a number of farm equipment dealers and other farm suppliers — and we have many of them in the city of Abbotsford — will be thrilled to see the end of the endless complexity of the PST and the equally endless and frustrating audits.

The HST will lower taxation on new investments by 40 percent, helping to create jobs and new opportunities in every region of the province, and is giving new momentum to our resource industries. HST will create jobs for British Columbians, a result that I would think the opposition would agree with and welcome.

Currently, the average British Columbian is earning up to \$22 an hour, and the real disposable income per capita is at its highest two-year growth rate in 20 years. It is a strong economy that will allow our communities to prosper and enable the province to continue supporting sustainable health care, education and social services.

[1100]

Accelerated infrastructure projects are now underway across British Columbia. Our government has committed \$5.3 billion to more than 850 accelerated capital projects in order to generate and protect approximately 34,000 construction jobs over the life of these projects.

In partnership with federal and local governments, late last year the province announced \$719 million in stimulus spending, totalling over 174 infrastructure projects throughout every region of the province. These projects are expected to create 4,600 jobs, in addition to the estimated 27,000 jobs created since launching the economic action plan, keeping people working during this difficult time.

These projects have put many people in my constituency to work as well. In fact, next week we will attend the groundbreaking for the Clearbrook Interchange. This project will improve safety, accommodate higher traffic volumes today and in the future, and provide better access to Abbotsford's industrial, commercial and agricultural employment centres, other key community amenities and local destinations.

[L. Reid in the chair.]

Further east on the Trans-Canada Highway construction has already begun on the McCallum Road interchange. This interchange is especially important because it will allow safer and easier access for students and teachers to get to the University of the Fraser Valley, for patients to get to the Abbotsford Hospital, and for shoppers, moviegoers, ice skaters and cyclists to get to the popular Abbotsford Entertainment and Sports Centre and surrounding business enterprises.

Abbotsford is the location of the second-largest airport in the Lower Mainland. Strong partnerships with all three levels of government have made it possible for our busy Abbotsford International Airport to build a parallel taxiway and widen the apron for parking aircraft, a \$30 million addition to the terminal.

Our airport benefited greatly from the 2010 Winter Olympics. Our airport was able to take some of the pressure off YVR. To give you an idea of just how busy it was, our airport in Abbotsford processed more than 500 aircraft during the 17 days of the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Passengers included heads of state, corporate executives, athletes, Hollywood celebrities and members of the 2010 international organizing committee, as well as more than 1,000 RCMP officers and thousands of military personnel who were temporarily assigned to provide security for the games. We were able to demonstrate to corporate aircraft owners that YXX is a good alternative to YVR when flying into the Lower Mainland.

In conclusion, hon. Speaker, the opposition wasn't confident that we would be able to build our Olympic venues on time or on budget. But we not only built the venues on budget, we completed them a year in advance.

As we continue to pay down the provincial operating debt, Budget 2010 lays out the plans to keep British Columbia on track, creating a thriving economy in the afterglow of a highly successful Olympic event.

There is no doubt in my mind that this 2010 Budget will indeed increase support for the vital public services that British Columbians rely on every day. I think, unfortunately, that sometimes we take for granted both the service and the cost, but those services will be there.

Most importantly, this budget will move our province forward with a variety of initiatives to stimulate and sustain economic growth so that workers continue to have the jobs that are so fundamental to the livelihood and success of their families in British Columbia.

Thank you, hon. Speaker, for the opportunity to comment.

Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member for Port Coquitlam. [Applause.]

M. Farnworth: Gee, if I had known I was going to get that kind of reception just on making an introduction, I think I would prepare to make another speech. Hon. Speaker, I ask leave to make an introduction.

[1105]

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

M. Farnworth: In the gallery today and in fact in the precincts today we have a significant group of students from Irvine Elementary, a French immersion school in my riding. They are here to tour the buildings and to celebrate Francophone Day here in British Columbia. I would ask the House to make them most welcome and to wish them *bienvenue à Victoria*.

Debate Continued

R. Fleming: I am pleased to take my place and rise in the House today to participate in the budget debate.

I have reflected on a number of the comments made by members so far in the debate, and I think that members of this House and members of the public are still learning, or relearning perhaps, that the devil is in the details in any budget. In terms of what this budget will mean to my constituents and people around British Columbia, we're only just beginning to find out what broad statements in the service plans and the numbers that were included in the estimates for this government mean on the ground.

Perhaps later I will comment specifically on what we're learning and how disturbing the information is for the kinds of services and supports being lost, in particular for low-income people.

It has been some time since we were here, prior to the opening ceremonies of the 2010 Olympic Games, to receive a throne speech from government, which gave us a gap in time to reflect upon the words of that throne speech, which dwelt at length about and foreshadowed a budget that would be about strengthening family and children in British Columbia.

I think a lot of people nodded approvingly, at least at the words. Even if they didn't believe a government that has no credibility on those issues, they were perhaps pleased to see that in the context of a recession, the difficulties that families expect and are living under throughout British Columbia had been acknowledged in the speech by the government.

Then we left this place, and we watched and participated in with our neighbours, and in our communities, the 2010 Vancouver and Whistler Olympic Games. Like other members who have reported on the impact of those games in their community, I can tell you that in greater Victoria people were on the edges of their seats enjoying those games for the full two weeks. The fever in Victoria... Even though we were separated by a body of water from where the main action was happening in Vancouver — in schools amongst school-aged children, amongst people throughout the community from all walks of life, in workplaces, in the downtown — the buzz indeed did extend to my community, and it was a great two weeks.

When we came back just a few days later to hear a budget, which was an opportunity for this government to build upon the success and the spirit and the emotions that were raised by successfully hosting the 2010 games, they could not have been let down worse than by the document that was tabled in this House on a whole number of fronts, including supports for sports; for special Olympics; for children, who had just watched and identified and pinned up pictures of new gold-, silver- and bronze-medal heroes from Canada on their walls, allowed themselves to dream about their future. This government tabled cuts to sports and youth programs, among other things.

It's incredible, but that is just one aspect of this budget. I want to comment on a number of things that are concerns to my constituents, not just now but over a number of years under this government, and missed opportunities for this government to address them.

[1110]

One of the most frequently cited concerns and stresses on parents and children in my district is the issue of school funding. There has been a lot of debate about whether the funding model that is used with school districts in British Columbia is the right one for today and whether school funding has kept up with the changing times, whether it is flexible enough, because this government restricted some of the supports that we used to have for schools in my area that serve inner-city

neighbourhoods, schools that are facing enrolment fluctuations and gradual declines over time but have had to dramatically close buildings and move school supports out of neighbourhoods.

The formula has been made less flexible and less supportive of districts, and in this budget it's going to be made even worse as school district 61 faces a significant multi-million-dollar deficit shortfall caused by this government.

There's another concern that emerged after the election last year, in the September budget, and that was the government's surprise announcement that in order to cover and conceal its deficit deceit from the election, when they, after all, went out of their way to say the deficit would be maximum \$495 million.... How many times did we hear that from the Premier, only to be told shortly after the election and then confirmed in September that it was on the order of \$2.8 billion?

But nobody, even with a government scrambling to cover that deficit deceit, anticipated that one of the areas the government would go in and raid for funds would be gaming grants for arts and cultural groups, for community groups, for parent advisory committees. Who would think that those would be the scapegoats for the government's misleading actions and words on one of the largest provincial deficits in B.C. history? But it did happen.

There was outrage in September, and there was outrage again in this budget, because the practice continues that money from gaming, the social contract between something that we don't necessarily consider a social positive, contributes back into our province and our communities for things that, in fact, strengthen the fabric of our community.

That social contract has been torn up by this government. That funding can no longer be relied upon. It amazes me continually that even some of the services and groups that provide critical portions of the education budget, for example, through parent advisory councils, are even put in a position where they have to rely on these grants and fundraise on a daily basis to meet huge targets for missing gaps in core funding. But that is what goes on, and not only is that a bad situation but it's one that has been made worse by this government.

Another critical concern that was not addressed in this budget is in the area of health care. There has been a lot of attention and focus on cancelled surgeries in greater Victoria from reduced capacity for some surgeries and how that impacts people's quality of life when you are on a wait-list for months at a time, sometimes even years.

There are constituents I have had who have been on wait-lists for hip replacements, living in pain for well over a year, and the same goes for knee and other critical operations. It is a sacrifice to the quality of life for constituents who have no other choice but to wait on a poorly managed surgical wait-list, and that continues.

The other one that has enraged my community quite understandably is that elderly people on fixed incomes have been subjected to residential care fee increases that diminish the small and set incomes that they have on a monthly basis. That was never promised or revealed in the election. We're still only ten months past the last election. I'm not talking about this being ancient history.

The government.... If they had a plan, if their seniors agenda was to raise residential care fees, they should have disclosed that ten months ago in the election. But instead, they've done it in the post-election budgets, and it's hurting people. It's hurting seniors.

[1115]

There have been mental health cuts. I am very pleased that the police chief of Victoria has spoken out publicly, joined other voices in our community. Unfortunately, police resources have become a front-line mental health resource in our community. The call-outs for very serious incidents on our streets, in our hospital emergency wards, in every part of our community because of discharges and reduced mental health supports in our community, is a growing problem, and it's one that's been made worse in this budget.

There have been facilities that were only announced and given operating grants a year and a half ago that have had those cancelled and taken away now. The government has reneged on announcements it made only recently, and that is creating a serious problem for our downtown, for merchants, for the quality of life in our community, for the morale of this region.

To think that we now have in excess of 2,000 permanently homeless people living in greater Victoria — in this prosperous place — with no housing supports, who have had their mental health supports cut, is outrageous. Again, I go back to the throne speech from February and the rosy words that were included in that and contrast it with the cold reality of the budget that was tabled here last week, and it could not be a more marked contrast.

Residents of Victoria are concerned about a number of other things that this government missed the boat on addressing: high housing costs; post-secondary education and access to it; the cost and the lack of child care spaces in this region; and of course, unemployment.

The unemployment rate has approximately doubled in two years in greater Victoria. They wanted to see a budget that would support and create jobs. Instead, with the introduction of the HST, in particular in my community, where tourism is the No. 1 or No. 2 industry, depending on how you count it, the B.C. Restaurant Association is projecting \$750 million worth of lost revenues after the introduction of the HST; 10,000 to 30,000 jobs lost. A good portion of those will be in my region.

We're about 9 percent of the population of this province in greater Victoria, but we're about 13 or 14 percent of the province's tourism market. Our industry has been betrayed by the sudden introduction of the HST, by the

government's abrogation of its commitment not to do so, the breaking of its promise just after the election.

The last concern that constituents of mine consistently raise that was another letdown in this budget is in the area of the environment and sustainability in particular. There were no supports for my region, which is looking at legislation that is the law of land in British Columbia now — to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 33 percent by 2020. That's only ten years from now.

There were no supports for this region to be able to take big steps to reduce our regional carbon footprint. The way you would have to do that is to significantly invest in the transportation sector and how people get around.

The other area you would have to significantly invest in would be retrofitting the building stock, both commercial and, in particular, residential. We know that in September the government suddenly, unexpectedly cancelled the funding for the LiveSmart program, and they have tepidly reinstated only a small portion of it in this budget.

They are missing an opportunity to match what other jurisdictions are doing, particularly a number of jurisdictions south of the border from here, to use retrofits not only as a means to, in our case, achieve the 50 percent energy conservation targets that B.C. Hydro is obligated to meet but to create tens of thousands of jobs, green jobs, and create opportunities for training, for skills that workers can in some cases retrain or newly train for as energy efficiency installers, as energy auditors — all of those new jobs that are attached specifically to the retrofit industry.

[1120]

With this response, this partial restoration of LiveSmart, as opposed to an expansion and a meeting of some of the initiatives taken by states like California and Oregon and others — in fact supported by Washington, D.C. in the federal budget in the U.S. — we are costing an opportunity in this recession to take construction workers, who have disproportionately suffered layoffs from the fall in housing starts and construction activity, and put them into the green economy specifically.

That is a shame, particularly given the rhetoric that we sometimes hear from the Premier and members of this government that they, in fact, get it on the green economy, when they so clearly do not get it.

There's another issue to do with the environment that comes up....

Interjection.

R. Fleming: If I could have some order, Madam Speaker. The member from wherever it is, is getting a little out of control.

There's another issue that always comes up with respect....

Interjection.

R. Fleming: I just can't remember the riding. I intended no disrespect. You're not speaking from your chair, but I will respond to that anyway.

There's another issue that always comes up, in particular for Vancouver Islanders but British Columbians wherever they live. That is the concern about whether wild salmon stocks, which B.C. is famous for — so famous for that we made them a premiere icon in the opening ceremonies of the 2010 games, because they brand this province so well in what we've been known for, for centuries.... Whether those wild salmon stocks are, in fact, sustainable or whether they could be something that a generation or two from now is unknown in all but memory....

That is a critical concern for every British Columbian. We are at a crisis point. We have a judicial inquiry into why the sockeye runs collapsed on the Fraser River, right now. We have escapes from salmon farms potentially cross-contaminating our wild stocks. Every part of the province, in almost every river system and watershed where salmon spawn and where wild salmon populations are, is under stress.

Now, some of it is caused by climate change and changes in water temperature, and we need to have an adaptation strategy for that — which, by the way, was not featured in this budget. But some of it has to do with issues that are well documented in terms of threats to wild salmon. This government has taken no action on that file, and we are running out of time to be able to make interventions that will help in that regard.

I talked about growing social inequality and how we've seen that over a number of years. In good times, under this government — in good times — we saw the gap between the rich and poor, the child poverty level. This is at times when the economy was growing at 3, 4, 5 percent a year. We saw the numbers of children living in poverty grow under this government. Six years in a row, B.C., one of the wealthiest provinces in Canada — highest child poverty rate in the country.

They failed to develop supports to narrow that gap to make our communities stronger, to make our society a fairer, more equitable place, to give opportunities for children and hope for families. In a recession all of those things get harder to do. It's true. But this government should have acknowledged that gap that is growing between our have province and everywhere else in Canada, and they failed to do so.

It's not just single-parent families. In my community one in five children live in families headed by, primarily, women — single-parent families — and almost half of those live below the poverty line. It's interesting to me, because in good times and bad under this government, there is never, apparently, a time for the minimum wage to be raised. Never.

We now have the lowest minimum wage in Canada. We have the highest cost of living in Canada, the highest housing costs in the country — in fact, in the world — and we have the lowest minimum wage. It hasn't been changed once in eight years.

You know, the small business community wonders why it hasn't been raised here in greater Victoria, because they don't pay it, quite frankly. Some of their competitors do — mostly chain stores and large companies. They want a level playing field that's fair and reasonable and that can provide their employees with the means to live in expensive places like greater Victoria, and it hasn't been changed.

When you wonder why single-parent families and children are being raised in poverty.... This government won't even look at a minimum wage that is now lower than every other province, including New Brunswick, Newfoundland and places like that. Unbelievable.

The economic downturn has hit my community. It has hit every community in this province. I look at some of the choices that this budget makes for the people who are struggling most in our society.

When you analyze the Ministry of Housing and Social Development's service plan, in particular.... It's incredible to me that on April 1 of this year, just a few weeks from now, for those who are on the lowest incomes and most vulnerable in our society, who are on disability assistance and income assistance, this government managed to restrict and cut coverage for dental, preventative health and medical services. Those are going to be cut back.

Well, you know what this budget did find the fiscal space to support? Some \$100 million in additional tax cuts for the banking sector. They actually found \$100 million for banks. You know what the rest of the world is debating in chambers like this? They're debating how they can tax bankers' bonuses.

That's something that Sarkozy, Obama, other countries, the U.K.... The U.K. — they're looking at how to recover revenues. They're looking at ways to recover revenues from a highly profitable sector so that they can support social programs and other forms of social spending. Here in British Columbia — and I dare say we're alone as a jurisdiction in the world, because I can't find another one doing this — we're cutting taxes for banks by \$100 million.

The government's story after the Olympics? They were saying: "Look, times are tight. We've got to protect core services. We can't let vulnerable people be cast aside." That was their message. Good message, but the reality is that there's \$100 million in tax cuts for bankers here and service cuts for the poorest people, the most vulnerable people in our society that I've just described.

The story doesn't add up. They made their choice. It's one that other governments — even the most right-wing governments in the world — aren't pursuing, but it's the

one that this government here in British Columbia, this B.C. Liberal government, has cast and tabled in this assembly.

I want to go back to gaming grants, because there are a couple of areas that really contrast with the throne speech, which said that government's initiatives were all about kids and early learning supports.

Interjections.

R. Fleming: This government is actually, in this budget, cutting gaming grants.

Deputy Speaker: Members. Members.

R. Fleming: This budget cuts gaming grants for pre-schools, child care centres and resource centres to \$4.6 million this year. That's cut in half. On the one hand, we have a throne speech littered with references about early childhood learning — that early childhood education is a priority. Then on the other hand, where it really counts, they table a budget that cuts in half supports for this sector. It's unbelievable.

That's called saying one thing and doing another, not meaning what you say, and it could not be more clearly illustrated than in this instance.

[1130]

I think parent advisory committees have been badly treated by this government — in particular, immediately after the election, when their budgets were slashed in half. But those budgets have not been adjusted in a very, very long time, and I don't think members on that side of the House, on the government side, appreciate what parent advisory councils do in our education system today.

Literally, there would not be a single computer in a school without parent advisory councils. Can you believe that? We have evolved in the 21st century.... Education has evolved to be a digital-learning environment, and the basic tools of education that are the standard — not luxuries, the standard — today have to be fundraised by bake sales and weekend activities by parents because they're not included in core funding budget envelopes for education anymore.

You know what happens when budgets like this pile up year after year after year and more and more core services for education are unfunded? We fall behind. We fall behind. We don't get to be a leading-edge knowledge economy with the best-trained people to attract investment and create business opportunities. We don't create the entrepreneurs of tomorrow by defunding and falling behind other jurisdictions on education.

You know what else parent advisory councils provide funding for? Literally, there would not be art and music programs in our schools today if the instruments — and, in some cases, the instruction — were not paid for by

parents. Sports equipment is another example. School and classroom supplies, field trips, special events — even textbooks. And in particular, scholarships. All of those things are funded by parents.

I've talked briefly about the tourism economy, a \$1.5 billion industry in greater Victoria that has been let down by this budget. In fact, they just laid off three staff earlier this week because this budget is an anti-tourism budget.

It also extends, and the critic and the member for Vancouver–West End has stated this very forcefully in the past.... In my community this budget not only fails to see the merits of the arts and culture sector; it fails to see the economic activity that is generated by that sector — the literally thousands of jobs supported by the arts and culture sector.

We got a budget that delivers absolutely shortsighted and devastating cuts. Theatre companies will close. Talent will disperse. Those things can't be rebuilt when you pull those supports away. People move on to other things, and literally, institutions — when you're talking about festivals and companies and all of those things — are lost.

That's what this government has done in greater Victoria, and I know it's the same in other parts of B.C. That's a fundamental failure to appreciate what a diverse economy actually looks like.

Now, the HST. This is interesting for a number of reasons, and obviously it's been commented on widely — how the government explicitly, in writing, promised to every voter in British Columbia they would not consider the HST, that it would be bad for British Columbia, that it was a job-killer and all the rest. Then lo and behold, July 23....

Interjection.

R. Fleming: Well, I'm going by the survey that the Liberal Party of British Columbia completed. It's in writing. It's in writing, unfortunately.

Obviously, the Liberals were smart enough to know that they would never be returned to office were they to promise it, so they didn't. In fact, they explicitly promised against it. July 23 was the turning point, because apparently, the Premier just discovered that, oh, maybe this is the "single best thing we can do for our economy," as he said repeatedly since.

The HST is going to hurt on a number of economic fronts in my community, and I know it's the same in other parts of B.C. In 2008 we had the lowest housing starts in a decade in B.C. The construction sector is hurting. Jobs have been lost there significantly — 75 percent decline in new housing starts.

[1135]

Well, what a signal to the market this government has sent by introducing the HST. Unbelievable signal to the

market, because consumers are very keyed into the fact that this will add very significant closing costs to purchase a new home. Therefore, it has had a ripple effect all the way down to builders, and building activity has dropped off.

But most importantly, the HST touches every one of my constituents. They sit at the kitchen table, and they have budgets to meet in their households.

I will continue on that point at a further opportunity.

Hon. J. Yap: It's an honour and a privilege to rise and take my opportunity to add my comments on this budget, Budget 2010, which I support strongly and which I believe will position British Columbia for strong growth in the coming years. I do want to get to some of the specific comments that the previous speaker, the member for Victoria–Swan Lake, talked about.

Before I do that, I want to make a couple of acknowledgments. I, first of all, want to acknowledge the people that make it possible for me to be here in this chamber, in this Legislature, to do the work that I do among other members. That is, first of all, my family, to thank them for their support and love — my wife, Suzanne, and my children, Lisa and Michael. I know that it's difficult sometimes when dad isn't around, when the husband is not around, but I do appreciate their support and love.

I also want to thank the people in my constituency office who are my face and voice and presence in the community when I am here in Victoria. That would be Paige Robertson, my hard-working constituency assistant, and my two part-time constituency assistants, PoWah Ng and Christiana Wu. I appreciate their support to me on a daily basis.

Budget 2010 really positions British Columbia to recover strongly from the recession that we've just experienced, the deepest recession that we've experienced in a generation. I'm actually really appreciative how this worked out. The member for Victoria–Swan Lake was the last speaker for the other side, and I want to address a couple of things that he said.

I was delighted that he talked about climate action and greenhouse gas reduction that we want to see in the province of British Columbia because that is an area that, of course, I have great interest in as the minister responsible for climate action.

The member knows — because he was in Copenhagen for the conference in December, personally there — that our Premier, the Premier of British Columbia, received an award for climate action for being the only subnational leader to receive recognition for the great work that our province is doing in taking action on climate change. In fact, highly regarded, internationally famous environmentalist leader Tzeporah Berman made the award to our Premier at that international conference. I guess the member missed that particular event when he was in Copenhagen.

No province has taken more action, has shown more leadership, in the area of climate change than the province of British Columbia, with our government and our Premier. I just want to get that on the record to be clear. I will come back to how Budget 2010 actually supports the vision for a clean, green, low-carbon economy that will be British Columbia, that will power our economy in the coming years.

[1140]

The member also talked about the lack of supports for families that need support. He was critical about the lack of these supports in Budget 2010. He couldn't be further from the truth.

First of all, I bring the member back to the fact that in British Columbia we have the lowest income taxes in Canada. In fact, over 300,000 low-income British Columbians pay no income tax in the province of British Columbia.

We have the lowest income tax regime. We have the lowest income tax, the most competitive income tax structure in the G8. For any British Columbian earning up to \$118,000, we all know that we pay the lowest personal provincial income tax in the country. So I just want to clarify that.

The member also talks about the lack of support for the arts and culture. Well, he probably didn't notice, and I'll remind him, that Budget 2010 adds \$60 million to arts and culture and sports. That will support the arts and the culture. About \$30 million of that \$60 million legacy fund will support arts and culture in the province. What a wonderful way to build on the wonderful, wonderful experience that all of us, including the member... He said that he enjoyed the experience of the Olympic Games, as did all of his constituents.

What a wonderful Olympic Games and what a great achievement we have here with the 2010 games, the most successful Winter Olympic Games in the history of the Olympic movement right here in British Columbia, Canada. All of us are so proud of what we achieved.

In these years leading up to the success of the 2010 games, which I know the member and his colleagues opposite were so negative, voted against the Olympic Games... They were against the Olympic Games. Their leader said that if she had her way, we'd never have the games. The Leader of the Opposition is on the record as saying she'd rather not have had the games. Suddenly we have the most successful Olympic Games experience, and they've come on side. They think it's the best thing that ever happened too, and they've forgotten what they said along the way — that they were against the games.

They were negative about the games, and here we are less than two weeks after the games. I'm delighted to share with them the fact that these were the greatest games, the best thing that ever happened, the greatest marketing opportunity for the province of British Columbia. Three and a half billion people thought about

B.C., saw images of B.C., saw the great athletic performances in B.C., in Vancouver and Whistler — and Richmond, my community.

What a wonderful experience, and I'm really glad that at least on this point we can agree. The opposition and government can agree that the Olympic Games were the greatest thing that ever happened, but I just wanted to remind them that they were against the Olympic Games. They voted against the games, and they're on side now with the fact that we had the greatest Olympic Games ever.

The arts and culture and sports legacy fund, \$60 million, will build on the great success and provide a great legacy as we move forward from the 2010 games. Of course, over the next week the Paralympic Games will also provide a wonderful opportunity for British Columbians, for Canadians, to come together as we did with the 2010 Olympic Games.

The member also talked about education cuts. I want to be on the record, as many of my colleagues have been, to be really clear that education funding is at record levels. In fact, even with declining enrolment....

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members. Members.

Hon. J. Yap: With almost 60,000 fewer students, we have increased funding every single year since 2001. We're funding at a rate of \$8,300 per student, on average, across the province of British Columbia — the highest level of funding for education that we have ever.... We should invest in education.

[1145]

The member talked about PAC funding. I'm delighted that with Budget 2010, parent advisory councils.... I've been to meetings of parent advisory councils when my children were going to the public school system. The funding formula, \$20 per student — I'm delighted that we have that. During the 1990s there was no assured funding provided to parent advisory councils. There was no system of funding. It was on an ad hoc basis. I just wanted to clarify that with regard to what the member for Victoria–Swan Lake said.

I do want to highlight a few things with Budget 2010. Budget 2010, as I've said, positions B.C. for the economic recovery that is happening. We have a budget that will ensure that we look after the strategic areas, make investment in the strategic areas that are important to British Columbians — whether it's in health care or in education or in supports for families, for young families — and set the stage to help grow our economy in this emerging low-carbon green economy that we want to see.

This budget, Budget 2010, continues to make B.C. the most tax-competitive economy in which to invest. And you know what, Madam Speaker?

An Hon. Member: It's not working. Where's the investment, then?

Hon. J. Yap: The member asks: "Where is the investment?" It is here, and it is coming. There are billions and billions of dollars of investment that are coming to British Columbia because we have the most tax-competitive economy. We have the system of taxation which is the most attractive among the G8, and we're going to continue to build on that with strategic policy initiatives.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

I'd like to focus on a few of these in the time I have left — first of all, health care. The member speaking just before me talked about cuts to health care. Again, nothing could be further from the truth.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, take your seat for a second.

Members. Members. There is a member that's speaking and has the floor. If you want conversations to carry on, can you take them outside the chamber, please.

Continue, Minister.

Hon. J. Yap: Actually, I appreciate members chirping, because then I know, as is our tradition, that they are listening, as opposed to working on their laptops and not listening. So I do appreciate it.

Health services. We have not invested in health services as much as we are today. We are investing record amounts in health care in the province of British Columbia. The budget for health care is approaching 48 percent, approaching half of our provincial budget, and it's an important area. It's an area that we all cherish. We all want the health care system to be there for us, for every British Columbian, and it is. In the province of British Columbia we have the best health care system in Canada.

We're making continued investments — \$2 billion in new funding over the next three years. So when the member for Victoria–Swan Lake and other members of the opposition talk about cuts to health care, they're simply wrong. We're investing in health care, and we'll continue to invest in health care.

Much has been said about the need to make British Columbia competitive. I believe, and many people believe, that we need to continue to attract investment to grow our economy.

The harmonization of the sales tax — the provincial social service tax — with the federal goods and services tax to create the harmonized sales tax, or HST, is the best thing we can do to continue down the path

of making our economy competitive, to attract investment, to encourage job creation, to grow our economy. This will then mean more revenues for government to provide the services that British Columbians want and need.

[1150]

The HST will allow us to join most of the countries in the industrialized world in providing what's called a value-added tax, where business is able to receive inputs so that they are more efficient. The HST will allow us, through a value-added tax system — which most industrialized economies, most modern economies, have in place — to be that much more competitive and to attract more investment, more job creation and more opportunities for British Columbians.

Leading economists, leading business leaders have made public statements in support of the harmonization of the sales tax, and I'd like to share a few of them, if I may. The first one here is from the president of the Certified General Accountants Association of British Columbia. He says: "While no tax is ever a good tax" — because, after all, who likes to be taxed? — "the HST is a better tax than the current, more complex PST-GST system. We have to make B.C. a better place to invest and do business. We need to be more competitive and ready to embrace the future, and the HST is good for that."

Another leading economist who is frequently quoted in the media, Mr. Helmut Pastrick, chief economist at Central 1 Credit Union, has this to say: "A consumer tax — a value-added tax — is indeed the most efficient form of taxation." The list goes on and on.

Most leading economists, business leaders believe and have pronounced publicly that this is the right thing to do and that this will lead to a stronger, more competitive British Columbia, with more jobs into the future. This applies to all businesses, big and small.

I'd like to share an example of a business in my community, in Richmond — a family-owned business called Mar-Con Wire Belt, which has about 20 employees. The owner, who is a constituent, said to me that the HST will provide real benefits. The one that came to mind first was that the HST would make for a much-simplified, more efficient administrative system, would take away the stress of having to deal with the requirements of the soon-to-be-phased-out PST accounting system that took up a lot of time and energy for his staff.

Of course, the other benefit is the input tax credits under HST. My constituent, who is a small manufacturer in Richmond, said it would be a benefit and make his operation more competitive.

There are a number of initiatives in Budget 2010 that I believe are worth highlighting. I've talked about how Budget 2010 builds on the competitive position that British Columbia is in and that we want to continue to attract investment.

The one that I'm particularly encouraged and positive in looking forward to is the funding provided for innovative clean energy, low-carbon projects through a program to encourage clean technology, low-carbon technology in the province. So \$100 million in new funding has been set aside, identified in Budget 2010, to allow us to build on the success of the previous innovative clean energy fund, which has already led to a number of projects to develop the clean energy potential of our province.

[1155]

Mr. Speaker, I have to go back to what the member for Victoria-Swan Lake said about lamenting the fact that there was nothing in the budget to support climate action. This is another example of the vision and initiative of our government in wanting to build a clean technology, low-carbon economy for our province so that we can keep building a strong economy and use the opportunity to develop a strong low-carbon sector in the province.

It has been shown by studies that here in B.C. we have among the largest clean technology, low-carbon economy clusters in the world. We are probably in the top three or four in the world in terms of companies that are engaged in clean technology, in low-carbon technologies, in green energy. We want to see this sector grow, because it's good for our economy, it will create more jobs, and it will also help us be a leader in greenhouse gas reduction into the future.

The \$100 million in Budget 2010 for innovative clean energy, clean technology development is a real positive and will provide a shot in the arm for British Columbia's growing low-carbon sector.

I am so proud of our government in wanting to continue to be a leader in climate action. There is funding identified in Budget 2010 to provide for the retrofit of homes — the highly popular retrofit energy conservation program, LiveSmart B.C. And Budget 2010 provides \$35 million in new funding because the previous funding was oversubscribed in such a short period of time due to the popularity of the program.

Noting the time, Mr. Speaker, I reserve my opportunity to continue speaking and at this time move adjournment of debate.

Hon. J. Yap moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Abbott moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

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