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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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**FIRST SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT**

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MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2005

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

Prayers.

### Orders of the Day

#### Private Members' Statements

##### THE OPPORTUNITY SOCIETY

**R. Fleming:** I thank the House for a chance to say a few words this morning about the politics of building a new consensus for society. The most successful governments in the world today are those that are committed to both the principles of social justice and the pursuit of economic prosperity, where the primary and fundamental goal is for government to create programs and policies that give opportunity for their citizens to succeed.

Many progressive leaders and parties in the United Kingdom and Europe — indeed, here in Canada — are developing and honing their policy ideas for what is tentatively called the opportunity society. The opportunity society entails new thinking on child care, public health, lifelong learning, law and order, housing and the issue of drug abuse.

[1005]

In the place of the erosion, even the abandonment, of the traditional welfare state, we need to construct a new social contract between citizen and government — one that balances individual and collective rights and responsibilities. As we look ahead to the 21st century, many political thinkers are asking, in the wake of a very ideological 20th century: what is a good society?

Part of this is motivated by the reality of globalization. When we look back at the best years of our society here in Canada, we undoubtedly look at the years following the Second World War. This was a time when all Canadians saw their incomes rise in lockstep.

On Remembrance Day this past Friday, like many Canadians, I reflected on the sacrifice of our Armed Forces who died for this country in the fight for democracy and freedom. I thought about all of those who have returned from battles as veterans. Many World War II veterans who came back to their country came back with uncertainty. They were uncertain about who they were and what their skills were.

In 1947 they were given an opportunity. The first generation of working-class Canadians ever able to afford our post-secondary education system were participants in a program that gave education grants to veterans. At that time the government had a consensus about providing more opportunity. It was an agreed-upon goal by all parties, by all actors in society, that Canada must give greater social mobility to its citizens.

After the 1980s income in middle- and working-class families began to flatten, and the top quintile began to share a greater and greater share of national income. Income gaps now are becoming a big problem

for North America. It's not just because of the alienation and the division inherent in what is being described as the gated community. When we hear that the numbers of homeless are doubling in B.C.'s major cities, when the demand for food banks grows so substantially — all at a time of improved job growth and a relatively strong economic outlook — and when an underclass develops in these circumstances, we have a significant problem that will cost society and the economy in the longer term.

Today we're losing too many young people to drugs like crystal meth and heroin. To tackle the problem, we need a different approach to drug and alcohol abuse. Yes, it has to favour tougher measures to deal with those trafficking in harder drugs, but the truth is that punishment alone will not work. Perhaps half of all the crime in my community is drug-related. The returns from drug treatment can be very dramatic.

In the United Kingdom, where the Labour government has doubled investment in treatment facilities, an estimated £3 is saved for every £1 invested. Under this government, the number of treatment places has not increased. Courts regularly release drug-addicted criminals and dealers because they cannot sentence drug treatment to those offenders. We need to spend more on hard-core addicts to save the high costs in the justice system and in our health care system and to reduce the amount of petty and occasionally, unfortunately, violent crime that victimizes ordinary citizens.

Those are the current issues that afflict B.C. — some of them. There are others that speak to the opportunity society. I mentioned in my opening remarks the creation of a lifelong learning society. Unfortunately, though, in this province those who never completed high school face even greater barriers today than they did four years ago to completing that later in life.

Today there are fees for adult basic education, which often act, unfortunately, as a disincentive for people to return to school and pursue education that will help them with gainful employment. Tuition fees have doubled in four short years. Student grants are down. That is not the vision of the opportunity society. That is closing the door on hundreds of thousands of our citizens.

Another aspect is to make work pay. If we're to expect people to get off government benefit and enter the workforce, then work must pay. There must be rewards for people to do that. Having a two-tier minimum wage, lowering the minimum wage by \$2 an hour, does absolutely the opposite.

[1010]

Skills training. Not only does our economy demand a growing and skilled workforce — which industry leaders tell us that we can't fill now, and the situation is getting worse — it also provides an extraordinary opportunity for the government to help young people start careers. Today we are graduating 42 percent fewer apprentices than four years ago. At the absolute time when we need more skilled workers to help our growing economy, when young people are looking around for a future for themselves and for their families in this

province, we're graduating fewer people. Now, the government will probably claim that enrolment is up. But if enrolment is up and completion is down, then we have a less efficient apprenticeship system today than we did in the past.

The opposition doesn't envision a society where all succeed equally. That is a fantasy that has, on occasion, led to tragedy. The opportunity society is one where you have an equal chance to succeed, where your life chances are not affected because of your ethnicity, your gender or whether you're able-bodied or disabled but rather where merit and hard work can achieve and where any of our citizens, no matter how poor — in sickness or in need — get the best care available without any regard to their wealth.

**L. Mayencourt:** I thank the member for Victoria-Hillside for his comments on the opportunity society.

He began his comments with a statement that progressive countries or progressive jurisdictions are taking, together, the tenets of social justice and economic development policies that create income in the community or that create a good, strong economy. I think that's a very good point he raises, which is that government needs to take a look at both sides of the equation. That's why I'm proud to be on this side of the House, because that has certainly been one of the key areas that our government has focused on.

You see, we believe that there is a place for a strong economic platform and that that strong economic platform actually develops the capacity for government to deliver on many, many other items which are sometimes placed under the area of social justice. For example, the member mentions the fact that accessible child care is important to British Columbians, as it would be in any society that's trying to progress forward and make sure that people have opportunity. Our government has nearly tripled the funding for early childhood development and for autism prevention in our school system, so we're actually putting more money into those things that the member has spoken about.

I mean, there are things that he has mentioned that are important, and one of them — for me, because of my neighbourhood — is access to detox and access to treatment facilities. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that in 2001, when I came into this building as an MLA, it used to take three to four weeks for someone to get into detox. I can't speak for other regions, but today in Vancouver Coastal, the maximum wait is 24 hours. That's a significant improvement. That's because our government actually put a lot more into mental health and addictions than any government in the history of British Columbia.

We have also taken a look at some of the other things that affect people's abilities to succeed in life. One of them is low income. The member raises a very good point that when someone goes into work, they should have some ability to make some money. In British Columbia you can do that. In fact, if you get a job here in British Columbia, you're going to be earning about three times more than what you would get if you

were on welfare. What that means is that there is opportunity for people which they can take and make their lives better.

In addition to that, this government was the first government in Canada to completely eliminate personal income tax for British Columbians earning under \$15,000. That is significant. That puts us at the head of Canada and perhaps other areas as well. That provides opportunity for people to save their money to invest it in the things that matter to them.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

We've also been the first government in the last 15 years to actually increase disability benefits. Those members on the other side had an opportunity from 1991 to 2001 to be able to do that, and they did not take that opportunity. We are the first government to increase the SAFER grant, the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters. Once again, we're the first government in 15 years to do that, and another government had plenty of opportunity to do so.

[1015]

We are increasing our K-through-12 education, because we do believe that the education system should be publicly funded, and it should be adequately funded. We continue to make increases there. Post-secondary education is really ramping up as well, because we're going to be building, and we're going to have 25,000 new spaces by 2010. That's a great equalizer. Education and lifelong learning and skills training are really what make a difference for people.

Yes, the member is quite correct. The number of apprentices in British Columbia is dramatically up. There are different ways that British Columbians are approaching apprenticeships. That is because of our labour shortage. We have a modular framework for people to gain their trades a little bit at a time.

An example of that is at BCIT. They have a program where individuals can come in, and they can learn about concrete forming. They learn that, and they spend eight or ten weeks doing that. Then they go out in the workforce, and they do that kind of work. While they are there, they talk to other craftsmen, other labourers. They talk about whether or not they should upgrade their skills and learn something like carpentry or what have you. Those people have the opportunity to very quickly get some skills that allow them to get into a job and later to take it forward and become full-fledged apprentices.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak about the opportunity society.

**R. Fleming:** I thank the member for Vancouver-Burrard for his comments.

I think the main point of the opportunity society is its approach to public services. We need to reform our public services. But this government has had an attitude of reducing public services, and that is where the problem lies. In fact, today ambition is not rewarded in our young people; it's stunted. Those young people

who cannot afford the tuition fees that are charged at our colleges and post-secondary institutions.... Tuition is a major barrier to attainment of a better life. Student debt is a major barrier — student debt driven by the cuts to post-secondary education grants.

Regarding people on disabilities, the previous government — which, the member pointed out.... It was the previous government that created a disability pension that expanded the definition of what a disability is in this province. It was this government that reclassified disability and wasted time and resources on a disability review that in the end, as the Auditor General agrees, did nothing but reduce 46 people from the rolls and cost five million of taxpayer dollars. I think the real shame, which his report wasn't able to get into, was the anxiety and stress it caused.

As I said, the opportunity society is about commitment to the principles of social justice and the pursuit of policies and programs of government for social justice in furtherance of a vision of economic prosperity for the society. I thank the member opposite for the chance to debate that concept a little bit more this morning. I'm sure we'll have many more occasions to do that during the life of this parliament.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HIGH-TECH INDUSTRY

**I. Black:** This morning I rise to speak to the vibrancy of our technology sector and to identify how its remarkable growth has changed the landscape of both our economy and our people in B.C. in the past decade and how we must remain vigilant in our support for highly nomadic sectors whose success will continuously provide the breathing room of diversification for our sources of prosperity for our families and for our businesses.

Last week it was announced that the turnaround achievements of this government hit yet another milestone: a 30-year low in unemployment, leading the country and breaking yet another prosperity record. The various technology industries have clearly contributed to this. In fact, in the last ten years or so there's been a 31-percent increase in job growth in high-tech manufacturing and an 89-percent growth in high-tech services.

[1020]

High-technology employment in B.C. has grown at a pace far exceeding that of employment in all other industries. As it stands now, the technology community employs over 45,000 people here in B.C., almost as many people as forest product manufacturing and almost as many people as are employed by the provincial government. This growth, and the new importance of the sector to us all, is also reflected in the change of total output, or GDP, of the sector over the last couple of decades. Relative to every other industry, B.C.'s high-tech sector or GDP growth has significantly outpaced every sector, with the exception of the stock market crash felt at the turn of the century. Even taking those market-crash years into account, however, the

GDP rebound and expansion of this sector — its total economic output — has expanded almost three times as much in the last decade as the province's overall GDP.

In the list of hundreds of different industries or sectors in British Columbia, technology now accounts for 3 percent of the overall economic output of the province. Now, it's critical for all of us in this chamber to understand, however, the nature of this sector, most notably its speed of change and its mobility of both people and investment dollars. In this sector government policy has truly been shown to have an impact, both positively and negatively, and it does so quickly. I have seen both.

As one who has spent his entire career in this extraordinary sector of our economy and who has been leading companies within it in one fashion or another in the past ten years, I can speak firsthand of the differences between the encouraging, forward-looking environment of today versus the suffocating and defeatist "why bother" environment, if you will, created and perpetuated under the philosophies and policies of the NDP.

Shortly after a crowd of 700 technology leaders gathered to rally around the B.C. Liberal Party during this last election, I shared a joke with a fellow named Mr. Rory Holland, one of our province's most successful technology entrepreneurs and philanthropists and, frankly, one of our province's more decent citizens. I joked that I wasn't certain that we could have held such a rally five years earlier as I didn't think our sector employed as many as 700 people in B.C. at the time. But boy, do they now. Look at them go.

Our technology sector is now one of the jewels in the crown of our many achievements of this government, despite the stock market meltdown and 9/11 occurring at the beginning of our first term. Thanks directly to the policies of this government, businesses and investors have been spending money in B.C. In 2000, the last complete year of the NDP rule, technology capital investment in British Columbia was just shy of \$22 billion — an investment by those who have the direct ability to create jobs in our province. By 2004, and after overcoming the devastating financial impact of 9/11, this capital investment had grown to \$29 billion versus \$22 billion or so. That's an increase of 34 percent in only four years in response to our hanging out a shingle that says: "Invest here. Create jobs here. Help families prosper here."

By comparison, in the entire five years of NDP rule under former Premiers Clark and Dosanjh, there was a total investment increase of only 8 percent. That was during the single largest economic expansion in human history, a joyous economic period for all in the world, it seems, except for those living under traditional NDP policies.

This government has been bold enough to look beyond our traditional industries for growth and economic contribution and to formulate policies and to make the changes necessary to make that happen. This government has been wise enough to see that the re-

taining of our children in post-university or college years within the borders of our province is very, very important. It means that we must provide an environment where technology services and research and development can prosper and where ideas — visions, even — on creating new products or new ways of doing old things can start, incubate, develop, be tested, grown, tested some more, made mainstream and then impact the whole world without leaving not just Yale-town or Gastown but also Kelowna, Nanaimo, Prince George or Coquitlam.

It is incumbent on us to keep the path ahead for those innovators clear of governmental debris and discouraging policy and to cheer them on in getting their ideas off of the whiteboards and out of the labs and into the hands of the intended consumers and beneficiaries.

[1025]

**G. Robertson:** Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the rhetoric.

Many of the huge successes that are now prevalent in our homegrown high-tech sector somehow arose back in the so-called dark decade of the '90s. The stewardship of NDP governments at the time was absolutely critical to the development of very competitive industries.

As anyone in business knows, strong and stable companies and industries do take time to develop. It doesn't happen over a couple of years. Publicly funded research and education have been increasingly important to B.C.'s becoming a global force and for translating the innovations that develop here into commercial successes and good jobs for the people of this province. That takes time. There was a lot of that investment through the '90s, and it's now coming to fruition.

I want to talk about the recognition that technology's purpose is, ultimately, to serve people and to improve our quality of life with efficiency. It has led to job losses in some sectors. The need to invest in technology itself and grow the industry to create new jobs is very important. High technology goes well beyond the many great companies that are developing these technologies. It's very important to other industries as far as efficiency goes. I'm talking about forestry, mining, retail and food industries. All rely on technology now.

Education plays a very vital role here in ensuring that all British Columbians do benefit from the rapid shift from more traditional types of work in these industries into using the technologies to their best benefit and also for people to be shifting away from traditional lines of work into more creative lines of work — into human-centred, communications-oriented work — and working with these new technologies. As a province, we have to invest in encouraging everyone to pursue their educational and training opportunities to the maximum in order to take advantage of the technologies that are developing.

Many high-tech companies locate here in B.C. because of our highly skilled workforce and because of

the quality of life here in B.C. Let's be frank. These companies generally choose places to locate for the workforce and for places that they will want to live. They want to benefit from the social programs and from the opportunities that their children will have. We need to ensure that we're making quality of life the number-one priority here in this Legislature. That means a balance of economic incentives, social support and environmental concerns. It doesn't mean that corporate tax breaks are always first.

What can we do better for the high-technology sector here in B.C.? We can support every stage. There has been a lot of oversimplification over these last several years in the support of the high-tech sector, and I want to talk about programs hugely beneficial to innovation that could do with more support, starting with B.C.'s SR-and-ED program, which provides for expansion and commercialization with incentives. It assists companies — small companies, in particular — with cash flows at key stages of development. My company benefited from this program for a number of years at key points, so I know this from personal experience. These funds were very constructive in the growth of my business and in creating more jobs, and a lot more can be done here to provide support to these companies.

We also need to be looking at the expansion of the Small Business Venture Capital Act to increase the supply of capital to early-stage companies. This is when companies either fold or are able to advance and secure investment and commercialize their ventures. It's a critical time for us to invest in the small companies here, and we can do more there as a government.

There's also a good case to be made for developing matching capital programs for attracting investment at later stages, so that the institutional capital comes to B.C. and supports the companies that are growing here at the mezzanine stage. They're able to stay here. They don't have to go offshore for financing needs. Drawing our brightest and best companies away is a big problem right now. This government needs to be doing something about that proactively.

Good programs that are now missing in the array are Tech B.C. and ASI. These are missing programs which were instrumental in funding the partnerships between small B.C. companies and our universities. We need to look at recreating these missing links.

As the Minister of Forests and the Minister of Environment know, technology can save the day in key situations where our brains can't solve challenges. That said, there are times when the use of technology is inappropriate, as in BlackBerry's in the House. We certainly need to be responsible about the research and development of new technologies. The questions always need to be asked about how new research and technology will affect people, improve our lives and save us money, as well as how it will help our environment.

[1030]

**I. Black:** My thanks to the response from the member for Vancouver-Fairview, who is once again provid-

ing us with constructive insights and brochure sound bites. He has also given me the opportunity to perhaps enlighten the member on what has been done and what lies ahead in this area, as our government has helped achieve this growth in research and technology sectors — and, frankly, what we're doing in response to the new demands that result from this growth.

In terms of what has been contributed by this government over the last number of years, we've had the Premier's personal involvement leading annual marketing missions to promote our technologies and key international markets. We've had the appointment of the Premier's Technology Council with a view to a comprehensive, industrywide strategy that is now in place and working very well. As a quick aside, this has allowed us to leverage this initiative to bridge, if you will, the digital divide and connect every community in British Columbia to broadband Internet access.

It's also seen about a billion and a half dollars in new research directly or in partnership, including \$900 million in provincial funding for research and access initiatives since 2001; \$56 million-plus to fund 20 post-secondary research chairs and nine regional innovation chairs, who are leading new research in areas including neuroscience, marine ecosystems, salmon conservation and sustainable rural development; and just a little over \$30 million to launch Project NEPTUNE, the world's largest cable-linked sea floor observatory to monitor fish stocks, earthquakes and climate change.

You've also seen other direct investments in technology research for areas including clean energy, fuel research and aquaculture research. But you've also seen other more meaningful things. It has nothing to do with corporate tax breaks; it has to do with personal tax breaks. B.C.'s top marginal income tax rate has been lowered from one of the highest in Canada to the second-lowest in Canada today.

You've also seen that the tax rate of stock options, a key part of the fibre of the technology community, was lowered from just under 39 percent in 2000 to just under 22 percent in 2002. The point of that, to be really clear, is that this is what attracts and retains skilled-knowledge workers in this province. It is this that — more urgently for young and innovative companies — dramatically increases access to venture capital. As a recipient of that type of venture capital, I would think the member for Vancouver-Fairview would understand that.

Now, in response to this expansion of this industry and the radical success within it, we have to respond yet again, because this begets new challenges that need our attention. I agree with the member for Vancouver-Fairview with respect to the focus on SHRED as a program, and we have stated that our intention is to continue that program and to expand our contributions to it.

We've seen now we have plans to double the annual number of graduates in computer science and in electrical and computer engineering. We've seen the establishment of a new learning agency called Leading Edge B.C. to spearhead the technology growth across

B.C. Our job is to ensure the opportunities for the visionaries and the inventors and the leaders of not just today but also tomorrow, and we will continue to do so.

#### AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE

**B. Ralston:** I rise this morning to speak about the agricultural land reserve, to celebrate its success and to think about the future of the agricultural land reserve, particularly in the context of changing world conditions.

When it was first promulgated here in the Legislature back in 1973, the agricultural land reserve was a response to a perceived and real threat to agricultural land in British Columbia. Agricultural land is scarce in British Columbia, as most people realize. Less than 3 percent of the land base of the province is capable of supporting a range of agriculture, and just over 1 percent is considered prime agricultural land. Agricultural land is sensitive to physical and environmental conditions, and good agricultural land.... The soil, the hydrology, the environmental conditions, the climatic conditions make good agricultural land unique and irreplaceable.

Prior to the creation of the agricultural land reserve in 1973, the government estimated that 6,000 hectares of prime agricultural land was lost to urban, non-agricultural development. This is perhaps not surprising. B.C.'s population has continued to grow over time, and historically, agricultural land has been developed because it is one of the easiest places to build.

[1035]

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

Indeed, for a very graphic example of that, one need look no further than the municipality of the city of Richmond, in the lower mainland of British Columbia — some of the best agricultural land on the continent. In 1958 the Richmond city council made a decision that 50 percent of the municipality would be urbanized. When you pass over there by airplane, certainly on Lulu Island, you will notice there's very little of the prime agricultural land on Lulu Island left as a result of that long-term policy decision.

Not only is it crucial to the future of the province and to the food security of British Columbia's citizens, but when one looks around the world at what changes are taking place, particularly in food production and food security, the visionary step of creating an agricultural land reserve and engaging in long-term planning to enhance the food security of the people here in British Columbia begins to look even wiser.

When we look at some of the global trends.... The global population is projected to increase from approximately 6.5 billion people now to 8.5 billion by 2025. Although in the Third World — the Green Revolution that's been spoken about which has increased the agricultural productivity of some crops, particularly rice — there are increasing threats to arable land throughout the world: urbanization, soil erosion, soil

salinity, desertification, the loss of fertility, compaction. Indeed, there's a major threat throughout the world to irrigated areas as the world's aquifers are depleted.

With depleted aquifers and increasing competition for water — ready access to water being essential for much of agricultural production, obviously — food crises loom in the future. Indeed, ready access — and we look globally as well — to inexpensive energy has been an important component of the world economy and, in particular, to agricultural production. Further than that, when we look to climatic change, it's clear that climatic change will.... The intergovernmental committee on climate change is clear that human intervention has begun to change the world's climate. One climate model projects that the number of hunger-related deaths would double, even if grain production kept pace with population but climactic conditions were unfavourable.

Traditionally, we have looked to the United States to import food, but the rate of loss of agricultural land in the United States is calculated by one expert at 50 hectares of prime farmland per hour as the pace of urbanization and suburbanization takes place. In the long term the United States may become a net importer of food, which will impact in the long run upon our ability to conveniently access food at low prices — traditionally, in this part of the world, from California.

In British Columbia the agricultural industry has \$2.2 billion in annual farm-gate receipts. When you calculate food processing, food retail and food service, the overall contribution to our economy is some \$15 billion and sustains about 280,000 jobs. In British Columbia we are approximately 50 percent self-sufficient in food, but — and this is the crucial point of the agricultural land reserve — to maintain that level of self-sufficiency, as population increases, we need to.... One expert has calculated that we would expect 2.4 million more acres required over the next two decades.

It's clear that the preservation of agricultural land is in the long-term provincial interest. Agricultural land must be viewed as a scarce and non-renewable resource, and a policy direction to the Agricultural Land Commission must be directed to the long-term consequences of taking agricultural land out of the agricultural land reserve. To properly evaluate those decisions and for citizens to participate in those decisions requires an open and accountable decision-making process which can only be in the interest of all British Columbians.

[1040]

My concern in speaking about the agricultural land reserve is to compliment the framers of the legislation and those successive governments over the last 30 years who have, with some amendments, continued to see it as an important policy objective. It's certainly the view of those of us on this side of the House that that direction ought to continue into the future.

**D. Hayer:** Talking about agriculture brings back fond memories of my youth, because for many years I worked in the fertile fields of Fraser Valley picking

blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, potatoes, tomatoes, broccoli and other crops from Delta to Chilliwack. I learned as a labourer what makes agriculture successful in this province, and it reminds me of the importance of farming to our community.

My family has been farming for generations back in India. I know productive land; I know what is unproductive. I know what farmers want and what farmers need to ensure that their business continues to be vibrant and continues to be among the greatest contributors to our vibrant economy in British Columbia. They are huge contributors to our employment, from picking crews to processing plants, greenhouses to dairy farms, beef ranches to orchards.

Agriculture is one of our foundation industries. It needs the support of everyone, because it is the breadbasket we all rely on. It would be wonderful to one day see British Columbia being self-sufficient in the production of food. However, in the meantime we must encourage the highest utilization of prime farmland, concentrating on the best soils.

That brings me to Barnston Island in my riding, which, while being farmed by a number of families, is not prime farmland. Due to the water table and the Fraser's flood potential during the annual snowmelt, much of Barnston Island is marginal. Of its 1,300 acres, 1,063 acres are class 4W, 63 are 3W and 418 are 2W. In the ALC report of 1974 "W" means difficult drainage. Barnston only has grassland. Attempts at corn, peas, carrots and beans have all failed. Barnston is accessed by ferry barge, which is inadequate and provides insufficient hours of operation, hindering marketing opportunities and hiring farm help.

Despite the island being surrounded by the highest concentration of population in this province, residents are cut off from the safety and health protection that most of us take for granted. They have no quick and easy access to police, ambulance or fire service. Lives are at risk on a daily basis. If someone suffers a heart attack in the middle of the night, there is no quick response. A fire truck has to wait for the ferry to get them there.

In 2004 two farm barns burned and were destroyed. The fire crew could not get there quickly enough. There was an expensive pedigree animal that was burned alive. As a result, the insurance premiums on Barnston Island are sky-high. If someone goes into labour — and this has happened — the baby can be born in the car or ambulance while waiting for the ferry.

There are no water or sewer services — all this within the city lights of the Greater Vancouver regional district, the governing body of Barnston Island. Yet while it governs the island, the GVRD has told me that they have no money and no plans to improve the services on Barnston Island. It costs \$700,000 a year for the ferry, yet the island generates only \$49,000 a year in taxes.

[1045]

So the residents and the government have a dilemma that's resolved only by building a bridge. But there are only a few residents, and tax revenues simply

are not there to justify the bridge. That can be changed, however, if we think outside the box. Barnston Island is separated by only a narrow channel from the CN terminal and their main line, from the Trans-Canada freeway, from the new Golden Ears Bridge, from the Pacific Highway, from the south Fraser perimeter road, from Port Kells and its mills that line the river across from the island.

To create the revenue to build the bridge and to satisfy the wants of most island residents, we must look, in the long term, at the best use for the land on Barnston Island. Everyone could be a winner. We just need to think outside the box. It doesn't have to be all or nothing. It could be a gem that we all will be proud of.

**B. Ralston:** The member for Surrey-Tynehead speaks about thinking outside the box. I think the kind of box he's talking about is a big-box warehouse or big-box retail. What Barnston Island is, is an agricultural jewel in the lower mainland.

Indeed, on the weekend I was speaking with Rob Donaldson, who is the manager of Bradner Farms. They have part of the dairy herd which provides milk production for Avalon Dairy, a well-known dairy in the lower mainland and a very popular one. They own some land there, and they lease about a total of 500 acres there. He told me that it's some of the best dairy land he has, and he has other land elsewhere in the Fraser Valley.

There is a herb farm there. There is land there that's excellent for cranberries. Indeed, because of Barnston Island's location — it's connected to the mainland by a ferry — a lot of the rural-urban interface problems that one sometimes encounters in the suburbs, where active farming causes some residents concern about odour or noise.... Given the channel that separates the island from the mainland, none of these concerns are there.

It's significant, in my view, that while the member for Surrey-Tynehead claims to understand the importance of agriculture and its centrality here to the economic life in British Columbia, the position that is taken in favour of removing Barnston Island from the agricultural land reserve is completely contrary to the views of all thinking persons on this topic and, indeed, of the GVRD; a number of citizens' groups; Smart Growth; agricultural producers; and of Mr. Donaldson from Bradner Farms, who farms on the very island that's being spoken about.

The island itself is below sea level. In order to colonize it for the big-box future that the member for Surrey-Tynehead has for it, it would require to be filled, with several feet of sand and rip-rap around the entire island, and an expensive bridge built there, supposedly to save the comfort of the residents there, at least half of whom do not seek these comforts. It would essentially destroy it and mean that they would all have to leave.

The chief proponent of the application is a person who brought forward a golf course application on the island, when golf courses were a permitted use within

the agricultural land reserve, and has turned to another means of attempting to realize an economic gain from the land other than in agricultural production.

#### SAVE THE CHILDREN

**K. Krueger:** In the new year just around the corner, 2006, young adults who were newborn babies in the year 1990 will be receiving their driver's licences. For these 16-year-olds it'll be, as it was for us long ago, a time of great excitement with a powerful sense of new freedom. It will also be a time of great danger.

In the first five years of this decade 266 teenagers have died in car crashes in British Columbia. In the same five years 494 British Columbians in their 20s have lost their lives in the same way — a total of 760 young British Columbians. You probably knew some of them. I did.

[1050]

I will never forget the sadness of the morning when we heard that Kenny Hamilton had died. It was a beautiful Victoria morning. Our beloved friends Arnie Hamilton, MLA for Esquimalt-Metchosin at the time, and his beautiful wife Carol had been at dinner with us the night before. Receiving a cell phone call, I rushed to Arnie and Carol's house and found them dazed and numb with grief. As they left their house minutes earlier, a policeman was walking up the driveway to give them the terrible news.

Kenny was a smart, lively, fun-loving, hard-working guy. He had a twin brother, Keith, and they were 19 years old. Theirs was a happy family, and Kenny was well-loved by his brother, his older sister and his parents. That morning he was being driven home by a friend — no seatbelts; high speed; drunk driver. Kenny and another boy both died in the crash, just a very short drive from his home.

The family has never gotten over Kenny's death. They never will. You just learn to live with your grief, and it has ripple effects. Arnie had troubles with his heart not long after and a change of medication. Then he had an inexplicable loss of consciousness while on a caucus tour with our colleagues, fell and sustained brain damage. Arnie and Carol, who is a pillar of strength but a hurting woman, deal with his injury and their grief. Their surviving children try to help. The hurt is permanent.

I was an ICBC claims man for 20 years. The patterns emerge quickly when you are investigating car crashes. All too often you could almost use a template statement and just fill in the blanks. "My name is blank. My friend blank was killed in a car accident last night. We had some beers at blank. Then we went to blank and had some more. We were going to blank. He was driving pretty fast. We hit the ditch and rolled. Nobody was wearing seatbelts." And so it goes. You fill in the names and details, but it's all pretty predictable and very, very sad and avoidable.

In the 1970s there was a horrifying string of such accidents in Prince George, B.C., which killed dozens of young people and maimed many more. I was a young

adjuster then. The people of Prince George got angry about the needless loss of young lives and took action in their grief. They struck a citizens' committee with a slogan: Take the Car out of Carnage. They set up billboards around town and parked wrecks below them, spoke in schools, ran advertisements and did everything they could think of to make kids think before they drink. And it worked.

ICBC was still a young company then, and its management decided to take a page from that lesson and write a new book. They hired skilled teachers in Prince George and elsewhere — people already respected in the school system. The teachers worked with ICBC adjusters right in our claims centres. They wrote curriculum and taught other teachers how to build traffic safety messages into the everyday life of school kids from kindergarten on up.

We had recognized that by the time people are young adults, attitudes have been formed, and they're often very hard to change. Some adults will never stop driving while drunk until you keep them in jail. Other adults will never start because they've known better since they were little children. The approach worked. Little kids, including my own at the time, would quote the traffic safety messages. If they saw a traffic light turn amber and noticed our vehicle accelerate, they'd yell: "Fools rush in, Dad; fools rush in."

One day as we were rolling out of the driveway, my six-year-old shouted, "Dad, you haven't done up our seatbelts" — on their infant car restraints. I said: "It's okay; we're only going five doors down to Grandma's house." There was a stunned silence in the car and a solemn little voice: "Dad, does God say it's okay to break the law if you're only going five doors down to Grandma's house?" Of course, God doesn't.

ICBC tracks the compliance of British Columbians using seatbelts and recorded heartening progress over the next 15 years. We saw the public attitude shift from regarding impaired driving as an excuse for accidents to the repugnant, frightful, reckless risk that it is.

In 1993 British Columbians who turned 16 and applied for drivers' licences had been receiving traffic safety messages since they were in kindergarten. It was a good program, and it worked.

Things are very different today. There is no organized ICBC program in the elementary schools. Traffic safety is not a part of the K-to-12 curriculum. There is some ad hoc messaging, some good programs here and there by good organizations. Teenagers grow up thinking, though, that it's not cool to wear seatbelts instead of realizing how utterly foolish it is not to. Some think it is cool to drink and drive, steal cars and street race. They attend funerals and leave sad piles of flowers at roadsides where their friends have died needlessly, often as a direct result of thoughtless decisions against which we used to train children's minds.

[1055]

The change happened in 1993. A hotshot new ICBC executive cut off the traffic safety programs in schools with a flip justification: "Those kids are too young to drive." We tried to explain reality to her, but there was

no changing her mind. How many of those 760 young people and the hundreds more who died between 1993 and 1999 would be alive today if we still taught traffic safety from kindergarten up? How many would be spared quadriplegia, paraplegia, brain damage and other catastrophic injuries? We can't say for sure, but we know that the program was working.

This past spring two young drivers were killed in separate accidents just one week apart in Kamloops. Both had just graduated from a high school in my constituency. Last year a young man who had just completed his second year in a carpenter apprenticeship was rendered quadriplegic when he crashed his car into a house near my office while speeding and drunk. His parents have remodelled their home, learned to perform medical procedures for him and are adapting to a very different life than they had joyfully expected with their bright, motivated son.

I stay in touch with Arnie and Carol and Keith Hamilton. I pray for them, love them, but there is no healing the hurt. The young man who killed their son went to jail for it, but that doesn't help much.

I'll yield the floor to my friend across the way and look forward to closing comments.

**N. Macdonald:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this. The first time the member for Kamloops–North Thompson and I met was at a meeting over the summer on highway safety. It's an issue I feel very strongly about as well.

The member talked very eloquently about the impact that accidents have on not only the individuals involved but the ripple effect and the fact that no matter what happens, families never get over the tragedy. Three weekends ago four former students were in an accident. There was one fatality. There were three that were seriously injured. There are stories like this coming out of communities constantly, and anything we can do to make improvements and make sure the people avoid these accidents, we should be trying to do.

There are things that have worked well. During the election I had a chance to go to schools and speak. A number of students would ask about the licensing changes and what my opinion was on those. It wasn't a popular opinion, but I told them that, as a parent, I thought anything that made licensing more rigorous, anything that made students or people learning to drive think more carefully about what they were doing was a good thing.

As my daughter learns to drive and as she drives with her friends, I'm happy with the way the police treat them. I'm happy with the fact that it is a rigorous process. We need to continue to improve, and I think the member's suggestion around an ICBC traffic safety program is a positive thing. I think that within the school system there are opportunities, in a systematic way, to provide part of the training, part of the mindset that is necessary for young people to have as they step into what will probably be the most dangerous thing that they do, which is to drive around.

There are other things that we can do and that we can look at as well. I just have a couple of suggestions.

The B.C. Automobile Association right now is talking about something that we can do for younger people. They met with the Transportation critic, the member for Vancouver-Kensington. One of the suggestions they had — and I hope the member for Kamloops-North Thompson will follow up with — is the idea of requiring booster seats. So as children step out of and stop using the car seats, they step into booster seats as an intermediary stage before they are ready for the full adult seatbelts.

There are also things that we can do around alcohol. There's a report that came out from the Children's Commission back in 2001 that talks about the impact of alcohol on children's deaths. There certainly is work that has been done there, but more needs to be done, of course.

The final thing that I would like to talk about in the time we have remaining.... Both the member and I — and, I think, the member for Shuswap — would know very well that highway quality has a big impact on accident rates and on the impact of a mistake. The accident that I was talking about, which happened several weekends ago, happened when people hit black ice.

[1100]

Now, that has always been there. The difference is that now when people make a mistake on some of our highways, they are almost always going to find an oncoming vehicle, and that is what happened in this case. There was a semi. Again and again we find roads that are so busy that a simple mistake has tragic consequences.

I'm very pleased that the member for Kamloops-North Thompson brought this up. I think that the description he gave about the impact — the wider impact of an accident and the fact that it affects not only the person involved but the family for the rest of their lives — is one we have to be mindful of. I personally will be supporting any improvements that can be made. This is an issue that I hope we continue to work on over our time here to make improvements. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

**K. Krueger:** I thank the member for Columbia River-Revelstoke. I know his heart is with the children on these issues, like everyone else in this House.

Every year in British Columbia we have fewer kids in kindergarten now than we do in grade 12, as our school population continues to shrink. Every child is precious, and we need to focus on kids and plan for their well-being and be disciplined about how we do it. It was a mistake in 1993 for the traffic safety program to be discontinued. It's something we can reverse.

Our government has a huge heart for children. Our government takes the position that early childhood development begins at conception. I've always believed that. We're very concerned for the health of mothers expecting children, very concerned for prenatal health, very concerned for what happens to children when they leave the hospital — that they leave in an infant car restraint in the vehicle that takes them home.

I worked with some wonderful people when I worked in traffic safety programs after I left ICBC claims. I mentioned the other day when we talked about the firefighters legislation that the firefighters would help with programs to teach young parents how to ensure that their children were properly secured in their infant car restraints.

The member is right that the BCAA has excellent programs. There are other private sector partners, like the independent insurance brokers all around British Columbia, trying to help in this area. Certainly, the RCMP are always completely gung-ho to help in every program that comes on, and they helped me a great deal in the initiatives that I undertook as a traffic safety regional manager. But this is one time when we should go backwards.

I call on my government and the Insurance Corporation of B.C. to step up to the plate again in a very organized way. My private member's statement is a call to action. Let's get traffic safety back in the curriculum, back in the schools, and teach responsibility and citizenship on the roads once again.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I call private members' Motion 28.

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 28 without disturbing the priorities of the motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

### Motions on Notice

#### INHERITANCE TAX

**J. Rustad:** Hon. Speaker:

[Be it resolved that this House respects seniors and their families who, over their lifetime, have worked to impart the fruits of their labour to the next generation so that they may continue their family's legacy; and in support of that, this House opposes an inheritance tax on British Columbians.]

I rise today to speak about the contributions made by our province's seniors and about how this government values all that they have done for our society. Sometimes I wonder why more than 200 years ago people uprooted their lives and moved to an uncharted wilderness. What drove people to come to a place that today we call British Columbia, to leave the then civilized world to come and pioneer in this rugged, beautiful land?

[1105]

I'm sure there were many reasons, but the one thought I believe that most had was that this new land was a place where they could build a future, a place where they could have a better life than the one they had. But more important, I believe, was the belief that this is a place where they could build a better future for their children than they had.

In the time that I have been a politician and for years prior I have spoken with many seniors. I asked about their lives, the changes they have seen over the years and about their hopes and aspirations. Nobody enjoys talking about the day when we'll depart this world, but one of the things that gives all seniors comfort is the knowledge that they have helped their children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews or other relatives and friends. Some have even been able to build up a nest egg and look forward to their families enjoying the fruits of their labour after they've taken their rest.

This government respects what seniors have done for our society. We respect the contributions that have been made to improve our way of life and to build our reputation as the best place in the world to build a future. We respect the fact that they have built our economy, our schools, our social network, our infrastructure and indeed our future. In support of this, our government has done many things for our seniors. Just this fall we put an additional \$242 million towards supporting our seniors. We provided them with the best Pharmacare system, one of the best health care systems and the best tax regime in Canada and have dramatically improved wait times from about a year to just 60 to 90 days for long-term care facilities.

I'd like to take a moment to talk about those long-term care facilities. When we formed government in 2001, many of those facilities were rundown and substandard. Seniors were grouped into crowded facilities with washrooms that you couldn't even manoeuvre a wheelchair in. This was no way to treat our most honourable members of society. Our government has done more than any previous one in improving these facilities so that our seniors receive the best support we can provide, yet we recognize that we need to do more.

Over the coming years the number of seniors in our province will be increasing dramatically. We need to do everything we can to prepare for this. Our government understands this, which is why one of our great goals is to have the best system of support for seniors. These are not just words. They are part of a vision that all of us need to work towards. They are part of showing the kind of respect and honour our government has for our province's seniors.

This past Friday was Remembrance Day. In this Year of the Veteran, and indeed in every year, we spent a few moments of our day remembering those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our society, for our way of life. I had the opportunity of speaking with a few of these surviving veterans to say: "Thank you." I'd like to share their response.

These veterans, who spent the rest of their lives living with what they had experienced, all shared one comment. It was something they believed they needed to do for us, and they would do it again if they were called upon. This comment was very profound, as it speaks volumes to their values. It affirms that these people believe so strongly in our way of life, in our society and in their families that they are willing to give their lives to protect them. In honour of their fight,

in honour of all the contributions that the seniors have given to our society, it's important that this House be clear in its recognition of our seniors. It's important that as we grow older, we have the opportunity to leave something behind for those who follow after us.

The two things that seem certain in life are death and taxes. Throughout our life we pay our taxes to support our society. Many of us would like to pay less, but few believe that taxes are not essential so that our society can provide the services that we all want and enjoy. However, is it right to ask people to pay their fair share of taxes throughout their life and then ask them to pay a second time, when they pass on whatever they have managed to save to the next generation? In my opinion, we should all respect the contributions people have made to our society and respect their wishes.

It has been said that the opposition's philosophical belief is that society should pay more taxes. During the '90s B.C.'s taxes were very high and uncompetitive. It was joked that they taxed us to death. In the last federal election the Leader of the Opposition supported the idea of an inheritance tax. This raised the joke that the opposition not only wanted to tax us to death but that they wanted to tax us after death.

[1110]

It is my hope that everyone in this House will support the following motion. It's a motion to send a clear message to our seniors that this House respects them and wants to give them the peace of mind that comes with knowing that what they pass on to the next generation will not be targeted by this or any government.

[Be it resolved that this House respects seniors and their families who, over their lifetime, have worked to impart the fruits of their labour to the next generation so that they may continue their family's legacy; and in support of that, this House opposes an inheritance tax on British Columbians.]

**K. Conroy:** It is interesting that this motion is being brought forward today. The reality is that this was an issue in the last federal election, but here in B.C. we have been quite clear that we do not support having an inheritance tax. During the last provincial election there was a deliberate attempt to bring this issue forward again as misinformation and as a distraction from the Liberal record on cuts to services to seniors in this province. Our leader was very clear that she and our caucus were not supporting any proposals for tax increases for seniors or the inheritance tax.

It is also interesting that when there are so many issues to debate or motions to put on the floor about seniors, this would.... Well, it seems to me that this would be fearmongering — fearmongering by this motion that doesn't really need to happen. Why didn't we see a government motion, for example, on fixing the broken promise to seniors about building 5,000 new long-term care beds? Long-term care beds — not assisted-living or supported-living, which are very, very important, but long-term care beds. Why didn't we see a government-backbencher motion demanding better care for our

seniors looking for home support, ensuring that seniors can stay in assisted-living or supported-housing facilities with the support they need?

I want to talk about the support that's missing for seniors in this province. Let's talk about the services that are costing the seniors in this province, that impact the fruits of their labours right in their pocketbook. I have met with groups of seniors from this province who want to talk about their lives. They have told me so many different stories. I want to share some of them today. A senior had to sell her family home that had been in her family for years and years — and why? Because she could no longer afford the medication she had to take, medication that was no longer covered under the new Pharmacare program. She had to sell her home in order to be able to live, never mind leave it to her children or to their children.

Seniors are now facing increasing costs in their private facility, as the owner now needs to make money off these facilities. Yes, private businesses do need to make a living, but it shouldn't be at the expense of seniors in this province. I am reading letters from seniors who can't afford the increases they are being asked to pay and are giving up services they have to pay for in order to pay for these increases. These are services that would enable them to stay in these assisted-living facilities longer, because without that support they could potentially have to access long-term care beds sooner — not that they will be able to, because again that promise to build those beds was broken and the wait-list grows.

Seniors are lying in acute care beds in hospitals right now, waiting for long-term care beds. They know they are taking up a bed that could be utilized by an acute care patient, and neither they nor their families want to be there. It is of little comfort to a family to be told that a community is over-serviced with long-term care beds and that they have to be closed, and then to watch their loved ones wait in an acute care facility or be shipped hundreds of kilometres away from friends, families and communities that they have lived in and contributed to all their lives, communities that have benefited from the fruits of these seniors' labours, because that's where the next available bed comes up.

Let's talk about home support: support in the home, support to stay in a facility with minimum support, support to not have to access long-term care beds. That support has decreased in this province. Home support hours have decreased 13 percent between 2001 and 2003 relative to the number of seniors aged 75 and over.

[1115]

As everyone knows, as our population ages, this government has failed to provide the increased services our seniors need. In 2002 this government reduced weekly home care and support visits for most seniors from three per week to two. In the Vancouver Coastal Health region alone, services such as cleaning, laundry and shopping were reduced for more than 5,600 seniors. One senior said to me: "Yes, I can still get my once-a-week bath, but it's in a tub that isn't very clean."

As a result of these cuts, B.C. home care recipients were receiving 30 percent less service than the national average and the second-lowest of any province in Canada. Seniors are spending hard-earned dollars, their savings, to get an extra bath and help with their cleaning and to ensure that they have healthy food in their house, and this is only scratching the surface. This is just so shortsighted, as it is just common sense to put more support in and ensure that seniors can stay in their homes longer and not in the long-term care beds.

I do agree with my colleague that we do need to respect seniors and their families, respect their contribution to this province over the long term and respect that the next generation may continue their family's legacy. We, too, oppose an inheritance tax on British Columbians, but respect isn't enough. We must also ensure that seniors have the services in this province that they deserve, when they need them.

**R. Lee:** I rise this morning to support Motion 28, put forward by the hon. member for Prince George-Omineca.

[Be it resolved that this House respects seniors and their families who, over their lifetime, have worked to impart the fruits of their labour to the next generation so that they may continue their family's legacy; and in support of that, this House opposes an inheritance tax on British Columbians.]

Madam Speaker, as you may know, Burnaby North, the riding that I represent, is a riding situated between Burnaby Mountain and Boundary Road, just east of Vancouver. It's north of Canada Way and south of the Burrard Inlet. The 2001 census indicated that 45 percent of the residents in this riding are immigrants. We also have many residents who have lived in this riding for many generations. It shows that we are very dynamic and multicultural. We have students, workers, professionals, business owners and retired seniors.

As in other parts of British Columbia, most have worked very hard to make a living. Some are renters who pay their rents from paycheque to paycheque, but a large number of my constituents are homeowners, who are paying for mortgages or have clear titles to their houses. In fact, many British Columbians have also contributed to their pensions and registered retirement savings plans. In other words, many British Columbians have worked hard to save for their retirement and have built up substantial family assets. They have paid their fair share of their taxes along the way.

The question of an inheritance tax came up during the last federal election in May 2004. At that time the federal NDP leader was proposing to introduce a tax on inheritance over \$1 million, which would begin at 18 percent and rise to 48 percent for an inheritance worth \$5 million. This proposal raised a lot of concerns for British Columbians, because many of our residents are homeowners and have substantial RSP or pension rights as well.

Many of our seniors would leave an estate of a value over \$1 million to their children. They are now worried that when they die, the government will take

away up to half of their savings under the NDP proposal.

Madam Speaker, we are not engaged in irrelevant debate in this House this morning. A federal election is again looming on the horizon. Many of my constituents are worried again.

[1120]

They are not only worried about this inheritance tax that would be implemented at the federal level. They are also worried about the position of some of the provincial NDP members, as some of the members sitting on the other side of the House today also ran in the last federal election and presumably also endorsed the federal NDP policy.

I would like to remind the House that the former member for Vancouver-Hastings said on June 2, 2004, in the TV program *Voice of B.C.*: "The inheritance tax, along with some shifts rolling back some of the tax decreases for corporations, is saying that in order to support health and education, we are going to move to a much more progressive tax system. The inheritance tax is part of that." The current Leader of the Opposition said on May 31, 2004: "We're the only country in the western world that doesn't have an inheritance tax. I think the people of Canada will support that tax."

Madam Speaker, I believe this motion is very timely. It's time to assure all British Columbians that the inheritance tax has no place in British Columbia. The members of the opposition now have a chance to come clean on their positions. I'm pleased that this government has worked very hard to reduce income tax and corporate tax. Now British Columbians earning less than \$85,000 are paying the lowest income tax in the country, and our tax measures have generated an excellent environment for job creation and business development.

An inheritance tax would be counterproductive. It would discourage investment from coming to British Columbia, and it may also make our seniors think of moving their assets out of this province. I do hope this House will pass this motion to send a clear message to all British Columbians, especially to our seniors, that the government should not impose an inheritance tax on them, that we encourage British Columbians to work hard to build up their family estates and that the fruits of their labour should not be cut away by the government.

**B. Ralston:** Let's be clear at the very beginning. The members on this side of the House do not support an inheritance tax. Our leader, the Leader of the Opposition, has spoken clearly against an inheritance tax. The question, I suppose, is why this issue is being raised now. Are the members opposite seeking to assist, some of them, their fellow Tory candidates that they hold a brief for? Are they seeking to assist Liberal candidates that they hold a brief for? Why are they bringing this federal issue before the House at this time?

It's clear that the issue is framed in a way that speaks nothing to provincial jurisdiction. On this side of the House, we're not in favour of probate fees. We're

not in favour of succession duties or any provincial-jurisdiction taxing power that would affect the probate of estates, so there is no factual basis for it. The member for Burnaby North claimed that members on this side of the House had run as federal candidates in the last election or were thinking of running in the next federal election. I'm not sure quite what he was getting at — again, without any factual basis for that assertion whatsoever.

The issue, then, is: why was this particular motion given priority? Why did it come forward? Why are the members of the government side attempting to promote confusion and distortion about the position taken by members on this side of the House? One probably could look to the playbook of the Republican Party in the United States where, on certain issues that divide Republicans from Democrats, this is considered to be a defining issue.

[1125]

Perhaps the members of the staff and the public affairs bureau sought inspiration there. Perhaps the members on the other side haven't found the right political lever, in their view, to attack the members on this side. It seems to me that this motion is born out of a kind of political desperation that seems utterly inconsistent with the tone of the House, the work that we're doing here and the accomplishments that we're achieving together. Frankly, I'm disappointed that this motion is brought forward at this time.

The other aspect of this motion that is very clear is that the other side of the House, the members opposite, seek to avoid their record on treatment of seniors. Obviously, the issue of what one does with one's estate, whether one gives it to your family or whether... Many people choose to engage in philanthropic pursuits. Indeed, there's a growing movement of philanthropy. People look to improve society by the money that they have earned and endow certain foundations, set up private trusts to benefit the unfortunate in the community. These are things that are ranges of individual choice and that people are entitled to do, and many people in the community would applaud them.

But the policy options that have been chosen by this government prior to the last election obviously need to be erased from the slate of public memory. In my view, that's what this motion is attempting — unsuccessfully — to do. In the election campaign of 2001 the government made a promise to build 5,000 beds for long-term care. They failed utterly and miserably. The member for Prince George-Omineca has proffered some of the usual excuses that have been proffered to explain this complete and abject policy failure on the part of the government over its previous term. Obviously, that's not a comfortable position for the government to be in, so they want to distract people by promoting some misinformation, some distortion, and create an issue when none is there rather than face their own record over the previous four years.

We heard stories of senior couples being separated and forced to live hundreds of kilometres apart. This was a deliberate policy choice of the health authorities,

given the financial constraints placed upon them by the government during its previous term. They raised fees for long-term and extended care as well as the medical services premiums. Again, part of appreciating seniors, if we are to take the member for Prince George-Omineca at his word, and I do, is to improve the condition of their lives before they end rather than be only concerned about what the disposition of their assets might be after their death.

They cut hundreds of hours that seniors had received for home care. Home care is a particularly important part of the health care continuum, where not only is it pleasant and congenial to receive company and assistance in going about one's daily tasks; it also has the added benefit of enabling seniors to remain in their family home rather than being institutionalized at an earlier time. Again, I can appreciate that the members opposite desire a distraction from that record.

Preventative health services such as physiotherapy, chiropractics, medical massage and eye examinations.... The fees were increased. Once again, less concern for seniors who are going about their daily lives and imposing additional, yes, tax burdens upon them rather than simply being concerned with the disposition of their assets after their death. A number of drugs were delisted from Pharmacare, and there was an increased dispensing fee for seniors.

There are more aspects of this treatment, but it's certainly clear that that's why this motion is brought forward. There's no substance to the allegation that's being made whatsoever. It's disappointing that it's being made, and perhaps upon consideration the member for Prince George-Omineca and the member for Burnaby North would want to withdraw it at this point.

[1130]

**D. Jarvis:** I rise to speak to this motion from the gentleman from Prince George-Omineca with regard to inheritance tax. I support this motion.

Inheritance tax, if you're not aware, is basically the tax you pay on all your assets when you die. In other words, you go to work all your life and are required to pay taxes every year, and then you pay taxes on your consumption, like the PST and GST, and on and on it goes.

After all those years of living and paying taxes, if you have anything left when you die, the government then wants another crack at it. They want to tax your estate, so if anything is left that you may want to give to your children, that's diminished somewhat. The moneys they receive are then taxed and taxed again for the rest of their lives. And on it goes.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Inheritance tax used to be relegated to the very wealthy, but now they want everyone to pay the inheritance tax, it appears, as you look around the world. The socialist parties were great with that — trying to establish the difference between the wealthy and those that don't have as much wealth. If you go back into

history, in the 1700s, 250-odd years ago, there's that famous quotation by Benjamin Franklin: "Nothing is more certain than death and taxes."

I noted that the members for Surrey-Whalley and West Kootenay-Boundary both were somewhat disappointed that this motion came forward. I want to tell them that probably one of the reasons is.... I'm not sure why it came forward, but from my perspective, it's that even just prior to the last election, the Leader of the Opposition, on May 31 of '04, actually stood up with the federal NDP members and said we are the only country that is against the inheritance tax, and "I think the people of Canada will support that tax." Well, that gives us concern. It concerns me.

Back in '05, during the last election, the member for Victoria-Hillside stood up and said, with respect to the inheritance tax, that it is not beyond consideration. That is why, I guess, some of the concern may have come up. You know, it's the old class warfare, the NDP socialist attitude that a wealth tax is the counterweight between the wealthy and the....

Interjection.

**D. Jarvis:** It's a counterweight to the undue concentration of wealth in this country. No matter how hard you work or how wisely you save your money and manage your affairs, in the end the governments step in and take it away. Inheritance tax, if it's brought in, will stifle savings, and it will stifle the labour supply, especially to family-owned businesses and farms, etc. It will stifle the economic growth of this country.

I'll close, as time is limited. As a senior, I would say to all the members of this House, regardless of what side they're on, that you don't want to be remembered as an MLA who attacks dead people.

#### Point of Privilege

**R. Fleming:** I rise on a point of privilege. The member for North Vancouver-Seymour attributed a quote to me — that I said an inheritance tax was not beyond consideration. I have never said that in my life. There is no way he can prove that. I challenge him to prove it.

Actually, I challenge him to withdraw that remark. There is no such quote that is attributed to me, and I take offence that that has been said in the House today. Will the member withdraw it?

[1135]

**D. Jarvis:** If the member for Victoria-Hillside takes offence to that, then I will withdraw it.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member withdrew the statement.

**R. Fleming:** It's not accurate. I challenge the member to prove it if he would like.

**An Hon. Member:** He has withdrawn the statement.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member.

**R. Fleming:** Well, I don't want any equivocation on it.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, the comment has been withdrawn. He has withdrawn it off the record. We'll proceed with debate.

### Debate Continued

**H. Bains:** I stand to speak in favour of this motion, but I must say that I am disappointed this motion even hit the floor. There was no need for this motion. It has nothing to do with the substance of the matter. It has everything to do with politics.

Our parents, our grandparents and our great-great-grandparents not only worked hard and long to give us the best country in the world, but they made many sacrifices. Many of them gave their lives so that their children and their children's children could enjoy a good life.

Yes, in the process they were able, with their hard work and their hard labour, to build a nest for themselves with the hope that they would pass it on to their children. It makes no sense for the government to then come in and say: "Now that you have worked hard to build that nest one straw at a time, we want to take a big chunk out of that."

I come from a background where, for centuries, it has been entrenched in the culture that parents pass their house and their land on to their children. For generations, as a result, people are living in the same house that their ancestors lived in once and toiling the same piece of land that their elders once toiled to feed their families.

The NDP was very clear in our platform during the last election that there shall be no inheritance tax. We made it clear that there will be no new taxes. It seems to me that that side of the House, also, does not agree with this tax. Then why bring this motion onto the floor? This motion does nothing to put our seniors in comfort — to allow them to live in peace and comfort and let them enjoy the remaining years of their lives. It has everything to do with politics, and our seniors are the last ones that this government should play politics with.

The member for Prince George-Omineca spent a lot of the time that was allotted to him patting this government on the back for the good things they've done for the seniors, but he neglected a dozen or so benefit program cuts to the seniors. They even tried to take the bus passes away. Now for them to stand up about how good they are to the seniors is hypocrisy.

New Democrats were clear throughout the campaign, with seniors and everyone else, that we're not proposing any new taxes. We're not proposing raising taxes. That side of the House is misleading seniors and the public to distract from their record on seniors.

They were the ones who cancelled 1,000 units of affordable housing and drove up the wait-lists for af-

fordable housing for low-income families and seniors. Then, in the 2005 budget update, they tried to spin it as a seniors budget, but a closer look reveals that they're only covering up for the previous cuts.

[1140]

The \$50 million over three years that they talked about for seniors supplements doesn't even come close to making up what they took away in 2002. Perhaps the Liberals are feeling guilty about treating our seniors with total disrespect and contempt for the last four and a half years. By putting this motion on the floor today, they believe that the seniors might forgive them for the cutbacks this government imposed on our seniors, or perhaps it is their way of atoning for the hardship this government put our seniors through. The real atonement will come when they come up with real solutions to the issues that our seniors face.

This government has done nothing to help our seniors, the most vulnerable in our society. My challenge to that side of the House is to quit playing politics with our seniors. Start respecting them, because they are our parents. They are our grandparents. They are the ones who built this country. They are the reason we are sitting in this House enjoying freedom.

In closing, I must say that I was, and I am, disappointed that this government continues to play politics with the most vulnerable in our society. Instead, they should be spending time to come up with the real solutions by consulting with those seniors, by consulting with this side of the House and by consulting with the public at large to come up with real solutions to the serious problems our seniors and many others in the public are facing.

[Applause.]

**R. Hawes:** I appreciate the applause too. It's a pleasure to speak to this motion today and to support the motion. I want to preface my remarks by saying how pleased I am there has obviously been a bolt of lightning that struck a number of members of the opposition, who have changed their position substantially on this issue. That makes me feel there's hope.

One of the previous members already quoted the Leader of the Opposition, who said on Global TV on May 31: "We're the only country in the western world that doesn't have an inheritance tax. I think the people of Canada will support that tax." The opposition seems to be confused as to why this motion would come forward. I guess, to start with, we all know we're on the brink of a federal election.

Now, if I digress for a second: federally, our party is not linked to the Liberal Party of Canada, nor are we linked to the Conservative Party. Our members have memberships, some in the Conservative Party and some in the federal Liberal Party. We are basically a coalition. I think there are few of us who would have a membership in the federal NDP party, who have definite links. The two parties are completely linked, and I think the opposition members would agree with that.

The leader of the NDP nationally is on record as strongly supporting an inheritance tax. When he campaigned in the last federal election, the Leader of the Opposition often accompanied him when he was on a swing through B.C. She, too, supported that tax. Our member did quote correctly, but the wrong person, when he said that one of the NDP candidates had said that it's not beyond consideration, that being the tax. It was actually Charley Beresford who said that. She was the Oak Bay-Gordon Head candidate in the last election, and she said that on CFAX radio on May 3, 2005.

Joy MacPhail, former Leader of the Opposition, said that in order to support health and education, we're going to move to a much more progressive tax system — the inheritance tax along with some shifts rolling back some of the tax decreases for corporations. The inheritance tax is part of that. Joy MacPhail said that on *Voice of B.C.* on the second of June of 2004.

[1145]

There are a couple of members of the current opposition here that ran federally in the last election and clearly were then supportive of an inheritance tax. I'm really pleased that they have changed their attitude towards that, because I think that will provide some modicum of protection. I really hope that in the upcoming federal election, their brother leading the federal NDP also has that similar strike of lightning and sees the light and drops his plan for an inheritance tax, were they ever to form any kind of government.

There have been, though, a number of comments about things like long-term care, etc. I'm very, very proud, actually, of our government's progress and our plan for long-term care in this province. In 2001 we set out a very ambitious plan to build 5,000 new long-term care beds by 2006, but what we found when we took office was a woeful decay among the existing long-term care beds in this province

Many of them were not actually habitable in terms of supporting people who needed that level of care — that lifts, for example, couldn't be put into some of them. There were some long-term care homes that didn't have wheelchair access. They didn't meet fire codes. We had to embark on a very ambitious program of reconstructing and refitting those homes, which has been accomplished to a large degree, but that did take away from our plan to build 5,000 new long-term care beds by 2006.

Our plan was very ambitious. The opposition likes to characterize it as a broken promise. The fact is that we worked very hard to accomplish an ambitious plan. It will be accomplished now by 2008.

I just want to read a couple of things here. Here's a quote from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, that well-known left-wing think tank: "In 1991, B.C.'s Seaton commission called for a transfer of health care resources from hospitals to the community, but the sad reality of the past decade has been hospital downsizing with no parallel investment in community-based care." That was a quote from a press release from the Canadian Centre released.... Let's see, when was it released? Oh, gosh, November 2000. Well, what gov-

ernment would they be talking about? By gosh, it would be the previous NDP government.

"Community and continuing care has become more difficult to access over the past ten years. The number of people receiving home support has actually fallen, and thousands of seniors are on waiting lists for long-term care," said this report published in 2000. This is about the NDP's decade, the dark decade where there was very little investment in, really, anything in this province — and nor could there be, because we ran out of money.

The money we needed to run our province was actually going to Alberta and other places that were far more friendly, places that would never, ever think of talking about things like inheritance taxes. They would never support those kinds of ideals. None of the members of their government in our neighbouring province, for example, would speak about that — other than the members of the provincial NDP in Alberta perhaps.

I know that this motion, as it's brought forward, is really about trying to secure some modicum of protection and some feeling of safety, as we move into a federal election, for the seniors in this province and for those who work hard all their lives to build assets and hopefully leave something to their kids and not see the government strip it away with double taxation.

I am very supportive of this motion. I think it is a timely motion, and I don't think it's particularly political at all. I think it's aimed at bringing some sense of comfort to seniors as they listen to the rhetoric that will come forward in the upcoming federal election. So, with that, I know there are other speakers who would also like to speak on this topic.

[1150]

**H. Bloy:** I would like to thank the member for Prince George-Omineca for bringing forward this motion. The reason I'm standing up to speak in favour of it today is fear — fear of what a government would do if they started taxing the citizens of this province who have worked hard all their lives to provide for them and to provide....

Interjection.

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

**H. Bloy:** I'm standing up for fear, Mr. Speaker — citizens in British Columbia that have worked their whole life to earn a living to pay their bills, to raise their family, to bring them in the best possible context so this province can move ahead.... To bring in an inheritance tax is totally wrong.

There have just been a few things that other members have said. You know, once you're an NDP member, when you join the NDP Party, you join the federal party and the provincial party. There is no distinction. You continue with that.

To quote the member for Surrey-Whalley, in his speech he asked us to recall this motion. I asked him to

stand up and tell us what his members think. We have it in quotes that his members believe that inheritance tax is proper and good. Carole James spent the week campaigning with the last federal....

**Mr. Speaker:** Member, don't use personal names in the House, please.

**H. Bloy:** Yeah.

In the last federal election for the NDP, inheritance tax. Now she says she's against it. Well, what does she really mean? She's quoted here — and it's been said before, and it has to be repeated: "We're the only country in the western world that doesn't have an inheritance tax. I think the people of Canada will support that tax." Well, I think the Leader of the Opposition is absolutely wrong.

Here's another quote from Joy MacPhail, a past member of this House. She has been a driving force in the NDP for years, and I just want to repeat that. "The inheritance tax, along with some shifts rolling back some of the tax decreases for corporations, is saying that in order to support health and education, we're going to move to a much more progressive tax system. The inheritance tax is part of that."

We have two members in this House who ran for the NDP in the last election 12 months ago or 16 months ago, and they're members of the NDP Party. So where do they really stand? Where does the member for Alberni-Qualicum or the member for Powell River-Sunshine Coast...? Where do they stand on inheritance tax? They ran to support inheritance tax. Do they have no conviction?

I want to read an article from the *Times Colonist* in May of 2005.

Throughout this provincial campaign, the NDP has been busily fearmongering about senior care. They have completely ignored the obvious: that the best way to ensure suitable and sustainable senior care is a strong and growing economy. That is precisely what we have achieved, thanks in no small part to the B.C. Liberals' policy. Now, however, something has appeared that really frightens this senior.

The Leader of the Opposition is on record as supporting the imposition of an inheritance tax. Referring to

this, she said: "I think the people of Canada will support that tax." It's now possible that if the NDP were to come to power, seniors would not only be taxed to death, but they would be taxed after death.

There's worry around North America where you go.... And what happens with taxes? Death taxes, referred to as inheritance taxes, kill many small family businesses, and it might just bury the job of someone working for a family business. When a family business suffers a death, employees who count on that business can go through a rough transition period. In fact, as many as 70 percent of businesses don't survive the transfer of inheritance tax.

Now we're not only taxing those that have worked hard all their lives, taxing those people that are providing for their families and leaving money to charitable causes in millions and millions of dollars. This NDP government now wants to rip that money away from charities before it can get to them so that they can get their hands on it. Not only do they take that money, but they take jobs away from British Columbians, from Canadians, and this is totally wrong. The family that loses the business, the workers lose their jobs....

Noting the hour, Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of debate.

[1155]

H. Bloy moved adjournment of debate.

**J. Kwan:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, there's still five minutes left before 12 o'clock to finish the debate. I'd like to speak to the motion, please.

**Mr. Speaker:** The question is adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Abbott moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

**Mr. Speaker:** This House stands adjourned until two o'clock this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 11:56 a.m.

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