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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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

THIRD SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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Honourable Bill Barisoff

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MONDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2007

The House met at 10:02 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

D. MacKay: I seek leave to file a petition.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

Petitions

D. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here from people in the Agassiz, Hope, Maple Ridge, Chilliwack and Langley areas, asking the government to activate the Select Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs to examine and to make recommendations on the implications of the Tsawwassen and Maa-nulth final agreements.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Statements

BUY B.C.

C. Evans: The subject I wish to discuss this morning is the Buy B.C. program, which was launched here in B.C. in 1993 and cancelled in 2001. But let me begin long before 1993, to establish the rationale for the initiative.

[K. Whittred in the chair.]

In the 1960s and 1970s farmers tended to have marketing systems that they could develop to influence the market according to their needs. Independent distributors and, often, produce managers in grocery stores bought directly from local producers in appropriate seasons, and farmers were able to capture some of the value that otherwise might have gone to the distributor and the retailer.

These systems were assisted then by provincial and federal governments in Canada, who used to use tariff law to limit foreign access to the Canadian market during times of peak local production. Governments also assisted producers to build storage or controlled environment facilities to enhance the farmers' capacity to store product until it was required by the marketplace.

All this began to break down, though, with the evolution of international trade law changes in the 1980s, a process of reducing the ability of governments all over the world to influence access to their markets. That's still going on today. Examples of this evolution were the Free Trade Agreement that Canada signed with the United States; the NAFTA agreement between Canada, the U.S. and Mexico; and the multinational GATT that began to discuss and influence food product distribution for the first time. Once these agreements were developed, it became possible, using

modern technology, for grocery chains to centralize their supply chain internationally.

[1005]

It became increasingly difficult for farmers to access the marketplace unless they could produce massive amounts of product to interest the centralized purchasers of the major chains. Different countries and provinces struggled to compensate for these changes in trade law and to help their farmers in different ways. The massive subsidy systems of the European Common Market and the United States are examples. Canada and Australia went in the opposite direction, eliminating support systems and subsidies for farmers faster than any other countries in the world.

British Columbia went in a unique direction. We did not subsidize food production or attempt to influence distribution. Following two years of extensive consultation, B.C. decided to brand its product and then tried to convince consumers to influence their retailers to acquire, advertise and sell the food that was produced here in the province.

The result was the introduction of the Buy B.C. program in 1993. The province developed, with industry, a brand and a logo that was used to convince consumers that local food was fresher and less likely to be contaminated with additives than imported product was. It was a benefit to our economy and to farming as a business.

Now, branding is all about consumer identification of a logo and about earned trust, by the consumer, of the integrity and value that the logo implies. To earn that value the Buy B.C. program had to agree to rigorous and ongoing evaluation programs to justify the approximately \$1.4 million it cost the province and the \$2 million it cost the private sector annually to deliver. It functioned as a three-part partnership between farmers, retailers and the province. It had to show an increase in product identification percentage each year, year over year, by independent survey amongst consumers.

Well, it worked beyond anybody's expectations, hon. Speaker. Every single year new sectors of the food industry joined the program to take advantage of the logo and of consumer loyalty. Logo identification rose amongst the public from about 23 percent in 1994 to 75 percent by the year 2000. The program was then studied and imitated by European countries, American states and other Canadian provinces as it proved its success. The program was credited with the creation of 20,000 jobs, largely in the processing sector.

In its last years the Buy B.C. program began a sponsorship of on-farm marketing, highway signage and farmers' markets. Essentially, Buy B.C. was making popular culture and replacing subsidy programs and tariff law with free market consumer choice as a tool for expanding the production of food in British Columbia. During the years of the Buy B.C. program, British Columbia was the only province in Canada that saw an increase in both the number of producing farms and the number of commodities that those farms produced.

Then in June of 2001 the government participation in Buy B.C. ended. The program limps along still as a producer-only-sponsored remnant of its former self,

but retailers, media, restaurants and farmers' markets are, in the main, no longer sponsors or participants except in exceptional circumstances.

Buy B.C. was not a political initiative. It was a partnership and a brand and a successful attempt to replace subsidy and law with popular culture. Culture cannot be sustained without ongoing media exposure. The approximately \$15 million in market share and logo identification that was earned by Buy B.C. over a decade is rapidly eroding from its zenith of 73 percent.

I am aware, as are farmers and retailers, of the surveys amongst producers that state that they want the program back to recapture their investment in the logo. I'm aware of the request that came into the government committee on agriculture from farmers themselves asking for a return of the Buy B.C. program and for its expansion to include institutional purchasing by colleges, prisons, universities, and the like.

We are all aware, I think, of the very large sum of money that the government has now spent looking for a brand-new brand to start all over from the beginning to try to develop consumer loyalty. Hon. Speaker, the idea of creating a new brand is silly. It's fiscally ridiculous, and it's impossible to justify. Farmers don't want some brand-new idea; they want what they know works. Farmers like what works, and they know that what worked was Buy B.C.

[1010]

I will conclude my remarks now, and I will invite the Liberal government representative to respond. If the government representative will commit to the rebuilding of the Buy B.C. program and logo, I will guarantee, on behalf of the opposition, a thank-you and congratulations from everyone on this side of the House.

Unfortunately, on the other hand, if the government member attempts to pretend that some other program will take the place of Buy B.C., and consumer identification with the simple and straightforward and successful words "Buy B.C." is going to be lost forever, then I will be forced to take this issue out of this House and out on the road, and we'll have a fight instead of a non-partisan agreement.

V. Roddick: It's always a pleasure to rise to respond to my colleague from Nelson-Creston, this time on the topic of Buy B.C. For starters, let's just clarify: the Buy B.C. program has not ended. It was transferred to the B.C. Agriculture Council in 2002, and the program is still active, encouraging promotion, production identification and road signs to help build consumer recognition of B.C. products.

The member should not think for one second that we aren't looking at all options for how to promote B.C. products, because we are. We have one of the most exciting, vibrant agricultural industries anywhere in Canada right here in B.C. — safe, fresh, nutritious, local, delicious food. Our government has promoted B.C. agrifood products through a number of initiatives, such as Eat B.C.!, the school fruit and vegetable snack program, B.C. Day and holiday promotions of B.C. products, and the soon-to-be-released provincial agriculture plan.

Let me just give the member for Nelson-Creston a little background. The Eat B.C.! program campaign, introduced in September 2007, launched a provincewide promotion of B.C. agrifood products — locally grown as well as locally processed food and beverages, including wine, beer, fruit juices and milk. The province committed \$282,000 over two years for the Eat B.C.! campaign. The launch was covered by major media outlets.

This year's campaign had involvement from over 130 restaurants in all regions of the province; IGA stores; farmers' markets; the universities of British Columbia, Victoria and Simon Fraser; plus the Fraser Health Authority's hospital cafeterias.

The B.C. Agriculture Council and B.C. Restaurant and Foodservices Association joined forces to create and host the campaign. The B.C. Automobile Association reached out to their members by sponsoring a free appetizer or dessert at participating restaurants, where chefs created a signature dish using locally sourced B.C. products. As you can see, we as a government have worked very hard to promote B.C. products with the help of a variety of organizations.

Some of the exciting outcomes of the Eat B.C.! campaign include: increased sales of B.C. foods and beverages, with a million-dollar increase in B.C. food and beverage sales over last September at one food service distributor alone; participant restaurants reporting increased traffic and sale of B.C. foods and beverages, some up to 50 percent; increased numbers of new business opportunities formed in the value chain; an aquaculture farmer formed a direct business relationship with Marriott hotels; a Fraser Valley hospital working with Natural Pastures Cheese; Okanagan Spirits working with Elixir restaurant. UBC has several new B.C. suppliers. Neptune is building a B.C. local food program. In fact, inquiries for B.C.-based food lists are growing from all distributors.

Another important government initiative that has helped promote B.C. products is the school fruit and vegetable snack program. This month the program received a national award, the Canadian Agri-Food Award of Excellence for Agriculture Awareness and Education. I would like to point out, for the member's benefit, the commitment we made in the 2005 election around fresh fruits and vegetables in schools.

[1015]

We are well on our way to ensuring that all B.C. public schools have an opportunity to participate by 2010. If the member goes back in the election document, he'll find that that was a specific commitment to B.C. product. In the very near future the British Columbia agriculture plan will be rolled out and will be an extensive package — a plan for agriculture for British Columbia not just for the next five years but for ten, 20 and 30 years out.

We as a government — and, I might add, as individuals — are constantly seeking every possible opportunity to promote B.C. products, both locally and globally. I think the member opposite would agree that through the important initiatives mentioned — Eat B.C.!, school fruit and veggie snack program, B.C. Day

and holiday promotions, plus the B.C. ag plan — your government is promoting B.C. products straight across the board. Because, Madam Speaker, we still have to eat to live.

C. Evans: My thanks to the member for her comments, and my thanks to whatever person in the government spin doctor system wrote those comments.

I asked the government in, I hope, a non-partisan way to join with the opposition to bring back the Buy B.C. program. Everybody knows I'm not the only one. The government had a committee on agriculture, and they toured the province. In Abbotsford the farmers came, and what did they say? This is according to the government's own website on the meeting. They asked to "encourage the Buy B.C. program to be brought back."

In Kelowna on June 21, 2006, what did the farmers say to the government? "There is a need to strengthen the competitive advantage we used to have in local markets — i.e., bring back the Buy B.C. program."

There was a study done. Investment Agriculture Foundation, the B.C. Ag Council and the B.C. Food Processors commissioned 50 pages of study. They asked 50 farmers and processors what they wanted to do in order to expand their business, and they all said: "Bring back Buy B.C." They asked them what kind of logo they wanted, and 100 percent of them said they wanted Buy B.C. back, because it works and because they've already invested in it.

We have a tragedy. The government, for whatever reason.... I don't even care the reason. In 2001 they killed something that worked. They are afraid to bring it back, in spite of the fact that the client group is asking them to, because it's hard to say: "I got it wrong."

Today I am saying: "Bring it back; we say thank you." Tomorrow we're going to go out and try to force the government to come to its senses — to do what W.A.C. Bennett would have done, which was called sober second thought; to do what the Senate is supposed to do for the Canadian government, which is sober second thought. It's to admit, when you make a mistake: "Darn, we got it wrong. Now we're going to do the right thing and get celebrated for it."

If the government can't figure that out, we're going to go out and try to force them to.

OUR FUTURE

D. Hayer: Surrey is one of the fastest-growing cities in Canada. In our future Surrey will be the largest in B.C., as more than 1,000 new residents all come to our community every month. Most of the new residents are new immigrants. That is why I want to talk about just how important and significant the WelcomeBC program is to my constituents, present and future, and how important this initiative is to the future of British Columbia.

WelcomeBC is a bridge that will lead our new immigrants to comfort, security and prosperity, and strengthen our economy through a workforce that can better understand the language of commerce in our

province. I commend the Premier on leading this initiative that will help our new immigrants to not only settle into their new homeland but assist them greatly in the workplace and in their contribution to our economy.

It is a well-known fact that British Columbia, through the untiring efforts of our government to stimulate the economy, will create more than one million jobs over the next decade. Yet 350,000 of the jobs will go wanting for employees unless they are filled by immigrants.

[1020]

WelcomeBC creates the opportunity and the ability for these new immigrants to learn English, the language of their new workplace — to help them take advantage of the employment opportunities created by our buoyant economy and to help them learn about the health, education and recreation services available to them and to their families. Most importantly, it will assist them in adapting to and succeeding in life in their community.

This program will provide accessibility to all existing and new expanded services under one agency, which will make it easier for our many new immigrants to gain the help they need to adapt to their new life in British Columbia. These are not just words. Our government and our Premier have committed \$43 million over two years to ensure this program works, to ensure this program meets the needs of new immigrants. This is a huge investment in our future, an investment in our economy and an investment in the lives of our new residents.

As we all know in this House and as I have stated in my previous speeches, there will be a huge influx of people into the lower mainland over the next 20 years. In fact, Surrey and its neighbouring communities are projected to grow by more than half a million people over the next two decades. Most of these new residents will be immigrants who will rely on the services provided by WelcomeBC.

This program sends a very clear message to immigrants that we not only welcome them; we want them to participate fully in our economy and in our communities. This program will reduce wait times for English-language training and increase access to advanced language training for those trying to gain employment. This initiative will improve immigrants' access to jobs, reduce barriers for refugees and assist newcomers to settle into their communities. Most importantly, it will help immigrant youth and their families adapt to a new culture and ensure that these young people will choose the right path for their future.

Another significant aspect of this initiative is that it provides assistance to newcomers throughout British Columbia, not just to those who choose to live in the lower mainland. British Columbia has a bounty of natural resources, and most of those are located in the interior and north of this province. Resource extraction is a huge employer and a tremendous job generator. These employment opportunities are mostly high-paying and will surely attract many immigrants who, like those coming to Surrey and other parts of the

lower mainland, will require the services provided through WelcomeBC.

From speaking with many local agencies that assist immigrants such as SUCCESS, DiverseCity, MOSAIC, PICS, ISS, Options and Multicultural Helping House, just to name a few of the many exceptional services provided in our community, I know they all appreciate and congratulate the government and our Premier on this initiative.

Its implementation will mean even greater success for those who come to British Columbia to seek a new life, new prosperity and a secure home for their families. It means that immigrants can feel more at home, and it means that everyone in this province will benefit through a strengthened economy and through seamless integration into a society that is among the most culturally diverse and most accepting in the world.

Again, I congratulate the Premier and the Ministry of Attorney General on this program. This is an initiative that will give newcomers the needed assistance to succeed. It will help everyone adapt to the enormous growth that is so key to our long-term success.

Just so everyone is clear that this program is not just feel-good rhetoric, over the next two years WelcomeBC will provide \$9 million to reduce wait-lists for beginner English-language services for adults, also known as ELSA; \$12 million to expand intermediate levels 4 and 5 ELSA classes; another \$2 million to expand intermediate ELSA courses for immigrants entering the labour market outside the lower mainland area; \$8 million to increase information and settlement services, such as health care access, employment and recreational services to help immigrants adjust to living in British Columbia; \$11 million for settlement workers to assist new students in schools in the lower mainland, the Fraser Valley and the Greater Vancouver area; and \$1.6 million for improved information outreach services for immigrants facing multiple barriers.

In addition to all that, pilot projects under this initiative will explore new ways to help the most vulnerable newcomers, including refugees as well as youth, children and families. Settlement workers located directly in schools will assist young people to succeed in school and at home.

[1025]

Madam Speaker, our future is very bright, so I look forward to hearing words of support for this excellent program from my colleague across the aisle.

L. Krog: I wasn't entirely sure what the member for Surrey-Tynehead was going to talk about this morning, so I dashed up to the library and grabbed that portion of *Locksley Hall* by Tennyson:

"For I dipt into the future, as far as human eye could see,
Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonders that would be:
Saw the heavens filled with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with ghostly bales;

Heard the heavens fill with shouting and there rain'd a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;
Far along the worldwide whisper of the south wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the thunderstorm;
Till the war drum throbb'd no longer and the battle flags were furl'd

In the parliament of man, the federation of the world."

I'd expected something quite inspirational from the member opposite, but I'm not sure I quite heard it this morning. I did hear a great demonstration of confidence about all the wonderful things the provincial government is supposedly doing around the issue of literacy. Much of it, of course, is federal money and really doesn't have much to do with the province of British Columbia whatsoever.

What do we know about literacy? We know that for level 1 literacy, the lowest level, 64 percent of the 391,000 British Columbians — 248,000 of those people — were immigrants. Level 2, the next step up: 590,000 people, 32 percent of whom are immigrants. What does that tell you, hon. Speaker? It tells you, quite simply, that notwithstanding what the member had to say in this parliament of man, in this federation of the world, we really haven't quite got there yet.

The fact is we know that immigrants coming to this country who don't speak English properly are going to be denied not only opportunities for themselves but opportunities to enhance the lives of all British Columbians, which is the whole point of immigration: to give people genuine opportunity.

We know that 3 percent of immigrants are, in fact, refugees. Many are children coming from dramatic circumstances — the kind of circumstances, if you will, that Tennyson talked about — from war-torn parts of the world. They're children who will require not only literacy training but intensive counselling, therapy and assistance if they are to develop into successful adults.

I say to the member opposite this morning that it's all well and good to talk about this, but in a world where immigration to this country is so important to our economic development and has been so important to the history of this nation, it is not sufficient to talk about the amount of money and the programs that the member referred to this morning.

We have a great deal to do. For a relatively small investment, we could increase the ability of new immigrants to contribute to our society and also increase very quickly and very easily the time in which it will take them to start that contribution. Instead of perhaps suffering for years in lower-level jobs or occupations for which they are more than qualified, they will be enabled to move into occupations and professions, contribute to their communities and support their families and one another in ways that are undreamed of under the present circumstances.

I say to the member opposite: it is about true investment in the future. It is about the confidence. It is about all the wonders that will be. Those wonders will

only be achieved if we make that commitment. Instead of making speeches in this House about how grand things are and how well the government is doing, with a \$4.1 billion surplus, we could do so much more. Can you imagine the thousands and thousands of lives that will be improved by a few million more dollars annually put into literacy for immigrants, let alone literacy for our citizens? We could truly do something here that would make us proud as British Columbians and proud as Canadians.

[1030]

I suggest to the member opposite: let us talk about moving forward. Let us talk about doing something dramatic. Let us call on the government to do more instead of simply saying, "Great job. Well done, Premier. It's grand. Everything's fine in British Columbia. It's a rosy picture" — notwithstanding that we're once again, for the fourth year in a row, the bearers of the great news that we are first again in child poverty in Canada — first again. Four years in a row, the worst province.

Part of that can definitely be related to the literacy of the parents of those children. There are no poor children; there are poor parents. Let's do something dramatic, not just what the member suggests.

D. Hayer: Thank you to the member for Nanaimo for his comments. I'm sorry he didn't realize what I was talking about. On the other hand, I'm sorry he doesn't see all the positive things that are happening in British Columbia.

I mean, this member served here before 2001. He was here when we had one of the worst economies. When the whole of Canada was booming, basically, British Columbia was going down the drain. People had to move to Alberta and Ontario and the United States to look for jobs. They were not funding for any services.

Now, with the economy being the best economy in North America, with more jobs created than anywhere in Canada, we can actually afford to put more money back. This is why I stated in my statement all the different funding that we have put back. I would have thought he was going to say thank you very much to see that so much money has been put in there.

It's sad to see that, when we have provided so much funding for all the programs, including that the Premier has spent so much money on trying to promote literacy. Regularly, if you take a look at it, we have put millions and millions of more dollars than were put in, in the 1990s until 2001 when this opposition was in government.

So I was hoping he would have said: "You know, it's great to see we are providing more money. We have this WelcomeBC program, which is one place you can go and get all types of help, where we'll make sure that all of our immigrants coming in — and not only them, but the kids — will get the help." Instead of complaining about it, I was hoping he was going to say: "It is nice to see there are so many jobs out there that you have a choice."

Actually, we have the lowest income tax rates in Canada. We have more people investing back in British

Columbia now. It's not like the old days when businesses were leaving and the workers were leaving. Now we have more jobs than the workers here. It's good to see that news.

I was hoping he would say that this new WelcomeBC program would help our new people coming in and youth coming in. You know, when we take a look at this program, it will make sure that our youth have positive places to go so they don't get involved negatively in youth gangs or drugs or other places. They can actually go around and mentor in different communities.

Also, different communities around the province can take advantage of this program so that they can make sure they can help the immigrants coming in. They can make sure those immigrants understand the culture they have. It makes it easier for the communities in the interior, and it makes it easier for people here.

Also, I was hoping that maybe the member opposite had looked at the WelcomeBC website. I was looking at it on the weekend. It's an excellent website which tells you, if you want to immigrate here, how to find the information and how to fill out the paperwork. It also tells the employers, if you want to bring workers from outside because you can't find any workers here because the economy is so hot, how to fill in the applications for that.

I was hoping he would go and say that the WelcomeBC program is something that is supported by many non-profit and community organization, including the immigrant services program. I'm sorry he wasn't able to say it. I hope he goes to the WelcomeBC website to understand the services provided by WelcomeBC so that he can learn more about it and tell his constituents, including that some of the immigrant services societies in Nanaimo are also using the services of the WelcomeBC program.

In closing, I see that the red light is on. My time has run out. Thank you very much. I hope the member for Nanaimo will go back to the WelcomeBC website and learn more about the program so that he can tell his constituents what a great program we have.

HOUSING STRATEGIES

D. Thorne: I am pleased to rise today to speak about my community's concerns regarding housing strategies of the provincial government. These strategies will have a significant negative impact on the Riverview lands, which are located in my constituency of Coquitlam-Maillardville.

To put my remarks in context, I would like to give a brief history of the Riverview site. In 1904 the province of B.C. dedicated 405 hectares of land on the west side of the Coquitlam River to provide treatment facilities for the mentally ill as well as agricultural fields on the floodplain to supply food.

[1035]

In 1913 the West Lawn building opened its doors to 340 male patients. By this time B.C.'s first provincial botanist, John Davidson, had planted at Riverview over 300 native species, including 30 species of trees, to form the first provincial botanical garden and arboretum.

Since the 1960s the hospital population has declined. Many factors contributed to this, including advances in psychiatric treatment, the development of new medications, an increased emphasis on the shift from hospital-based to community-based delivery systems, and the establishment of psychiatric units in acute care hospitals.

In the 1980s approximately 275 hectares of the Riverview lands were sold and subdivided for residential use, with 25 hectares being given for a forest preserve. At this point only 100 hectares are remaining for hospital use.

Over the years there have been many announcements of the closing date of Riverview Hospital, but at present it is continuing to operate with approximately 300 patients. In the past ten years two lodges have been constructed on the grounds, where patients are able to live more independently in a non-institutional setting. A third lodge is currently in the planning phase.

Over the years there have been many rumours that the province planned to sell all or part of the remaining lands. The possibility of losing this valuable site for mental health and community uses prompted the city of Coquitlam to set up the Mayor's Riverview Task Force in December 2003.

I was a city councillor at this time, and we gave the task force a mandate to advise city council on the creation of a community vision and a comprehensive plan for the future uses of the Riverview lands. The plan had to be realistic, sustainable and consistent with the values and goals of the community. The task force met regularly during 2004 and received input from a multitude of individuals and organizations. Their report was presented to council on February 3, 2005.

In brief, the task force recommended the following: that the lands be kept in public ownership with enhanced services and enhanced housing for mental health and wellness; that the botanical heritage and ecology of the land be protected; that centres of research, education and innovation be established on the site; and that opportunities be provided for heritage, arts and cultural endeavours.

I accompanied representatives from the city of Coquitlam when they presented the task force report to Health Minister George Abbott in 2006, with the strong request that it form the basis of any decision about the future uses of the Riverview site.

The worst fears of my community were realized in July of this year when the Minister Responsible for Housing stated in a lengthy interview with *The Vancouver Sun* that the government is considering development of the Riverview site for market housing with a smaller number of supported housing units. He stated that his preference would be for at least 10,000 units of market housing.

The Riverview site is an important heritage and ecological space in the lower mainland, and the prospect of it being covered with dozens of condo towers is of great concern to the residents not only in my community but throughout British Columbia.

In response to the outcry following the minister's statements, I circulated a petition — which has been

signed, to date, by almost 11,000 people who live all over this province. The petition states:

"We the undersigned are opposed to the provincial government's plan to massively develop the Riverview lands in Coquitlam, British Columbia. The Riverview lands are home to an important mental health facility and a nationally significant collection of specimen trees, many almost a century old. The Riverview lands are one of the most significant green spaces in the Tri-Cities.

"We urge the provincial government to adopt the 2005 Riverview task force report, which was coordinated by the city of Coquitlam and received input from numerous community organizations. This report recommends the lands be kept in public ownership with services for mental health and wellness; protection of the botanical heritage and ecology of the lands; establishment of centres of research, education and innovation; and opportunities for heritage, arts and culture.

"The future of the Riverview lands should be decided by the residents of Coquitlam and the Tri-Cities."

[1040]

This petition has received almost unanimous support from those who have come in contact with it, and it cuts across all political and philosophical labels.

Despite the minister's statements to the contrary, the world-class arboretum at Riverview would be destroyed by a massive housing development, because the tree collection is dispersed throughout the entire 244-acre site. The trees are unique and considered by some to be the best collection in Canada, valued at well over \$50 million. It's clear that the proposal outlined by the minister would not only destroy an irreplaceable ecological site but also prevent Riverview from continuing as a haven for the mentally ill.

The government has promised public consultation before any decisions are made about the future of Riverview lands. I hope these consultations are transparent and meaningful, and not just a rubber stamp. Our guiding principle must be that the ecology, tranquility and medical purpose of the entire Riverview site be preserved.

L. Mayencourt: It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the issue of Riverview. The title of this motion is really about creating a housing strategy, so it's very timely that we talk about the issues that surround Riverview.

As you know, Madam Speaker, I've been very, very concerned about the intertwining of homelessness, mental health and addictions. I see these things travelling together so tightly and so tightly wound together that I think we can't fix one problem without the other. I am grateful to the member for Coquitlam-Maillardville for bringing up the issue of Riverview.

I am also grateful that we got a little bit of history on it. I want to let the member know that I've been to Riverview many times and had an opportunity to walk through the gardens and see the trees and see the beautiful work that was done by John Davidson almost a century ago.

I think that is a treasure. It's something that should be protected, and it's something that I would very definitely want to put my support behind — to protect

those trees — because I think that's a wonderful resource. Apparently, there are over 600 native species from around B.C. We really do want to do that sort of work — very important.

The member talks a little bit about a process that the community went through to talk about what they wanted to see happen at Riverview back in 2005. It's very important that the community be consulted in that. As a matter of fact, the Minister for Housing was very, very supportive of that consultation process. There are issues, though, about who sits at the table when you're talking about those issues.

First, let's frame it this way. Riverview is not a possession of the city of Coquitlam. Riverview is actually a possession of the province, and it is there for the benefit of the entire province. That means that people in Quesnel have a stake in what happens at Riverview. People in Prince Rupert have a stake in what happens at Riverview. People from Surrey have a stake in what happens at Riverview. We need very much to have those individuals represented, because over the long term the reality of it is that we need facilities like Riverview in order to preserve and protect our ability to provide mental health services to the people of B.C.

The other thing I'd like to frame this as is the issue of who needs to be at the table versus who doesn't need to be at the table. In the case of the task force report, there wasn't a single person on that task force of 16 people that had any mental health background. That's a very important part of this conversation. I really want to support the fact that the community got together, but we need mental health people, service providers, and we need individuals that are part of that community to be part of the task force that eventually says: "This is what we'd like to see happen here."

Riverview is a very special jewel in the heart of all British Columbians, but most particularly to lower mainlanders. I can remember driving past that site for many, many years. I know that we need to preserve and protect our ability to serve people with mental health problems in our community by preserving and consulting fully with the people that are concerned about Riverview.

D. Thorne: I thank the member across the way for expressing a viewpoint not, on the face of it, so different from part of what I have been saying.

[1045]

I will remind the members on the other side that the petition I will be presenting later today has 11,000 signatures from all over British Columbia, not just the Tri-Cities — just to ease his mind that it's only the people from Coquitlam who think they own Riverview. No, in fact people from all over the province do not want to see a massive condo development at the Riverview site.

I'd like to talk a little bit about a study conducted in the Tri-Cities — that's Coquitlam, Port Moody and Port Coquitlam — in 2006 by the Hope for Freedom Society. They found that there were approximately 170 homeless people in the area, and over one-third of these people were identified as suffering from a mental ill-

ness. In response to this crisis, the society has proposed a cold wet weather mat program, which would provide temporary housing for the homeless in five area churches.

This proposal has proven to be extremely divisive, with neighbours pitted against neighbours in supporting or opposing the program. Many residents have asked why a permanent homeless shelter could not be constructed on the Riverview site. I believe — and I've said for many, many years — that we should immediately be building more supported and transitional-type housing for people with mental illness, at Riverview.

The two lodges that I referred to earlier are a good example of a model for this kind of housing, and many of the current buildings on the site could quite easily be adapted to provide stable and safe housing. If we did this, it would no doubt help to alleviate the homeless problem we are all grappling with right now.

In their August 2004 report on the Riverview Hospital site, the Burke Mountain Naturalists summarized the rationale for this approach, and I would like to quote:

"The original goal from a century ago to provide a haven for the care of the mentally ill at Riverview was inspired and remains so. As a society, we must ensure the mentally ill continue to receive care in a tranquil and appropriate setting. Care also needs to be provided in a manner that encourages positive reintegration with society and provides opportunities for patients to accomplish this.

"Current mental health policies are focused on deinstitutionalizing patients but have also been blamed by many for the increasing number of homeless people living in the back alleys of Vancouver" — as well as beside the Coquitlam River and many other locations. "Future approaches towards mental health care should be directed towards providing more supportive living accommodation and ongoing assistance with the development of life skills.

"Riverview is an ideal site to provide these facilities. It is important that the Riverview lands be retained so they will be available to meet future mental health needs."

That, Madam Speaker, is a housing strategy that all of us could be proud of.

100-MILE DIET

J. Rustad: Today seems to be a day for talking about food. Few things actually are more important and relevant to everyone than our basic needs, even though many of us take them for granted. Shelter, clothing and food are the simplest form of basics. Yet how much time do we actually spend thinking about them?

Today I'm going to focus on one of these necessities. As the member for Delta South constantly refers to, we all need to eat to live. Sadly, many of us don't often think about where our food comes from. Today it's a fact that for the average person in North America, the food on their plate travels about 1,500 miles.

Beef from Brazil; lamb from New Zealand; wine from Australia as well as many other countries, including, of course, B.C.; vegetables from California; fruit

from Florida; tea from India; coffee from Colombia; grapes from Chile. This is truly a statement of our interdependency on global trade, yet most of us don't stop to consider the ramifications of this global trend.

Mass-produced food reduces the varieties we eat. It exposes us to vulnerabilities that can come with contamination or other issues. We've all read or heard about the great potato famine that struck many years ago. This was driven by the Irish dependency on a single variety of product, which ended up killing more than a million people. Could something like this happen again today?

Another issue today is the dependency we have on our neighbours. We burn untold amounts of fossil fuel to deliver our daily bread. What would happen if our food supply was interrupted? How long could we survive without the daily planes, trains, boats and trucks working 24 hours a day, seven days a week delivering our groceries?

[1050]

On another note, what would happen if our world faced something catastrophic like a pandemic? Many scientists are predicting that an event of global proportions is not a matter of if but a matter of when. How would our supply chains hold up under the stress of such an event?

It's Monday morning of another promising week. I don't believe we should dwell on such issues as a pandemic, but I do believe we should take some time to think about one of those basic requirements of life, that being our food supply.

From what I understand, the questions I've asked have been looked at. Plans detailing Canada's and British Columbia's response have been considered, but what about us as individuals? Is there anything that we should be doing?

Our habits are such that we want the best-quality, cheapest-priced food we can get. Everyone tries to stretch their budget as far as possible. Subsequently, we go to the grocery store often. We look for the best prices, making the assumption that all carrots are alike. Some people will look for B.C.-branded products, but most of us won't spend the time to look for the tiny stickers labelling where the food came from.

This trend has been in place for many decades. Since the 1950s the average amount of income spent on providing the basics of food has shrunk from 22 percent to just 7 percent of our income. Now, this is great news on the surface, but it comes at a cost. Farms are forced to compete with the global supply chain. People growing corn in B.C. are competing with growers in Mexico that can get four crops a year from their fields. The cattle industry competes with far more hospitable climates that can produce significantly more feed per acre than B.C. can. Mass-produced vegetables with multiple yields per year can make it very difficult for our local farmers to be able to grow enough at competitive rates.

Many countries subsidize their farmers. Europeans seem to be on the top of this list when it comes to states subsidizing farms. The United States is not far

behind them. This can create significant competitive impediments for our local agriculture industry. Should Canada be taking the same route as these other countries? Canada does provide some subsidies, as do provinces. But is this the right thing to do, or could there be another solution?

As a province, we're all concerned about the environment we live in. Issues such as global warming, severe weather, flooding, mountain pine beetle and other issues have been occupying the media and people's thoughts. In my own riding this past summer, 198 homes in the community of Vanderhoof were under a flood evacuation warning, while sandbags and gabion dikes held back a wall of water for more than two months. In the surrounding countryside, thousands upon thousands of hectares of dead and dying trees could be seen.

Is it possible to try to address both of those concerns at the same time? If you think about all the greenhouse gases created to get our food to our plate and when you consider the issues surrounding our food supply, would it make sense to try to focus our habits on consuming local agriculture products?

Imagine what a difference our consumers would make if we were to buy all of our meat from within a 100-mile radius of where we live. I wonder how much of a difference it would make if we were to buy only locally produced vegetables where possible.

Our tendencies have always been to look towards others to solve our issues. If greenhouse gases are to blame for global warming, we immediately look towards governments to solve the problem. If there's a problem with our food chain, we ask governments to find a solution.

I believe the only true way we can make a difference is through our own actions. Governments can play a role through regulation and legislation, but if we're not willing to change our habits, we're likely not going to make the kind of difference that's needed.

My parents grew vegetables in a garden just outside of Prince George at one of the lakes. I remember helping to tend the garden as a kid, and I always couldn't wait till the peas and carrots were ready for harvesting. They were so delicious — nothing like the products you can buy in a store. Even today I grow tomatoes and cucumbers in my back yard. I'm always amazed at how much better they taste, compared with the usual fare found at the supermarkets.

Could this be the key to changing our habits? Could it be that the flavour and quality of products are actually worth paying a few pennies more for? But even if people desired the superior quality, where do you go to get the product from? In my riding we only grow a few percent of what we consume. Local beef and farm products are usually sold through farmers' markets. Sometimes you can hunt through the local grocery store and find some things, but usually it's just too difficult for farmers to get access through the megachain stores.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to carrying on with this in a short time.

[1055]

N. Simons: I appreciate the comments from my colleague from Prince George–Omineca. His words were indeed enlightening.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

I think that when we talk about food production and the need to consume food that's produced closer to home so that we can avoid the need to rely on food that's been in trucks or on trains or in boats for thousands of miles, as the member opposite suggested, it really comes down to the crux of the issue of the 100-mile diet and the need to be conscious about the source of our food.

I just want to start with a little quote, a question that we should ask ourselves in terms of how we eat food and where the food we eat comes from. Can we eat well in our community without buying chemically altered foods picked and packaged three weeks ago by exploited migrant farmworkers and marketed by giant international corporations for huge profits?

That's at the crux of this issue. Our food is not only the health that it brings to our bodies, but it's also a statement on the health of our communities and our ability to be self-sustaining — or at least more self-sustaining than we currently are.

I'm proud to represent Powell River, which, of course, is known in Canada as the capital of the 100-mile diet, even though they had to reduce that to a 50-mile diet because of the geographical limitations on the city.

The problem with the member opposite's statement, to me, is that it seems to contradict the sort of philosophy that's been promulgated by this government around the need to rely on more of the large industrial agricultural sector. If you just look at one policy initiative, the meat regulations, we actually see the ultimate in the hypocrisy of that.

We have at the same time a government that is promoting what they consider healthy food. In other words, everything has to go through abattoirs that are sanctioned by the province. It is in contradiction to the ability for smallhold farmers to produce and sell their own locally raised animals.

I think if we do concentrate more on promoting small-scale agriculture in our communities across the province, whether it's in the north or in coastal B.C., we'll do a lot more to increase the communities' reliance on locally produced food. The spinoff effects of that are significant. Not only would we be able to eat healthier food, but we'd have the ability to support our friends and neighbours, the families whose children go to our schools. This is something that I think needs to be part of the whole overall look at where our food comes from.

The 100-mile diets in Powell River and in other communities across the province are really an expression of a community's interest in not being reliant on food that has to travel a long distance and, like we mentioned, be produced by underpaid workers for large corporate interests.

I appreciate the member opposite's comments. I think that he would do well to try to convince some

others in his party to incorporate some of those views — to perhaps mitigate some of the more, shall we say, fundamental perspectives of this government when it comes to agricultural production. If he were able to convince the ministry to in fact promote small-time, smallhold farmers to raise animals and raise vegetables, that would go a long way to allow communities to be able to rely less on the foods that we currently get which, as we mentioned, do have a serious impact on greenhouse gas emissions.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I allow the member opposite to continue.

J. Rustad: I'd like to thank the member for Powell River–Sunshine Coast for his comments. He brought across this idea that government can solve this problem. The purpose of my statement is actually that we as consumers have to take a lead role in demanding the differences.

[1100]

Just before the member for Powell River–Sunshine Coast had an opportunity to talk, I was talking about what products were like that you can grow in your back yard and that you'd be able to grow and that you used to taste as a kid, and also about the fact that our local production can sometimes have a challenge getting to the markets.

When it comes to the abattoir issue, there's no question that we must have secure food, safe food, and we know that we need to be able to rely on that. At the same time, we also need to recognize that it is up to us to make that difference for those local producers.

I want to say that I don't believe we can actually change our particular habits significantly through legislation and regulation, but we can if we raise our level of awareness. If consumers were to start asking the local producers — and ask, particularly at the supermarkets — for local products, demand would ultimately bring about change. After all, the consumer is always right.

In order to have consumers demand local production, we need to raise the level of awareness of the consumer. We need to be able to taste the difference. We need them to be able to taste the difference. We need to be able to think about where our food comes from and what the consequences could be of not being able to provide enough local production to meet our needs.

One way we could do this is by encouraging communities to host a community dinner where all of the dishes would come from within a hundred miles of the community. This would help to introduce people to local products, but it would also help to raise the level of awareness. Through a community dinner, we could start connecting people more directly with their food source.

We could also work with our schools through meals programs. We're already seeing a lot of this happening within our schools.

Perhaps there's more that we can do. Another possibility is to look at the carbon footprint of importing food. Perhaps we can consider a carbon tax and credit system for our food. The farther food travels, the

higher the carbon levy would be; while the closer the food comes from, a credit could be applied.

Perhaps we could look at setting up a provincial food charter. The goal of this would be to continue to promote local production and consumption through all of our policies as a bit of a lens. All of these things have the potential to change our habits. After all, we as consumers really do make a difference and can change things for the better.

I'll close with this. I believe that David Suzuki said: "Eating locally isn't just a fad, like the various diets advertised on late-night TV. It may be one of the most important ways we can save ourselves and our planet."

Hon. B. Penner: By agreement with the Opposition House Leader, I call Motion 84 on the order paper.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 84 without disturbing the priorities of the motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

Motions on Notice

SUMMIT ON FUTURE OF FOREST INDUSTRY

H. Lali: Motion 84 is:

[Be it resolved that this House demand the government immediately convene an emergency summit on the future of forestry in this province which will allow communities, workers and the citizens of British Columbia to, once again, have a direct say in the development of a new vision for our forests, our industry, and our communities.]

Hon. Speaker, we're in a time here in British Columbia where the forest industry, in the last six or seven years, is in a complete shambles. There are some forces that, obviously, no one has control over, least of all government. We recognize that in terms of the slumping prices for forestry products that British Columbia exports internationally. We've had times in the past, especially in the '90s, where that happened — where prices of our wood products that we were selling have tumbled, such as has happened here in the last year or so, as well, in British Columbia.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

Obviously, there are other factors, such as the Canadian dollar, which is rising in relation to the American dollar. Therefore, Americans are not buying our wood products in the same quantity as they have in the past. Coupled with that, the housing market has collapsed in the United States as well, the U.S. being our major partner in terms of our wood being exported to the United States.

[1105]

Some of those items like that, we obviously recognize, on this side of the House, there are no controls over, but there are so many things that we do have

control over — this House, this Liberal government. The mismanagement that has taken place in the forest industry by this government has really burdened British Columbia, especially on the coast, as you know, where the Liberal government was supposed to come forward with some plan.

"Wait for it; wait for it," they told us. It's been years in the making. "Wait for it another month, another two months, another week; wait for it another day." Finally when they did bring it forward, hon. Speaker, there was nothing in it. It was one of those plans that was a no plan — a no plan of action that was designed to actually save the coast industry and to the person.... Industry specialists will tell us that it will do absolutely nothing to help the coast forest industry.

Now we have mill closure after mill closure. Since 2001, when this Liberal government took office, we've had a record number of mill closures all across the province. It started out in the lower mainland and in the coast region, but it's happening all across the interior and the north and the northern half of the Island as well. To date, if I'm not mistaken — I know it's over 40 mills — almost 45 mills have been closed across the province. A lot of it has to do with the policy that the Liberal government is putting forward and, at the same time, the lack of policy in terms of helping to save some of these sawmills. That is hurting.

Coupled with that is Prime Minister Stephen Harper and this Premier, this Liberal Premier, putting forward a softwood lumber deal which is actually hurting British Columbia in a big way. It was designed to basically help companies back east as opposed to helping us here in British Columbia. It has been termed — even by folks within the industry itself and the media, those folks that have been watching it — the softwood sell-out. It's not known as the softwood deal; it's called the softwood sellout.

Not only have British Columbia firms been sold out by this government and by Stephen Harper, the Prime Minister, but at the same time, our forest policy now is being determined by the agreement that was set. Any time somebody objects in the United States, obviously it then hurts the management of our forest policy and also the public policy decision-making with respect to the forest industry.

That has gone on for far too long, because the government does not have a clue as to how to actually save the forest industry or to help it in any way to make sure that there are not massive layoffs that are taking place as a result of the huge number of mills that are going down in this province without even a whimper or a peep from this government.

I want to talk about some of the things they've done. The Minister of Forests was directly involved to make sure that there was a fair and balanced way in which the wood was actually put into the hands of the manufacturers. The large companies got their fair share. There was a small business program. Obviously, some of the family-run operations that have been around for generations were able to get access to the timber. Then some of the remanners or the value-

added companies were also able to get access to timber so that they could create jobs in local areas.

It was done in a fair way, where the minister was able to oversee all of that. Through either himself or through the deputy minister and the ministry they were able to do that. Now what they've got is B.C. Timber Sales put in place. It's dominated by the majors — the big players, the international companies — and very little of the wood is actually getting into the hands of the family-run operations.

Just to give you an example of some of the family-run operations, there's J.S. Jones timber. Aspen Planers mill and timber — they own that. Ardeu Wood Products out of Merritt; Lytton Lumber, which has just gone down, is another family-run operation; Gorman Bros. There are so many others that are smaller operations, family-run operations. Then there are all of those dozens and dozens of small operators who go in and clean up the woods and bring out whatever they need — or traditionally they have — in order to create jobs.

[1110]

Obviously, this government has made it very difficult to actually put wood into the hands of those small operators and the family-run operators and the remaners, because this government does not have a commitment to small operators, as they're allowing mills to shut down and take the timber with them in order to feed larger mills.

Some of the other examples. As you know, with the bankruptcy of Pope and Talbot, this government is allowing Pope and Talbot, or the banks, to sell off the public timber that belongs to the people of British Columbia so that the bankers could be paid first rather than all of the workers and the contractors who are owed money in the millions.

You have this situation in other communities as well. Pope and Talbot's mill in Fort St. James.... I was just talking to one of the people in Kelowna. He was down from Fort St. James. They've actually gone down as well. In New Westminster, Canfor has done that there, and Interfor in Adams Lake. There's the Lytton operation. As well, I've talked about Terrace. Those are just examples — all over the province, especially in rural British Columbia where communities are now left holding the bag and this government has allowed companies to take their timber with them.

Another example is in the Kamloops-North Thompson, in Lewis Creek, with Tolko's mill that got burned down. They received the insurance moneys. By all means, they should have reopened that mill there, such as what happened with Tolko in Merritt when the NDP were in government. When the mill burned down in Merritt in the mid- to late '90s, with the insurance money they built a state-of-the-art sawmill. It is now one of the best and most efficient sawmills in the province. In Merritt all of the jobs were left intact when the mill was rebuilt.

That's not what happened in Kamloops-North Thompson, where the government just looked the other way. They allowed the company to take the insurance money and also allowed them to take the timber with them, to be able to distribute it to operations

in the interior, including Merritt. Even though my home community benefited, it wasn't fair, because the folks up in the North Thompson were left without a sawmill and anchor tenant. People had to actually move, and families were disrupted. Their lives were disrupted.

You know, this government is just doing basically everything for the large companies to allow them to actually consolidate the timber rights as they look the other way. That's not fair. That's not the way forest policy should be operating in this province.

Under the Social Credit in the 1980s and then the NDP when we were government in the 1990s, we had some processes that were put in place where the communities had a say, where they were able to be consulted in a meaningful way and actually were a part of the solution. That hasn't happened under the Liberals. As a matter of fact, there's very little to none in terms of consultation, especially with aboriginal people. Communities are left holding the bag as companies walk away with all of the timber as this Liberal government has allowed large companies to consolidate timber into their hands.

In the '90s we had a 90-day mill closure review process where a company actually had to give 90 days' notice to the government saying they were going to close. In those 90 days we were able to work with communities, with the workers, represented often by their union, as well as with the first nations and the company and government, to try to make sure that jobs would be left within the community if a mill was going to pull out. We were able to do that, hon. Speaker.

The Socreds brought forward an independent office of the job protection commissioner. The job protection commissioner, who was independent from government and answerable to the Legislature, would go in and do an honest job and look at all of the variables to see if an operation could be saved. If it could be saved, he would put forward some ideas on how it could be saved, and if government had to put in some help, we were able to do that.

This government got rid of not only the 90-day mill closure review process but also got rid of the job protection commissioner under the guise of trying to balance the books.

Then there was the appurtenancy, where access to timber by companies was tied to keeping jobs open in a community so that small communities all throughout the province — such as Lewis Creek or Lytton or Terrace and other communities across the province — would know they had an operation that was going to be viable to employ people to pay off their mortgages and to keep communities alive.

[1115]

This government cut the tie. There is absolutely no obligation on the part of a company to actually keep jobs open in the timber supply area or in the region where the timber was accessed. They're just letting them walk away. It's basically the thin edge of the wedge of privatizing our forests so that it's not government that has the say anymore in terms of how the

timber is allocated. It's either B.C. Timber Sales or the companies that decide where they're going to do it.

The arbitrary closure of so many sawmills across the province is done under the guise of economics. Then the companies walk away with the timber, leaving communities devastated all throughout the province.

For that reason the NDP caucus has put forward this motion. We're in an emergency situation, as communities are being devastated. This government does not have a forest policy. What we're saying is that the government needs to immediately convene an emergency summit on the future of our forestry in this province. That's how badly they have mismanaged the forest industry and the forestry sector in this province.

Immediate attention should be paid to it, where communities would be a part of finding solutions — as well as the workers, the companies, first nations, environmentalists, community leaders and public servants. MLAs would be a part of that as well as mayors and councils and forestry experts — in order to convene an emergency summit so that we can find made-in-British Columbia solutions, made-in-the-locality solutions, whereby we could actually revive the forest industry and keep small-town British Columbia alive, instead of the abandonment that is taking place under this Liberal government.

With that, I take my seat in support of Motion 84 that is before you, hon. Speaker.

J. Rustad: I want to thank the member for Yale-Lillooet for bringing forward this issue, although I think the drama that seems to be worked into this might be a little bit overstated.

I just want to start by saying that perhaps the member for Yale-Lillooet should actually go and talk to a group that's in his riding, which is called the Cariboo-Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition. It's one of those groups that, around this province, has been engaging the communities, the workers, the companies and all the stakeholders throughout the area about the future of the forest industry and the future of the region and bringing forward ideas.

In my own riding there's another group called the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition. I had the honour of speaking with them just a few weeks ago with regards to the future of the forest industry. They're working on some very progressive plans and ideas. They're including all stakeholders through those discussions.

So when the member brings forward this type of a motion, you have to also consider what is already in place. I mean, I can understand, certainly from the policies of the 1990s, why the member would want to see, in particular, government or Victoria controlling that kind of discussion and where it should go, as opposed to actually having it happen in places like his own riding.

We believe — and I believe, particularly — strongly in the future of the forest industry. We are definitely going through a tough patch at the moment in the forest industry, perhaps one of the toughest patches that we have seen in 30 or 40 years. But we do not have

control over where the Canadian dollar is going, despite the fact that the opposition would like us to perhaps have that.

We do not have control over things like the U.S. housing market. We do not have control over the sub-prime credit crisis that is happening in the States. All of these things are creating a very, very challenging environment to work in and to be able to flourish in. Industry understands this. They understand the cycle and the process that we're going through.

I've talked with some of the industry leaders. They understand that their role, as part of this, is to be able to support communities and to be able to support their workers to get through this tough patch so that when we come out, we will have a vibrant, strong forest industry.

I've heard some predictions on the far side coming out of this that by 2010, we may see lumber prices in the \$600-per-thousand-board-foot range. Imagine that, Madam Speaker. We would go from what the opposition is calling an emergency crisis in this province to suddenly seeing the highest prices we would have ever seen in lumber prices, if that type of a prediction going forward comes true.

[1120]

There's no question — and I'm not denying — that the forest industry has its challenges and its struggles at the moment. There is much that needs to be talked about and looked at in terms of the future of the forest industry.

In my neck of the woods, particularly when you look at pine beetle and what may emerge from pine beetle, there are some real concerns in communities. What I find absolutely amazing is that the members opposite, and particularly the member for Cariboo North, come out, continually, talking about the sky falling and his doom-and-gloom scenarios for the forest industry.

We don't need doom and gloom. What we need is people thinking progressively about what could happen in the future of the forest industry — people working and bringing forward ideas.

I want to just talk about a few of the potential ideas. Today in the forest industry we log about 0.7 percent of the timber harvesting land base. That's not the overall provincial land base. That's the land base that is designated for forestry activities — 0.7 percent per year. That equates to about a 140-year-or-more rotation.

There are many ways that we could be looking at increasing productivity on the land base, perhaps through giving companies the ability to be able to access a second cut or encouraging them to look at things like new silviculture activities to perhaps get a 70- or 80-year rotation out of the wood that's being planted. We could be looking at things like hybrid species, which can get a nice eight-inch to ten-inch sawlog in about 30 to 40 years.

All of those sorts of things are what we're looking at or things that we're potentially looking at and are things that groups like the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition and the Cariboo-Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition

are looking at for the future to stabilize our timber supply and hopefully be able to increase our timber supply so that we can get through that rough patch.

There are many other things we could be looking at as well. As I mentioned, at 0.7 percent of the land base, just think of what would happen if we were to increase that to 0.8 percent of the land base. That would represent a 12-percent increase right there in the amount of wood that would be available — just by looking at increasing our harvesting rates by 0.1 percent. That would still allow us plenty of reserves for the future.

Another thing we could look at is the utilization levels on timber. Right now in the interior we cut to a four-inch top. If we were to consider going to a 2½-inch top — companies would have to consider retooling — that would essentially put perhaps 7 to 12 percent more wood available into the annual allowable-cut basket.

There is plenty of opportunity to be looking at where the future of the forest industry should be going and to be building those kinds of strategies. That's exactly what we've tasked local groups to do — to look at that. On top of this, the chief forester is currently in the process of working through a future forest strategy, and he is in the process of coming through this.

The member opposite, with a motion like he's put forward here today, seems to be intent on taking those tools away from the local people under some sort of guise of trying to control it here in Victoria and make it political.

Well, let me talk a little bit about what making forest policy political looked like. In the 1990s under the NDP, they had eight forest ministers in just ten years. How is that — talking about being stable on the forest industry? They brought forward this idea that... You know, Premier Glen Clark basically came close to ordering the forest industry that they must create 21,000 jobs over the next five years or lose the timber cutting rights.

What happened over that time? Some 13,000 jobs were lost through the forest industry, and the forest industry itself was continually under attack by the NDP government over that time. They went from being one of the lowest-cost producers to the highest-cost producers and having trouble just to compete.

On top of that, when there were some challenges in the forest industry, their immediate reaction was: "Let's just bail them out. Let's throw \$425 million of public money into Skeena Cellulose." What was the end result of that? As soon as that money was gone, the industry shut down. Those are the kinds of ideas that have come forward from the NDP over time on how to resolve the forest industry.

[1125]

What we're doing on this side of the House is making sure our forest industry can be as competitive as possible, as healthy as possible, so that when it faces downturns like this, we can come through this as a stronger industry, moving forward.

I've been involved directly in the forest industry for 25 years. I have seen many of the downturns that we

have gone through in terms of the cycles. Yes, this one is challenging, but I also know that companies do things. For example, they're worried about employees and their families. They want to see stability for them and for their workforce. They look at things — like trying to be able to perhaps work with some shift-sharing and working through EI — to try to make sure they can keep their workforce and keep moving through times like this.

When you see downturns like we have seen in the past, they are very challenging for families and for communities. One of the communities in my riding, Fort St. James, is facing some real challenges at the moment. Fort St. James may be one of the most forestry-dependent communities that we see in the province. We need to be looking at working with the community, working with the companies to try to resolve those issues so that we can get through this. I'm confident that we will get through this, if we can be as competitive as we have been in the past, which I believe has been the underlying strength throughout the forest industry.

Let me digress on that thought just for a moment. This challenge that the forest industry has been facing — with the rising Canadian dollar, the problems with the shrinking housing market in the States and the lowering demand in forestry — is something that has been going on for a number of months now, yet the forest industry in the interior, in particular, has been able to resist some of these challenges. They've been able to resist because they have been able to keep their costs down and to drive on, being competitive.

At this particular point, however, there's only so far you can go before you have to try to take some curtailment to be able to survive, coming through. Those are tough decisions, and I know that many people in the industry lose sleep thinking about how they can make sure that they can stay — in terms of supporting their communities and employees.

As I was saying, we will get through this. There's no question that we'll get through this. Our industry is competitive enough and strong enough that when they come out of this, you're going to see some very interesting changes in the forest industry.

For example, one of the initiatives that we're trying to do is in terms of generating power using wood. There's a huge potential now for the forest industry to look at their waste products. Things that have typically been burnt in the forest or that have been sent to the burners could now potentially generate power. That's a whole new dynamic that forest industries can look at to be able to take advantage of and to suddenly, perhaps, get a different revenue stream coming out of some of those forest products.

The pellet industry, for example, in this province currently produces about 700,000 tonnes. It's expected to expand to close to 1.5 million tonnes over the next little while. It has a tremendous opportunity in terms of meeting some of our energy needs, once again driving some innovation and change in the forest industry.

Places like Japan, which currently produce about 30 percent of their electricity with coal, are considering

taking half of that productivity in looking at bioenergy. The pellet industry has a huge potential. If that were to come out of B.C., it would be 1.5 million tonnes of pellets just to meet that industry. It would be a phenomenal potential increase in B.C.'s products in terms of export.

All of that, then, helps to drive some innovation and change that can happen in the primary industry of forestry. I think that over time we'll see the change of industry. Instead of just primary breakdown, you'll see different streams and different productivity lines. I think what that does is drive our secondary manufacturing, and it gives opportunities for us to look at a different way of doing forests in this province. All of those things are being looked at for the future of the industry.

What we need now is not a motion about creating an emergency meeting to talk about the forest industry. What we need are solid ideas and initiatives that can come forward. We need the processes like the beetle action coalitions that engage the public, that engage the people, to allow that input process. We need to allow for those innovations on the ground, not driven out of some committee or some artificial process that becomes politicized out of Victoria.

[1130]

I appreciate the member's concerns about the forest industry. I appreciate the fact that he has raised this for discussion in the House, but I cannot support the direction that he is proposing. I do not believe it would be healthy for the industry. I do not believe it would be an effective way for being able to allow for that public input and for those discussions. I believe that there are better ways, that the process is in place and that we have initiated those processes.

I look forward to hearing more of this debate, but like I say, I can't support this motion.

C. Trevena: I'm very pleased to be standing to support the motion that my colleague from Yale-Lillooet has submitted, saying that there should be an emergency summit on the future of forestry in the province to allow communities, workers and citizens to again have a direct say in the development of a new vision for our forests, our industries and our communities. The member for Prince George-Omineca, I think, sadly misses the point of this.

This is not a political move. This is something that we need to see being driven by our communities, by those who work in the forest industry and by those communities that survive in the forest industry. Sadly, we are not seeing that vision. We are not seeing a voice that is coming from the communities. The voice from the community is, sadly, being silenced.

What we have seen, which was very worrying, was that after much promise, much discussion, much debate and much hope, the revitalization plan that was submitted and tabled by the government offered nothing for our communities. It was a thin piece of paper which had no vision.

We are still seeing the shutdown of mills and the damage happening to our industry, which is why this

side of the House believes that the way we need to move forward is by having an emergency summit. It would be an emergency summit for the future of forestry, which includes all of the communities, and is not a political process.

I think the member for Prince George-Omineca is also talking about the various things that are happening in his constituency and in his area. The benefit of this is that this would be provincewide, because forestry is still the backbone of the B.C. economy. We need to have a provincewide discussion which involves everybody.

My constituency, North Island, is still highly dependent on the forestry industry. I think it would be safe to say that it is still the backbone of our economic development. It's the backbone of our communities. But in the last, I would say, maybe 15, 20 years, we've seen a massive change in the forestry and the sector in the area.

Instead of seeing a number of mills, now we have very few mills. Our main one is a specialty cellulose mill in Port Alice that almost shut down. It was after much fighting and much pressure that this government finally actually assisted that mill to keep open. As the member for the riding, I was putting a lot of pressure on the government. We have that one.

We have a catalyst mill in Campbell River. Again, like other catalyst mills, its future is very uncertain. If that mill was to go down, I'm not sure what would happen to Campbell River, because that mill supports thousands of jobs and thousands of families in the community.

There is another mill, TimberWest Elk Falls, which has been on the market for well over a year and can't be sold because there is no link anymore between the mills and the logs. I think this is one of the most damaging things that we are seeing: the separation of the industry — the fact that the mills and the companies are now centralized.

I would like to see a vision that could come from communities, from the people who work in the forest industry, which looks at the structure of our industry right from the ground up.

Again, for the north Island, we have two main forestry companies. We've got TimberWest, which looks after the private lands, and Western Forest Products on the Crown lands. They have effective control over all the forestry in our communities, which means that they also have control over the logs. There are some B.C. Timber Sales — but very few.

I have to admit that one of the things that will be quite interesting to see in a vision and in discussion — and I know members from my community would bring this to the table — is the role of the Ministry of Forests in selling off forest land and Crown land. There is some concern on that. I think there would be a real positive debate to see how our forest industry works.

[1135]

The fact that we can have one company, Western Forest Products, maintaining control over almost all the Crown lands in the north Island and that the government can still come in and have the audacity to take

land out of the TFLs so Western can benefit from that....

The member for Prince George-Omineca talked about subsidizing and talked about Skeena Cellulose, but I think we're talking about massive subsidy when the government comes in and assists a large forestry company that is not based in the communities anymore but is based in central Canada — Brascan — and says: "Okay, you seem to be having a bit of a problem. We'll help you out financially." I think that's a subsidy. That's a subsidy that people really sense.

This is another reason why we need to have a summit to say: where are we going? Where are we going with forestry in our communities?

I'd like to just give an illustration of the situation that we're in on the north Island — why we do need to have a summit, why we need to have a community discussion on where we're going. Tahsis used to have a very large mill. It shut down. The community of Tahsis has a couple of hundred people who still try to get by there. There is a small mill there.

Western logs around Tahsis, but Western has consolidated all its log sort down in Gold River. The guy who runs the mill in Tahsis has to pay Vancouver log prices to get logs that are logged in his back yard back from Gold River, and he has to pay Vancouver log prices to Western to get access to them. Then he's got to ship them back to his community.

These are the sorts of things that we could be looking at if we had a summit on forestry — if we had communities across the province coming together and saying: "How is this working? How are we going to make sure that small businesses survive? How are we going to make sure that we have a value-added sector in our forest industry?" At the moment we don't.

At the moment we are seeing our future literally taken away from us, whether it's through exports, whether it's through overlogging. We need to be able to come together as communities to discuss what we see as our future for forestry. That's why I wholeheartedly support this. We do need to have a new vision for our forests, for our industry and for our communities, because I believe that this is still the future for British Columbia.

M. Polak: Why would an MLA from Langley stand up to talk about forestry in British Columbia, you may ask. The reason a member from Langley would do that is because forestry is still the backbone of all those things we hold to be important in British Columbia.

It amazes me sometimes when I visit schools in our province that we have in the classroom such a small amount of emphasis being placed on the importance of our resource industry in British Columbia, because it's that very resource industry — and forestry is right up there — that contributes to the education that those students are receiving.

It's the same with health care. We can talk a lot about health care and the money that it's taking out of the budget to support our health care needs. If it wasn't for industries like forestry, we wouldn't have those

programs such as health and all other social service programs that we need in this province. That's why you're going to see members from Langley, members from the lower mainland talking about the importance of forestry.

In the motion, at the end, it speaks to the development of a new vision for our forests, our industry and our communities, and it speaks to the involvement of communities and workers, etc. Having looked over the ways in which the public, forest workers and communities are currently involved in the development of visioning around forestry, I would challenge the record of any other previous government to show such a high level of input and access and a direct say as what they have today. I really don't think you'd find it.

When you take a look now, in dealing with problems that are confronting us, like the pine beetle, you have communities engaged in discussing what role their communities can play. You have communities involved in discussing what options are going to work for them. You have communities involved in bringing forward to the Ministry of Forests those ideas that they think can assist in sustaining their communities.

[1140]

When it comes to first nations, first nations certainly are a part of our community who have not seen the benefits of our resources used for them. They've watched as those resources have been exploited by the newcomers to British Columbia but have not provided the advantages to them.

Finally, we have the establishment in the Ministry of Forests of ways in which first nations communities can be active in the forest industry — not just as forest workers, but as owners of companies, as business people, as those who would support their own communities by taking advantage of the resources around them. That's something that our government is very proud of. For the first time, we see first nations as partners in our forest industry in British Columbia — a huge, huge change.

All across the world, economies are pushing us in different directions. I would have to say that, in my opinion, nowhere is that more obvious than in areas such as the resource sector. Everybody talks about the new economies of knowledge, the economies of technology, but in the end a province like British Columbia still depends on our resources, and we depend on forestry.

So how are we going to find that balance, and how are we going to involve the rest of our community in determining that vision and that future? Well, one of the ways in which we started to develop that ever-so-important policy, how we interact with the world, was in commissioning the Wright-Dumont report — challenging recommendations that came out.

Perhaps the most telling thing was their observation about the complexity of forest policy in British Columbia. You do something that changes something a little over there, and it has a huge impact over here. Unexpected consequences abound whenever you touch forest policy. It's all the more reason that we've sought

out communities to be involved as we talk about a future for forestry.

Let's take a look at a few areas in which the public is now involved in developing forest policy. One of the largest is the Land and Resource Management Plans that are being developed across the province, and these have a huge first nations involvement. This is a constructive way to take a look at a future, a vision for how an area of land will be managed, not only with respect to forestry but integrated with other uses.

That's a way forward that hasn't been attempted in the long past in British Columbia. For too long, we isolated different components of our resource industry and weren't able to integrate them. Now when we are, what are we doing? We're involving the communities in making those decisions.

The member for Prince George-Omineca mentioned the pine beetle action coalitions. We have a list right now of some other processes that are ongoing. So there's the minister's community advisory group on the mountain pine beetle; the Cariboo-Chilcotin, Omineca and Southern Interior beetle action coalitions; the Forest and Range Practices Advisory Council; the first nations forestry leadership council; the Forest Science Board; and the Forest Investment Account's forest science program. Those are just a few.

At no time in British Columbia has there been the kind of input that we are receiving currently from the public and from communities who have a vested interest in forestry. But it is so important for those of us who live on the lower mainland — those of us who aren't touched daily by what happens in the forest industry — to remember that this is something that touches all of us, not just forestry-dependent communities. In a sense, all of British Columbia is a forestry-dependent community.

I look forward to working with the people of our province as we take the action plan forward, as we respond to the recommendations of Wright and Dumont and as we attempt to make the best transition for our forest industry into a new economy that has B.C. leading and has forestry as one of our top performers. That's our vision for forestry in British Columbia.

C. James: I'm pleased to rise to speak in support of this motion. I've heard other members ask: "Why? Why would we pull together an emergency summit? Why would we pull together people to talk about putting together a plan for our forest industry?"

[1145]

I think it's very clear to anyone who has actually listened to the communities that are impacted by the changes in the forest industry why we need to do this, how important it is to be able to pull people together. In fact, the government has continued asking the companies what they need when it comes to the forest industry, but like many things in government, this government has left communities out.

This government is asking companies what supports are there, but they're forgetting to ask the workers, the people who live in those communities who are

directly impacted. They're forgetting to ask first nations about the impact on them. This government, as is typical, has cut communities out of this dialogue and discussion.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

I have no doubt that, in fact, the impact is going to be huge in British Columbia. We know that over 40 percent of our exports come from the forest industry. The previous member mentioned the impact is all of British Columbia, not simply the rural areas, and that's very true. The forest industry impacts our entire budget in British Columbia, which therefore does impact our education system, our health care system.

That is why it's even more important that we have everyone at the table when we have discussions about our forest industry. That's why it makes it even more critical to not cut people out of the dialogue and discussion, yet that's what we've seen. We've seen it time and again over the last six years when it comes to the forest industry. We've in fact seen raw log exports go up without a discussion with our communities. We've seen our public forest lands given away — given away without any connection to the community, without any discussion or debate with the community. That's this government's direction when it comes to forestry.

We've seen communities — mayors, councils, community members — stand up one after another to try and get this government to pay attention to the pine beetle epidemic and what a devastating impact that's going to have in those communities. Once again what do we hear from the government? We hear that we shouldn't be concerned, that we're fearmongering and that we're raising issues that shouldn't matter. "Don't worry; everything will be fine."

Well, Mr. Speaker, people in those communities know that everything isn't fine. They've known that for the last six years, and they've done everything they can to try and get this government to pay attention to those challenges.

We often hear the government talk about the value-added sector and how valuable that is. Again, what we've seen is the government go in the opposite direction and hurt the value-added sector and make it more difficult for the value-added sector to be able to thrive, to be able to help with the transition around the pine beetle epidemic.

I've talked with many first nations who say that they are struggling, as well, when it comes to the term of their contract. They can't get someone to come and invest because they aren't able to get a long enough supply of wood to be able to look at any kind of viable business plan. That's another reason that we need to bring everyone to the table in order to have a discussion.

Forestry is a critical area in British Columbia and always will be — a critical industry not simply to our past but to our present and to our future. I would think that with an industry that's so critical, the government would want everyone at the table, the government would value the experience that's there in small wood-

lots, in first nations, in workers, in industry and communities — that they would value those voices and bring those people to the table.

I speak strongly in support of this motion. I think it's critical. Time has long passed to pretend that everything is fine in the forest industry, as we see this government doing. It's time to make sure that everyone comes to the table. It's time, as this motion says, to have an emergency summit on the future of our industry, to make sure that it's viable and to make sure that communities are back in the equation when it comes to the forest industry.

[1150]

L. Mayencourt: It's a pleasure to stand today to speak to this motion. I was very intrigued by the member's motion, because it demands that the government immediately convene an emergency summit on the forestry industry. Well, while the member who put forward that motion.... When he was in cabinet over the last term of the NDP, he spent years kicking the bejesus right out of the industry. What we have in this chamber today are members that....

Mr. Speaker: Member, be careful of your language, please.

L. Mayencourt: Thank you, sir. I shall.

What we had in this chamber was a group of NDP ministers that decided they would start driving the industry out of town, like a bunch of bullies. In 1990 you used to have to file about this much paper to do a forestry plan for a piece of property. Under the NDP, the forestry code rose to this high. They had to spend tens and tens of thousands of dollars just to write up a plan that said: "We're going to cut down some trees." There was no benefit to it.

The industry was forced by a government to put tens of millions of dollars into the forest renewal fund. What did they get out? Maybe \$2 million, \$3 million.

The feathering of the nest of the NDP, the feathering of the nest of people that were driving this industry over to other places in the world was only matched by their lack of concern for marketing B.C. lumber products. They didn't care. They didn't care that they were losing market share in Japan. They didn't care that they were losing market share in the U.S. They didn't care that the Swedish people were kicking us in the pants because they knew how to do forestry better than us.

It's time for the NDP to own up to what they did in the 1990s. They killed the forest industry. They put 13,000 loggers and forest workers out of work. That was an emergency. That was when we needed an emergency summit.

I'm so glad that the member has woken up after 15 years in this chamber to understand that the forest industry is struggling. It is time for that member to take full responsibility, for those members on that side of the House to take full responsibility for destroying the forest industry in British Columbia. It's time for them to start working with us, with community, with the

industry, to make sure that each and every forest job that can be protected in British Columbia is protected, that people can cut down trees here and make a living out of it, that communities can have mills. It's time for them to own up to that.

It's time for the NDP to stop talking about forest policies and consultation and actually get engaged in consultation and in making sure that forest policy actually improves. It is not an improvement that the forest code requires this kind of a plan, this much paper. What it is, is they have to understand that there's a competitive need that they have not met, and it is time for us to do that.

We have dozens of committees that are meeting with communities right now, talking about forest practices. Where is the NDP in that process? Nowhere. They're not at the table. Why? Because they don't have any ideas. In fact, the ideas they have are so wildly out of step with the rest of the world that they just can't offer anything positive.

Mr. Speaker, noting the hour....

Interjection.

L. Mayencourt: Oh, I'm very sorry. I understand a member on that side would like to speak, and I'd be very eager to hear what the NDP has to say — after they've destroyed an industry — about how they're going to have an emergency summit and fix it in five days.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

L. Krog: I don't know that there's a dumpster big enough in British Columbia to haul the rubbish out that I just heard delivered into this chamber. The member for Vancouver-Burrard might have some real credibility on forestry issues if he argued as passionately for the reforestation of Vancouver Island as he did for Stanley Park.

[1155]

Firstly, I want to pay my compliments to the member for Yale-Lillooet for bringing this important motion before the House. Those of us who actually represent forestry communities with forestry workers understand the seriousness of the issue.

When you've got 500-plus people in my community facing a Christmas where they may never see their jobs again, where Harmac may be ready to close, we take it seriously on this side of the House. We're not going to lay blame on some market conditions back in the '90s and make some stupid excuses about why we're in the mess we are today. The fact is that this government has had six and a half years to deal with forestry issues in this province, and they have utterly failed to do so.

I want to pay my compliments, also, to the member for Prince George-Omineca for the words he spoke earlier this morning around the 100-mile diet. He was thoughtful. He was eloquent, and I believe he was passionate about the issue, and he deserves credit. But when he stated in his response to this particular motion that the drama may be overstated, I have to say that he was just dead wrong.

Every newspaper columnist, every forestry expert, anyone who knows anything about this industry, anyone like my family who has worked in it for generations, and I myself — anyone who has worked in the forestry industry understands how serious things are. The fact is that government policy and the responsibility to have a decent minister in place and real policy that makes sense for real people and real communities are important and paramount.

I'm astonished at the reaction of the government members this morning, being dismissive of something. I hope their words get quoted in every paper across this province where there's a forestry community so that they'll know which side of the House actually cares about their jobs and their communities.

There are thousands and thousands of British Columbians and their families who face bleak Christmases this year because of the state of the forestry industry, and if this government gave one whit — gave

one whit or an ounce of concern — about those families, they would be supporting this motion. They'd be bringing it in themselves. They'd be convening a summit so fast it'd make your head spin.

But, hon. Speaker, I suspect they're not going to bother to do that. They're going to be dismissive of this, just as the member for Prince George-Omineca was dismissive of it, just as the member for Vancouver-Burrard was dismissive of it. It is an important issue. It deserves the attention of this House, and it's to my great regret that the members opposite don't understand that.

L. Krog moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. C. Richmond moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

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