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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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

FIFTH SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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Honourable Bill Barisoff

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MONDAY, MARCH 9, 2009

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

Introductions by Members

J. Yap: This morning in the gallery we have two special guests. One is no stranger to many of us, having served on Vancouver's city council until November of last year. B.C. Lee is here today in the Legislature, and with him is a student all the way from Hangzhou, China, studying at Simon Fraser University — Weiwei Chen.

They are here for the awards this afternoon, but more importantly, to also observe how we do parliamentary democracy here at the Legislature. Would all members join me in giving them a warm welcome to the Legislature.

[1005]

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Statements

CANCER AWARENESS

R. Hawes: This morning I want to talk just for a few moments about a topic that actually touches the lives of, I think, every British Columbian: cancer. I know that every one of us has a connection with someone, whether it be ourselves, whether it be a relative or a close friend, that has contracted this terrible, terrible condition.

Thousands of British Columbians every year hear those dreadful words: "You have cancer." Their doctor tells them they have cancer. I know in my personal case, my mother died of esophageal cancer when I was four years old, leaving my older brother, who was six, and my two twin sisters, who were, at the time, one and a half, without a mother. We struggled through that period, but I know that has had an indelible effect on our lives.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

I do know the rules of the House here, and you'll forgive me if I break them a little bit, but cancer is something that touches people personally. My colleagues, all of whom I feel a great deal of respect for, and there's a huge amount of... In spite of, sometimes, our political differences, we are all doing the same type of job for our constituents, and there is a bond of friendship and mutual respect that exists between all MLAs. In our House here, as you know, Madam Speaker, many of our colleagues have not escaped the touch of this dreadful disease.

So you'll forgive me. I do know the rules. I'm asking forgiveness in advance, and I'll apologize after, but because it's such a personal thing, I think it goes beyond where you come from. Sindi Hawkins; Wally Oppal; Barry Penner; the late Stan Hagen; Chuck Puchmayr; John Horgan; Carole James, the Leader of the Opposition — all have been touched just in the last few years by cancer. All of us know someone who has been touched by cancer.

I know that I personally — and I'm sure every member in this House — have too often visited people in the hospital in their last days or gone to funerals for people who have been taken far too young by this dreaded, dreaded condition. Cancer doesn't know or respect age or race or gender. It touches everyone right across the spectrum, and in British Columbia, we have worked hard for many years to try to do something about this.

Perhaps one of the good things for British Columbia is that we are making headway. There are more people today that are cured of cancer or who don't succumb to cancer than those who contract cancer. In the old days, I think it was a death sentence; today, not so much. I'm very happy to say that I believe that British Columbia is winning, and I just wanted to talk about a couple of the accomplishments that have been made, mostly by the B.C. Cancer Agency, and I'll just read a couple of these.

The B.C. Cancer Agency's investigators made an important advance in the study of breast cancer, showing that the normal female breast contains a population of breast stem cells, and these normal breast stem cells are responsible for starting to form breast cancers. That, through such venues as the Michael Smith Foundation and the genome work that they are doing, will lead to the recognition of the precursors to breast cancer and the identification of markers within genes that will allow breast cancer to be wiped out for those who have a genetic predisposition.

Scientists at the B.C. Cancer Agency have identified distinct pathways for five types of ovarian cancer, showing that they're completely different diseases, a discovery that may lead to new avenues of early detection and more effective, customized treatments for women with ovarian cancer.

[1010]

With men, of course, prostate cancer is a huge, huge problem. In fact, the biggest or the most common form of cancer in men is prostate cancer.

For her team's work in successfully identifying a molecular mechanism which may explain how advanced prostate cancer grows even in the absence of male hormones, Dr. Marianne Sadar, senior scientist at the B.C. Cancer Agency, was named recipient of the annual Terry Fox Young Investigator Award. She is developing drugs to prevent and improve outcomes for a disease that affects one man in seven. That is a huge percentage of men that are diagnosed with prostate cancer, and right

here in British Columbia, it looks like there's a strong chance that we could find the cure for this affliction that affects so many men.

The B.C. Centre for Disease Control is funding a three-year local and international research project at the University of Victoria, examining the effect of air pollution on the health of pregnant women and their children. We all understand the effects of the environment, that the effects of environmental pollution cause diseases. But we don't know what the total impact of these diseases are, and we don't understand what specific parts of, for example, air pollution really cause these cancers. It's this type of research that will lead us to much improved air quality and, hopefully, lesser incidence of cancers.

You can't talk about cancer without talking about smoking. British Columbia has worked very, very hard for decades to reduce the incidence of smoking and to make the smokers aware of the disease that they're going to cause for themselves with this habit. Of patients with newly diagnosed lung cancer, 50 percent are former smokers. Madam Speaker, 50 percent of people with lung cancer are former smokers. That is an alarming statistic.

I know my colleague opposite has some words to say, and I'm very much looking forward to what he has to say. So I'll cede the floor to him, and I'll be back to conclude shortly.

J. Horgan: I thank my friend from Maple Ridge–Mission for that introduction and also for being named in this place. I know that the Speaker is providing some latitude.

I was quickly writing down the constituency names for all of the members that were named from Mission, and it's quite an extraordinary list. I'm now, I guess, in the fraternity of a cancer survivor, and I'm quite happy about that, I have to say, off the top. It was with shock and surprise that I received a call from my general practitioner advising me of a diagnosis last fall.

Cancer has affected all of us in one way or another in this place, as the member says. Certainly, the member for Kelowna–Mission has been a tireless crusader to raise community awareness and also awareness of public policy-makers about the impacts of cancer on families, on individuals and on communities.

I have to say, of course, that I was involved and active in my community, as virtually all members are, whether it be the walk for the cure, the Run for the Cure and various other public initiatives in our communities right across B.C. — in fact, right across Canada — designed to bring people together from different walks of life with different socioeconomic backgrounds, different cultures, all coming together with a common cause: to raise awareness and, quite often, large sums of money for cancer research and medical assistance.

It's interesting, hon. Speaker. When I was diagnosed, and it became public that I was going in for surgery, I

was overwhelmed with support, initially, and then concern from other cancer patients who had a similar diagnosis to my own. I kind of established new friendships as a result of the prognosis and diagnosis that I had last fall. It's interesting.

[1015]

It started through e-mail. A couple of people with similar cancer to my own contacted me, asking me how I was doing, what techniques or innovations I was looking at. Was I talking to naturopathic practitioners? Was I going with mainstream prognosis and treatment?

I discovered quite quickly that there is a whole new world — I hasten to call it a subculture — of those that are in and around and involved in cancer in our community, certainly here in British Columbia. It's quite heartening.

I know many of us who are touched either by a family member or a loved one respond in different ways, but when you're actually faced with it.... I remember the Leader of the Opposition. When she advised our caucus of her diagnosis a couple of years ago, it knocked us all flat on our backs.

I know members on the other side have had similar.... Of course, the member for Maple Ridge–Mission articulated the number of members involved. I think it's a microcosm of the community that we live in. Cancer is the scourge of our generation. We don't know why, where and how, but we're getting closer and closer every day to treatments for certain types of cancer.

The member also touched upon cigarettes and smoking. I'm proud to say that when I worked in government in the 1990s, we were very aggressive with the purveyors of the noxious substance of tobacco. I'm very pleased that the current government carried on that crusade into this century.

Both sides of this House worked tirelessly to assist and develop policies that will discourage tobacco use. I think that that's one of those issues. I'm often asked: "Why do you guys disagree on everything?" Well, we don't, and this is one that both sides of the House agree on.

Certainly, the member for Kelowna–Mission has been inspirational for many of us. I was always happy to see her whenever she came back from treatment. I never thought.... You never consider that you would become part of the same fraternity, having experienced the disease, faced it in the eye, stared it down and, for at least the short term, been successful.

While I'm on my feet, hon. Speaker. I did say after I returned to the House in the fall how touched I was by the outpouring of support from members of this place, particularly government members who I quite often.... Many of them are here right now. Quite often, I'm very aggressive with them in the to and fro of debate, and we give as good as we get. But when as individuals we are struck by this single, humanizing issue and incident of a potentially deadly disease, it really is an honourable place to work.

I want to thank all members once again for their support for me and for other members — my colleague from New Westminster and my colleagues from Victoria–Beacon Hill, from Vancouver–Fraserview, from Chilliwack–Kent, from Kelowna–Mission and, of course, the former member for Comox Valley, Stan Hagen.

Again, I'm pleased to participate in the debate today. Raising awareness. We can't do enough of it. Working together, both sides of the House, communities right across B.C., we'll defeat this over time.

R. Hawes: I'd like to thank the member for his comments. I know his personal struggle in coming to grips with this disease has had an impact on him and his family. He has exhibited, in my view, the same kind of bravery that all members in this House have exhibited when they faced their challenge as well.

I did want to speak for a second about the access to treatment in British Columbia. I know that there are areas in British Columbia where, if you are diagnosed and you have some difficulty, then, going in for your treatment, whether it be radiation or chemotherapy or whatever, and you have to go to one of the cancer centres.... If you live in one of the more remote areas of British Columbia, that can be a very challenging thing.

You have a long way to travel, and sometimes your treatment is on a frequent basis over a protracted length of time, and it becomes very, very difficult. That's why it is so important to ensure that, over time, we are able to provide these kinds of services closer to where people live.

[1020]

Where I live in the Fraser Valley, I'm extremely pleased that we were able to open the Abbotsford Cancer Centre. I know it's had a huge impact on a lot of people who live in the Fraser Valley, who no longer have to travel into Surrey or further to get their radiation therapy or their chemotherapy or whatever their treatment regime happens to be.

But that drive from the Fraser Valley to Surrey pales in comparison to some other areas in British Columbia. So I'm quite pleased, and I know the people in Prince George are very pleased, that there will be a cancer centre opening in Prince George. I think that for the people in the north, it's a very, very important and a very, very necessary addition to the health care spectrum in the northern part of British Columbia.

I have to also commend the B.C. Cancer Agency. I think they are the ones who keep us at the forefront of cancer research and treatment. Because of their work, we are actually the leading province in Canada for curing cancer and for limiting the debilitating outcomes that cancer has.

Our population is well served by the B.C. Cancer Agency, and I can tell you that their drug approval system is second to none. When new drugs come out

for cancer, the B.C. Cancer Agency is on top of it. They give approval very quickly, and patients who suffer from cancer and who would benefit from new drug therapies are well served in British Columbia by the B.C. Cancer Agency.

Besides the cancer agency, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the cancer foundation. The member opposite did talk about the volunteers. There are thousands of volunteers out there working tirelessly to raise money and awareness, and I want to thank all of them.

THE COMPLETE COMMUNITY

G. Gentner: As we head into what has been described by many as the greatest global economic downturn in 80 years, we as public officials must weigh our options through consultation with our constituents — options, however limited, as to how to invest in an uncertain future that will have a maximum effect and benefit for all.

Governments throughout the world have rediscovered Keynesian economics as a means to invest into infrastructure projects in order to stimulate the economy, creating jobs that will result in a multiplier effect and thus stimulate further employment and spending.

In the 1930s Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration embarked on a new deal, an unprecedented interventionist approach for a capitalist economy — the injection of public money for publicly owned utility megaprojects, whereby dams were built to provide energy and greater water capacity in order to stimulate a depressed economy.

Since then the world has changed. The postwar era, urbanization and the automobile have altered modern society, including our daily vocabulary — such as new words: congestion, gridlock, suburbia and the freeway, which in turn created the "megalopolis."

With the economic slump comes a new opportunity to reinvest in a new direction that will build a secure future for British Columbia. We must build a viable British Columbia. Not something created from old-school thinking, but a British Columbia that not only fixes and maintains infrastructure, including the broken social net, but by investing in projects that will harness the future for our children, projects that will re-adjust our communities to be more livable and affordable.

Urban sprawl is dead. If we are to move out of what may well be a depression, government must support cost-effective projects with viable results, programs that will transform ineffective transportation plans, that will help make communities more complete. Transportation planning that will not tear them apart.

We must assist communities in order for them to be self-sufficient, with jobs, mixed residential developments that offer a variety of options for seniors, the young and the families — affordable options. We must

invest in communities that are safe, where people do not have to commute great distances in order to work, learn and play.

If ever there was a time to invest in communities, it is now. Now is the time for the province to show leadership and stimulate economies where people live. Perhaps as politicians, we do not do this because there are no photo-ops, fewer sod-turning events or ribbon-cutting venues. Capital projects are far more politically sexy than run-of-the-mill maintenance and operation of our existing social services or hard assets.

[1025]

My community in North Delta is striving to become a self-reliant, complete community. It is encouraging higher density with infill housing and smaller lots, more multi-unit dwellings and duplexes to townhouses. Schools and places of worship have defined vibrant new neighbourhoods. Recreational amenities keep kids active through organized or unorganized sporting cultural venues.

Community policing and public safety is a mainstay. Our streets are lined with trees and light standards. We do our very best to keep our farmland; maintain our parks; preserve a sensitive ecology and natural environment, including the Fraser River foreshore — the lifeline for salmon and the site, in my community, of one of North America's oldest, 8,600 years in fact, aboriginal archaeological sites.

However, if we spend foolishly on the wrong projects, we'll bear witness to a community struggling to become a complete community to one of fragmentation. The world has changed, and so must the way we plan our communities.

Freeways will destroy complete communities. Greater volumes of traffic spurned by a freeway along B.C.'s most productive salmon-bearing river will create greater traffic jams — in my community it would be the interchange at Nordel and the Alex Fraser Bridge — and consequently, a backlog of cars that will clog our arterial, collector and local streets. That will separate homes, jobs and shopping from each other. Property values, in effect, will be decreased because of increased traffic. So will property tax revenue to help provide for those amenities.

Greying of our communities is caused in part because of traffic. Increased traffic will put stress on a community's character. We have the potential to build a better British Columbia, a province that consults with partners, with communities, families and everybody in that community. Unfortunately, the megaproject doesn't always make it. It doesn't provide that type of consultation. It runs rampant through communities. In my community that, of course, is the South Fraser perimeter road.

Now is the time to stimulate a new economy, yes. Build from the ground up a responsible commitment for families as a part of a solution.

Investing in a community is a major economic driver. It stimulates 35 percent of every dollar spent in that

community, whether it be local businesses or whether it be stimulating towards community involvement and community programs.

It is time that the province of British Columbia seriously look at a different approach. Yes, it's indeed the time to embrace some of the examples that Roosevelt was committed to. But we have to be smart. We have to invest in the 21st century, and that is within our communities.

J. Yap: It's my honour to rise to respond to the statement by the member for Delta North. I would like to start out first of all by acknowledging an area of general agreement on the principle that, yes, we need to have fresh ideas and thinking to ensure that communities are sustainable and that we provide for an environment that will allow communities to be vibrant and to provide the opportunities for those that are able to live and work in proximity.

In my community, in Richmond, the city council has laid out a plan to.... The member for Delta North talks about densification. That's one of the programs the city of Richmond is looking at, to increase the densification in the area generally known as the city centre.

The Canada line, which is the major infrastructure transit project of our times, up to this point in our history, will be completed — up and running, it is expected — by this fall. The vision is to see densification — more residential, more commercial neighbourhoods — in and around the Canada line as soon as it enters Richmond, coming across from Vancouver to its terminus in the centre of Richmond.

[1030]

That is an important concept. I applaud the city of Richmond for taking the opportunity provided by the Canada line to do this.

It's projected that up to 40,000 to 50,000 new residents will settle in the centre of Richmond because of this approach to densification, people who will be able to commute using the Canada line and who will also, being in the centre of Richmond, be able to — if they're able to — walk to work or bicycle to work and not have to commute a long distance.

In the meantime, the fact is we do have a community of communities. We have Metro Vancouver, which is spread from one end in the west right through to the Fraser Valley, and this is something that hasn't happened overnight. The notion that we can suddenly stop urban sprawl after generations of thinking that it's okay for people to move out to the suburbs and commute to where their work is, where their jobs are, is not something that we can change overnight.

In the meantime, to ensure that for the sake of having our economy continue to thrive and grow, we need to provide the kind of infrastructure, the transportation infrastructure, that's needed. I don't have to tell those

who are viewing this debate who have to commute and come over the Port Mann Bridge how frustrating it is to be stuck in the lineup to come over on the Port Mann Bridge.

That's why we are undertaking a brand-new, ten-lane bridge to replace the old Port Mann Bridge. That's why we have to invest in a project like the South Fraser perimeter road, which will create jobs. You know, the member talked about the need for projects that create jobs. The South Fraser perimeter road will create in the order of 8,000 jobs to get it built and will sustain and create more jobs as trade through the movement of goods happens along this stretch of the South Fraser perimeter road.

Now all of this has been out in the public discourse for a number of years. These projects have received a lot of public input. These projects will receive input from communities that are affected. There's a process that will be followed. Whether it's ensuring that the design complies with the requirements of each community.... Also, the environmental impact — there's an environmental assessment that happens.

So there has been an opportunity for input from communities and citizens that will be affected as these important projects, these transportation projects, are contemplated and built. We look forward to these projects carrying on so that we can get on with building the infrastructure needed for British Columbia and for complete communities.

G. Gentner: Let me end this discussion with the following consideration. On Thursday yours truly — the constituency helped in this matter, I suppose — sponsored an oratorical scholarship. As you may know, on this side we agreed to put a considerable amount of funding into sponsoring charities, etc. This of course came about with the massive pay increase to members of this House. I put my money into an oratorical contest which was represented by all members of the high schools. The very two best from each of five high schools came.

Why I'm raising it is that it was interesting because that debate was all about community. It was quite fascinating. It was entered by primarily young people. This was their future. This is what they perceived. It was interesting to hear what their concept was.

[1035]

The winner of it was a young woman. Her name was Elizabeth, and she talked about the lack of shopping amenities in my community and how without having proper transportation — we've had fragmentation because of freeways — you had to go to big-box stores, and she had a very difficult time finding places to do what she liked to do, which was to shop. She won the contest because she was very logical and very thoughtful in how she set out that.

Another person talked about litter. She talked about the character of the community, how it was decreasing

because of traffic going through our communities and throwing garbage every way.

The overwhelming concept that was discussed by all members there — or by the rest, in part — was the South Fraser perimeter road and the lack of transit services and not only how it was going to impact with pollution and asthma and particulate but how it was going to displace cars and cause greater congestion.

This was the greatest concern of all, of all the speakers: how the freeway was going to impact their community as they saw it — how it was going to impact the environmental footprint of our beautiful community; how, in fact, the congestion today is going to get far, far greater; how it's going to, in fact, impact Burns Bog; how it's going to impact the foreshore, the nature reserves; and of course, above all, how it was going to impact neighbourhoods.

Because of this road and the new congestion created, roads will be congested and backed up with gridlock. It was going to split neighbourhoods and streets in half, and there will be no logical ability to walk to and from work and to school. And those were the comments I heard from my community.

Hon. K. Krueger: I ask leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

Hon. K. Krueger: Last week I had the pleasure of having dinner in the home of Clark Roberts and Jacqueline Beltgens. Clark was our caucus lawyer back in the early days, and I was so impressed with their daughter, who's in grade 5 — her name is Olivia Roberts — and how up she was on the issues and so on.

We got talking about what we do in this place, and today she has come with three friends, Leanne Farcus, Kennedy Aragon-Scriven and Jordan Hibbert. They're all students at St. Michaels University School. Olivia's mom, Jacqueline Beltgens, is with us as well. I don't know if Clark has made it. But I'd like the House to join me in making these very bright, very interested students and Olivia's mom very welcome.

Private Members' Statements

SOUND AND VISION

J. Nuraney: I will read some remarks from our past.

An unemployment rate of 10 percent and the worst economy in the country. Thousands of British Columbians leaving the province to seek work. Real disposable income per capita dropping and the highest marginal tax rates in North America.

This is a grim picture, but now I shall talk about a little bit brighter picture as it exists today.

Unemployment rates at their record lowest. One of the strongest economies in the country. British Columbians working in British Columbia. A 20 percent increase in real disposable income per capita since 2000 and the lowest marginal tax rates in Canada for anyone earning \$116,000 or less.

I've painted these two contrasting economic pictures to highlight an astonishing fact. British Columbians today, in the midst of a fierce global economic storm, are much better off than they were during the previous government's time in office. This is the result of this government's sound economic management and a strong vision for the future.

[1040]

British Columbia today needs sound economic management and a strong vision for the future more than ever. In these times of international economic crisis we simply cannot afford to return to the reckless and irresponsible ways of the '90s.

The opposition's impossible promise to balance the books by increasing spending, by taking in less revenue, was a proven failure during their previous time in government. This will absolutely not work now. Their reality-defying economic formula has failed in every instance and in every place where it has been tried.

It's a simple fact that we cannot weather this economic storm, which was caused by the reckless and ruinous economic policies of governments in other countries and the financial institutions which recklessly dealt with the global matters of trade that have brought us to this great global economic downturn.

In these times it is critical that we need a government that has the vision of getting us through this crisis. To meet these challenges, our government has taken a thoughtful and prudent measure of deciding that, unfortunately, we need to go into a deficit-budget position for the next two years.

Our provincial economy is under pressure. I take great comfort from the fact that this government has faced challenging economic problems of great magnitude before, has found solutions to those problems and has had the discipline and the resolve to come out of it and emerge as a stronger economy — a position envied across the country. I have full confidence in this government that they will once again rise up to the challenge and take us through these difficult economic times.

We have a plan to get through these difficult times. We are taking strong measures to stimulate the economy so that those who want to work will have the opportunities to do so. Thousands of jobs, 88,000 jobs, will be created as a result of the infrastructure projects supported in Budget 2009, building opportunities for economic growth in every region of the province.

I feel it is important to highlight the fact that some of the \$14 billion we are investing in infrastructure is in partnership with the municipal and federal governments. I also take pride in the fact that our leader in our government made a conscious decision when we assumed office in 2001 to work with our counterparts in Ottawa.

It doesn't matter which party of which political stripe was in power, it was our decision that we should work with the federal government for the benefit of our province as a whole. Gone are the days of feuding with Ottawa, and we can all see how much better off we are to have a more cooperative attitude from the government in Ottawa.

In addition to creating jobs today by building for tomorrow, we are also ensuring that not a single penny is taken from health care or education. In fact, we are increasing funding for these vital services. Over the next three years we will increase health care funding by \$4.8 billion. In education, our funding per pupil in K-to-12 will increase to a record high of \$8,242 per student.

[1045]

I take tremendous pride in this, because it shows that this government understands that it is not enough simply to invest in roads and bridges and buildings. It is also very important to invest in our people.

We have come a long way in the past eight years. We have consistently demonstrated sound economic management and a strong vision for the future. We have overcome the severe economic challenges we inherited from the previous government.

M. Karagianis: In listening to the last few minutes, I'm sure that the listeners will be giving their heads a shake. Let's have a little reality check on what the member for Burnaby-Willingdon has just been claiming. Either he's reading from old literature or is certainly not in touch with what's happening across British Columbia in communities.

This is a government that only just recently realized there was an economic crisis across this country and across this world. Only weeks ago it had to admit that, in fact, despite all of their claims to success with the economy, it's been completely out of their control. We can see it now as it spirals down into deficits. We have a forest industry that is in tatters. We saw statistics in the month of January that 68,000 people had lost their jobs in the province of British Columbia.

That's the reality check of what is happening here in this province. Years of squandering dollars by a government that has been fixated with megaprojects, huge cost overruns like the convention centre in Vancouver, a new roof on B.C. Place costing millions of dollars at a time when people in British Columbia are losing their jobs and are worried about how they're going to get from payday to payday. We have seen eight years of a province

selling off the resources of this province at the expense of the residents of British Columbia.

For any member of the government to sit down and talk about some rosy future here, they have to look at the reality of what is happening in British Columbia today. The government is completely out of touch with the reality for most people living in this province today — the majority of families who are making it, just barely, from payday to payday. The government has repeatedly downloaded costs onto those individuals, those families — like the families in my constituency — and has made life harder for British Columbians in the last eight years, rather than easier for families in this province.

When we talk about what the future holds, for many people the future continues to be a struggle. This is a government that has raised ferry fares, transit fares, tuition, Hydro rates, ICBC, MSP. A gas tax has done absolutely nothing for climate change but has made it more expensive all across this province for people to get back and forth to work.

That's the reality of what the economy looks like for families today. A government that is so arrogant and out of touch with reality thinks that by standing up and proclaiming that all is well somehow that puts a blinder on what is actually happening with families.

The sell-off of B.C. resources alone is, I believe, one of the most heinous actions that this government has taken, and it continues day after day here in this province. I know that I hear from my constituents, and I know that my colleagues here on this side of the House hear from their constituents, that that has got to stop. That is continuing to erode the very resources of the future. If the member for Burnaby-Willingdon wants to talk about a vision for the future, let's talk about a vision for the future where B.C. resources are kept in the hands of British Columbians, here to stay in this province and benefit our residents.

We have watched the continual proliferation of privatization schemes and sell-offs, whether it's our rivers, whether it is our ferry system, whether it is the dismantling of B.C. Hydro. We have watched this government systematically take apart the very cornerstones of the economy here in British Columbia that, in fact, have proven to be of benefit to the citizens of British Columbia. Now where are they going? They're going to corporate shareholders, somewhere else, offshore, out of this country. That is not the vision that we would have for the future.

[1050]

The reality for British Columbians today is that they are paying more, they are getting less, and they have watched this sell-off of British Columbia. It is time to halt that.

It is time to stop the bleeding away of our resources and to make sure that whatever happens in British Columbia, it's about our citizens first and foremost — not corpora-

tions, not some flawed vision that this government has for the future of British Columbians.

In fact, it's about educating our children, making sure our health care system is here for us and our families and our parents, making sure that tuition is affordable, making sure that the resources of this province stay here in our hands, in the public hands of British Columbia, so that it's always a benefit here, first and foremost to the citizens of British Columbia. And it's about stopping off-loading and sticking the hands of government in the people's pockets every single day and taxing us to death.

J. Nuraney: I have been in this House the past eight years. In the last four I have heard nothing but untruths, statements made without any facts. The fact of the matter is that British Columbia today enjoys the highest rate of growth, the highest economic progress, in the history of British Columbia.

The investments that have come into this province in the past eight years are unprecedented. Our investment in health care, our investment in education, the increase in per-capita income, the rate of employment — these are the signs, the measures of the economic growth of any province or any country. If the opposition cares to look at those facts, they will quickly realize that British Columbia has never had it better in all these years that we have been here.

It is time that we face the truth, we tell our people the truth, and we tell our people what is in store for them when difficulties arrive. These times of difficulties that we are now going through are not of our making. These are the difficulties of global nature. It is a fact that is felt globally by every nation, and if I may say so, we in this province have so far been least affected by this downturn.

We are preparing ourselves in case we do face that downturn. It is that prudence, it is that care, it is that vision, and it is that sound economic policy of this government that will see us through the difficult times. I can assure you, Madam Speaker, that we have still got good times ahead of us.

EXPANDING THE VISION

N. Macdonald: I'm speaking to "Expanding the vision." As many members will know, the weather has had an impact on those that are here today, so there's been a bit of a change. I've spoken with the member who's responding so that he's prepared for that.

It always interests people from the Interior. And, of course, it's the Interior people who are here. It always interests us how two centimetres of snow is a cataclysmic event on transportation down in the Lower Mainland. Nevertheless, we will continue.

I want to talk about something. For those that are watching, these opportunities are intended to be

non-partisan. Obviously, there's always a difference of opinion on facts. Nevertheless, we try to speak about issues that often would not come up in other parts of the debate — other than estimates, which is a part of debate in the Legislature that allows for many of these issues to come forward.

I just want to talk about paramedics in the B.C. Ambulance Service and in particular in regards to rural paramedics. It's something that I think rural MLAs will be familiar with to a certain extent but need to be familiar with and need to make sure that it's part of the discussion that we have here.

[1055]

The paramedic service, the B.C. Ambulance Service, has changed fairly dramatically over the last eight years. With any change there certainly can be a good debate as to whether it's positive or not. But I think with anything that is done, very often it is with the details that you can have unintended consequences. I think one of the — I would hope it was unintended — consequences for paramedics is with some of the lack of planning that went into the changes.

I'll just remind members of something that has been talked about in this House before. One of the requirements that the government made in these changes was that paramedics in rural areas would stay at the paramedic stations. Now, in many areas that worked fine. For instance, in my home community we had a station that was prepared for that, but in a neighbouring community — Revelstoke — there was not a facility that was available. So that was a shortcoming that has been very difficult for paramedics over the last four years.

In raising the issue, of course, there was recognition that that's not the outcome that was intended. In pushing to have that shortcoming addressed, there is going to be a new station for paramedics — a new ambulance station in Revelstoke. This is not the only community that had that problem. So we need to look at the details of any change, and we need to bring them forward in this House.

I just want to talk about the past practice. These are things that have been mentioned to me by a number of paramedics in Columbia River-Revelstoke. If I am inaccurate in any detail, that's not their fault. It's due to, you know, me not being able to perhaps adequately explain it here.

Essentially, in the past you had paramedics who would either be full-time, permanent paramedics and be paid appropriately, or else they would be people who held other jobs and would be called out to the station and respond. Their training tended to cost about \$5,000, and that would be paid for, essentially, by the government. So the training is provided. They have the opportunity to do other work very often, and then they would be called out.

Now, the government decided that they needed to stay at the station and that would improve response

times. That certainly sounds like a reasonable thing to do. But at the same time, they made paramedics stay at the station, and for that they were paid \$10. Now, the government can say that they were never paid before, but the fact of the matter is \$10 is a fairly small amount of money, and it's difficult to make a living if you are at the station for a long time.

By the way, just for people's information, when you get called out, then you get paid at a higher, more appropriate level. But while you stay at the station for 12-hour shifts, you get \$10 an hour.

The difficulty in rural British Columbia is that, of course, there are relatively fewer call-outs. So people do tend to sit in uniform at the station for long periods of time, earning that \$10. When they are called out, then they are not paid overtime. So if it's at the end of a 12-hour shift, it can easily go into a longer period, and they're not paid overtime.

The impact is this. If you are training and have to pay your own training fees to get up to a decent level of training, you're investing \$5,000 that you will never get back in rural B.C. So what happens is that those people tend to go to places where they can earn their money back.

It is a fundamental change, and the unintended consequences of that are as follows. Just so people understand, I'll go through the criteria — and so the member understands. For an OFA, it's 40 hours' training. For an EMR, it's 105 hours' training. For a PCP, it's 1,575 hours of training, and for an ALS, it's 2,940 hours' training.

Obviously, as the hours of training go up, the amount that somebody has to pay for that training goes up. So like I say, for a PCP, it's around \$5,000. When you're called out, there is about \$1.80 difference between the EMR and the PCP, even though the level of training is substantially different.

[1100]

The implications, therefore, are these. In the area that I represent, the travel conditions during the winter are very, very challenging. The rate of accidents is huge. Other rural MLAs will know that for the Rogers Pass, for instance, there are serious consequences to that.

I look forward to continuing, and I give the opportunity to my colleague to speak.

D. Hayer: I appreciate the topic. I was actually looking forward to my colleague from Surrey-Panorama Ridge. When he was talking about expanding the vision, talking about some of the things that are happening in Surrey and the Lower Mainland.... Then, I guess because of the weather, the member for Columbia River-Revelstoke decided to speak on this topic instead of the member for Surrey-Panorama Ridge. As well, the topic is a little bit different.

It's a very interesting topic, and it's a great topic. I have a lot of respect for the paramedics. I think they do a great job. To the member, I can tell you that I have

a little bit of knowledge about paramedics because my son just finished his paramedical not too long ago — the end of last year. He's working as a paramedic, and he's working in a small community. He's working on the Sunshine Coast, in Gibsons, where my wife's family has lived since the 1950s.

When he goes to that town and he gets to meet lots of people from little villages, small parts of the community, they all talk about the relationship of the family being so long, which is much different than if you work in Vancouver-area paramedics.

He also went to Prince George, where he did his final exam for paramedics in order to get his licence. He was really excited, and he was able to meet with many new paramedics who were trained. Some of them were firemen and firepersons. One of the ladies is a firewoman. She wants to be a paramedic because she says that it is much better. She wants to sort of shift from there. She was there, and there were other people from smaller towns, and they have to share their experience. They were talking to me about that.

On top of that, that is not the only connection. My sister-in-law, my wife's sister, was also a paramedic. She started in the early '90s, and then she worked in the smaller towns, even in Prince Rupert and many other towns. As a paramedic, she used to explain to me in the '90s what challenges they had, how she had to go there and she got no pay. She was waiting for the call. No call came in. They came with zero pay.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

I said: "How could that be, in the late '90s?" You were working for this many hours — ten hours — and because there was no call that came in, you came with zero pay, and you took your lunch home. It actually cost you money.

I started talking to another individual. His name is Nick Hazen. He is actually my current brother-in-law — who my sister-in-law married — who used to be head of the B.C. Ambulance. He was head of the B.C. Ambulance under the Social Credit time. When the government changed in '91, later on, they let him go. He used to tell me about the challenges they had under the Social Credit time and then under the NDP time and how it's much different, much better now.

I know our government has put a lot of money into the B.C. Ambulance program. I know we have increased the budget by 65 percent over seven years. Currently, the budget is \$181 million more. It went from \$181 million in 2001-02 to \$298 million in 2008-09. Also, we know that we have more paramedics working now than we had before.

When I talk to my son, he says he really loves the job, and I can tell you that the community really respects the paramedics and the jobs they do. We have to be con-

stantly looking at how we can make the system better. How can we make the jobs of the paramedics easier so they can keep on providing the great service they provide? That's the way I look at it.

My son, when he works there, explains to me what type of topics.... He's a young man. He's not even 20 yet. He's a young boy, but he loves working, helping people out from all backgrounds, all ages and sometimes very difficult circumstances — car accidents and all that, when you're looking at that, or having to go to people's homes.

[1105]

Like the member said, he's happy that he is getting a new ambulance station in his own riding of Revelstoke, which is good to see — about \$2 million being put in there. Also, people have to stay there, so they can respond much faster to the calls, rather than going from home.

Sometimes, when you're in a rural area, it takes quite a while to get to work there. On the other hand, I can tell you that when my son travels to the Sunshine Coast, goes to the ferry to work in Gibsons.... He also tells me that he goes for a few days, but then, after he has a licence, he can work in different parts, too. That's the unique licence, where you can work in different places.

I want to say to the member: "Thank you for your statement." I look forward to saying more about it when I have more time. I'm sorry I ran out of time at this time.

N. Macdonald: I thank the member for his comments. As I said, the intention was to have a different topic. I certainly appreciate the member's experience with the issue and also his ability to speak quickly on a different topic.

The basics of it I think we would agree on, which is that you have a system that's critically important. We have an obligation to citizens as well as to those that visit the province as well as to those that work within the system to make sure that it's working as properly as possible.

The shortcoming, as I see it, for rural British Columbians — and I don't think it's a terribly complex problem to work out — is that you have those training costs, which are substantial for the PCPs. What you're finding is that those members — the ones with the more extensive training — are, of course, being pulled into other areas. The majority of rural paramedics in the area that I represent, in many of the communities, are now there with a three-week course, and I think that's not the expectation that most people have.

There are not a great number of call-outs, but the call-outs that come in rural B.C. are complex. Those that have had the misfortune to see a Trans-Canada accident realize that we have to wait for the paramedics to get there. That's something that's unavoidable. When they get there, we need them to provide service right away,

because there is, again, a time lag, and these can be critically important periods of time to get the service.

We owe it to have the best-trained people as possible. What I would suggest is that that's an element we need to look at in our paramedic service to make sure it's possible to have those people trained in the appropriate way for dealing with those situations.

With that, I thank the House for the opportunity to speak. I know that we're anxious to get on to the next topic.

Hon. T. Christensen: I call private member's Motion 23.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 23 without disturbing the priorities of the motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

Motions on Notice

ECONOMY AND FISCAL RESTRAINT

J. Les: It's my pleasure to move:

[Be it resolved that this House recognize the necessity of fiscal restraint to protect our children and grandchildren from bearing the burden of today's economic difficulties.]

I think it's a motion that's very apropos as we consider the economic situation around the world today. There is no question that governments everywhere are being seriously challenged in terms of their public policy not only to get through the current economic situation but also to get through it in a way that doesn't compromise the prospects of those that will come after us.

Just as a footnote, I'm somewhat qualified, I think, to consider that aspect of leaving behind a better situation for those who come after us because, as members of this House may be aware, my wife and I are the proud parents of six kids and, at this point, 11 grandchildren. So I actually do think from time to time about the moral obligation that we all have to ensure that we hand over a world that is actually a better place for our children and grandchildren to inherit from us.

Let there be absolutely no doubt that today's deficits are nothing other than tomorrow's taxes. I think that is a fundamental truth that we always need to keep in mind.

[1110]

When I look at the different experiences that are ongoing right now around the world.... The American budget, I believe, for the upcoming year is projected to carry a deficit of \$1.75 trillion, an amount of money that, frankly.... Perhaps somebody can understand what \$1.75 trillion is. I don't know how much that is. I cannot

get my head around that amount of money. All I know is that that is a huge mortgage on the future.

We see that going on in numerous places. Our own national government is suddenly running a very large deficit. The province of Alberta next door.... My understanding is that they're going to be running a deficit of \$1.5 billion. That is a massive turnaround from just about this time last year when they were projecting an \$8 billion surplus — very, very significant turnaround.

In British Columbia we've decided to keep very much in mind that we don't want to be running up the debt. The deficit, therefore — which frankly is unavoidable for the upcoming two years — has been kept at a very modest level: \$495 million this upcoming year, \$245 million the year after. Then, by law — by legislation that we just passed in this House a couple of weeks ago — by the fiscal year 2011-2012, we will be back in balanced budgets territory in this province.

Now, as I've said, that is the law. I was disappointed by the comments of the member for Surrey-Whalley last week, the opposition Finance critic, when he qualified that by saying: "That's the law at the present time." There certainly was no ringing endorsement that balanced-budget legislation was a good thing. As a matter of fact, to me, he seemed to be opening the door to something other than balanced-budget legislation. I think that is something the members opposite might want to clarify with British Columbians, whether, in fact, they are in favour of balanced-budget legislation.

We already have heard some worrying commentary by members opposite. They're in favour of many different new spending initiatives that blow, by my reckoning, at least a \$2 billion deficit hole in the annual budget. Then the opposition leader actually made a commitment that she would be issuing bonds to residents of British Columbia to a total of \$10 billion.

That sounds very good, but we have to understand that that's another \$10 billion of debt on the backs of British Columbians and on the backs of our children and our grandchildren.

Interjection.

J. Les: The member for North Island seems to have difficulty understanding the concept. You have to actually pay these bonds back, and you have to do so with interest. In the case of the bond structure that was floated by the opposition leader, it would be at a greater and a higher level of interest than what government is able to borrow in the open marketplace. So there are several things there where the NDP needs to come clean and explain to British Columbians what their new definition is of responsible management of the public's resources.

Our record is very clear. We've actually reduced the provincial accumulated operating debt very significantly over the last number of years. At one point it stood at

\$15.7 billion. It is now at \$6.4 billion. That, obviously, is a huge reduction in accumulated debt. In the 2004-2005 fiscal year we actually paid off \$1.9 billion of debt. At that point that was the biggest single reduction in accumulated debt in the history of our province.

For five consecutive years we've been able to balance the budget, including the budget year we are still in, which is '08-09, which ends at the end of this month. That will complete the fifth consecutive balanced budget in this administration. We've also made a further commitment, again, by law — we've done this in legislation passed just a few weeks ago — that beginning in 2011-2012, when our budget will again be balanced, that any surplus cash will go, first of all, to debt reduction in this province.

[1115]

We certainly have not lost our appetite for debt reduction and debt elimination. It's compromised only in the very short term by the need to protect funding for health care and education.

Health care is obvious. We have an aging demographic. There is more appetite for health care dollars all the time to ensure that people have the health care they need. I can point to various statistics like hip and knee replacements and other things that are indicative of an aging population and the health care commitment that that requires.

Also, in the area of education. There are increased resources there. One thing that, I think, we all understand very clearly is that a good, sound education policy and good education opportunity availability is one of the keys to rebuilding and revitalizing an economy. There has been no compromise there either.

With those two caveats, increased funding for health care and increased funding for education, we had to put in place a modest deficit for those two years — but for those two years only.

The debt-to-GDP ratio over these last six or seven years has declined, I think, admirably. It stood at 21.3 percent in 2002-2003. It has now declined to 13.8 percent and is projected to rise only slightly as a result of these two modest, consecutive deficits to something just over 15 percent.

That is the way to protect our children's future — to be very wary of debt and deficit and to try, whenever it is reasonably possible, to balance our budgets, live within our means and invest in things like health care and education so that we, in fact, will be able to turn over a province that does not have its future compromised and a province that affords all kinds of economic and other opportunities to our children and grandchildren.

M. Karagianis: I'm happy to rise and respond to the member's comments this morning. It's very interesting, if you look at the substance of this motion, fiscal restraint to protect future generations from the burden of today's economies, essentially.

Let's be very clear that we've had an eight-year legacy here of empty promises to the electorate of British Columbia by a government that is completely out of touch with the reality of what has been going on in this province most recently.

That's been very evident in the activities here in the last number of months in the province of British Columbia, where we had a government that assured us only a few months ago that the economy in British Columbia was perfectly fine, and we would weather the storm that certainly other economies and other countries have been unable to weather. They seemed completely in denial of the reality of what was happening outside of this province.

Then suddenly they came late to the game here with a declaration that we were going to go into a deficit budget and that we, in fact, were going to be affected. We see every single day more and more evidence that this will have huge ramifications on the economy of British Columbia for much longer than the government either seemed able to acknowledge or seems prepared for.

In fact, when we look at the legacy of the last number of years, of the neglect that has gone on to rural British Columbians and to the forest industry here in British Columbia, just as one example, then you have to say: "How can we protect future generations when we've done such an abysmal job of protecting current generations from what has been happening here under this government?"

We've had rural British Columbians hurt disproportionately over the last number of years by things like an ineffective gas tax, by a government that has not done enough to try and staunch the destruction and job loss in the forest industry. We continue to let raw logs leave this province.

We continue to deny a raise in the minimum wage in this province. We continue to allow a proliferation of sell-off of resources here in British Columbia — our hydro, our rivers, our ferries. The agricultural land reserve is not being protected. Forest lands are being turned into fodder and cash for corporations.

It seems to me that if we're going to talk legitimately about protecting future generations, we have to talk about protecting what's happening here in British Columbia now. I will tell you that with no resources left in public hands in this province, there will be nothing to protect for future generations. It will be gone.

[1120]

The sell-off and giveaway that's been going on in this province over the last eight years is absolutely appalling. If we're going to protect future generations, we have to staunch right now the sell-off of this province to corporations and make sure that in the future our hydro is not something that we purchase back from some corporate head down in California and repurchase our own power through a privatization scheme.

If you're going to legitimately talk about protecting future generations, then you've got to talk about investing right now in the things that matter to communities, in the resources that will provide for our future generations. That's things like education. That's things like ensuring that our children are getting the best possible education and not in overcrowded classrooms, that we are not denying students with special needs the kind of supports they need, that we are not making post-secondary education so expensive that you either come away burdened with debt for life or you can't afford to go in the first place.

If we really want to protect future generations from the burden of the economy, we make sure that they are the economy of the future, that they are able to compete in a world that is going to be more difficult. We're going to need more resources in the future for our young people. We want to make sure that they have an opportunity to create the best kind of economy in the future. We need to be investing in that, not making life more difficult.

We need to invest in families and make sure they're not struggling, that they are not, in fact, having to go into debt or that they are not just barely getting by payday to payday. We've got to make sure that life is more affordable to them. We've got to invest now in British Columbia in order to protect future generations. I don't see that happening with this government. In fact, I see an entirely different agenda at play here.

If we are going to seriously talk about protecting the future generations, that means investing in education now, investing in skills training now, investing in keeping resources in British Columbia for British Columbians and making sure there is something for our future generations to access for work. If we're going to take the government seriously about this, then I'd like to see those kinds of initiatives put in place rather than all this rhetoric we hear about the '90s or anything else.

If we want to make sure that the future generations are protected.... Listen. I have grandchildren. I want them to be able to have a life here in British Columbia in the future. I want them to be able to enjoy the same things that we have as generations here in British Columbia. That means preserving our resources, our parks, our agricultural land reserve and making sure that those things are there to benefit the future generations.

We can't allow a sell-off and giveaway. We've got to stop that now. That's a real investment in future generations, and I would hope that the government will think more about what they're doing today rather than long term, what might happen in the future.

J. Yap: I rise to speak on this motion, and I thank my colleague for bringing this forward.

In response, first of all, to the comments made by the member for Esquimalt-Metchosin, it was yet another doom-and-gloom statement of which we're hearing

more and more from the members of the opposition as we move towards the month of May.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

This motion is one which I would think members of the opposition would be glad to support, because it is, after all, one that.... Members of the opposition, we know, believe ultimately that we need to have good fiscal management, yet we hear the rhetoric from members of the opposition.

The fact is that we do live in extraordinary times, and yes, the world economy is slowing down. We're seeing a serious recession around the world. No one is unaffected. We in British Columbia.... Our economy is the best positioned to weather these economic times.

Why is that? Our economy is well positioned because of eight years of prudent fiscal management by our B.C. Liberal government.

Back in 2001, when our government was given the opportunity to govern by the people of British Columbia, we inherited a financial mess. The members of the opposition, the NDP, want us to forget that there was a mess that had to be cleaned up. They want us to forget that the 1990s were the lost decade. They want us to forget that opportunities were lost during the 1990s thanks to their mismanagement.

[1125]

We went from the most thriving economy in the early 1990s, 1991. The NDP drove our economy, really, from first place to last place. That's what happened. We are going to hear over the next 65 days more and more revisionist history from members of the opposition about how: "Oh, it wasn't really that bad." Well, let's not forget that during the 1990s, the NDP government doubled the debt.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, Members.

J. Yap: They doubled the obligations on British Columbians, doubled the debt during the 1990s. They had eight consecutive years of deficit. They had debt management plans announced with great flourish, and they missed every single one of them.

Now that clearly is not the kind of fiscal management that members of the opposition are promoting, because we're hearing them these days talking about: "Oh yeah. We believe in balanced budgets. Yes, we do believe in balanced budgets."

But we know the reality. The best proof of what we can expect is the record of the group of people, the party, that presents themselves to British Columbians. We have seen their record. That is the best measure of what a party that wants the opportunity to govern will do.

What did they do during the 1990s? We saw investment chased away from British Columbia.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members, order. Order.

J. Yap: We saw the loss of our sterling triple-A credit rating, downgraded by the international financial markets because of their fiscal mismanagement. Using the analogy of a household, the NDP government of the 1990s just kept spending with the credit card, running operating deficits so that when the B.C. Liberals came into government in 2001, we had a structural deficit that we had to deal with.

That structural deficit has been solved, and we have seen nothing but progress in the last eight years. Since 2003 we have made record reductions to the level of debt, the obligations that British Columbians have through the debt. We have paid down that obligation.

Because we are in extraordinary times, we're willing...

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members.

J. Yap: ...to allow temporary deficits. Members on the government side believe that this is not the right way to go. But the Minister of Finance brought in a budget on February 17 that is a measured approach, that will protect the programs — especially health care and education and social programs that British Columbians need — and at the same time address the discretionary expenses, cut administrative expenses to ensure that we can put those dollars to work in the areas that are needed.

For the next two years we will have a temporary deficit. By year three we will have a balanced budget. British Columbians can count on it, because as our B.C. Liberal government has shown, we deliver on our financial commitments. We will do that once again, unlike what members of the opposition did when they were in government.

I'd like to hear what the other members would like to say, because we know what we can expect should they ever receive the privilege to govern. We know they have big spending plans. They want to spend, spend, spend. They want more funding for hydro and ICBC rate reductions, more funding for increases to social assistance rates, more funding for transit expansion and fare reduction, more funding for child care, for crime and safety, for forest communities — all worthy programs.

But they don't talk about how they're going to pay for it. In fact, they tell us on the one hand: "Oh yes. We believe in balanced budgets. Yes, we do believe in balanced budgets..."

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members.

J. Yap: "...but we're going to spend and spend." At the same time....

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members.

Member, sit down.

Members, we do have to hear the debate.

[1130]

J. Yap: For example, the pollution tax against carbon emissions which is in place now. The NDP are saying they're going to get rid of the pollution tax on carbon emissions. They want to get rid of the carbon tax, the groundbreaking, honest tax that was introduced to address greenhouse gas emissions — right?

They talk about wanting to axe the carbon tax on pollution. They want to do that at a cost of \$2.3 billion to our treasury over the next three years, but they don't talk about how they're going to replace that revenue. So we have to assume with all the spending increases that they're proposing, more spending.... More spending, and yet they're going to cut the carbon tax on emissions.

What we have here with this motion is a very sensible one, and I thank my colleague from Chilliwack for bringing this forward. As we have seen from the reaction from some members of this House, it's one that we all care passionately about.

The thing is this. We — our B.C. Liberal members of the caucus and government — believe in good financial management. We have delivered this for British Columbians over the last eight years, and we will continue to deliver this for British Columbians moving forward.

R. Fleming: I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

R. Fleming: Today we have with us.... I had the privilege of meeting with two individuals this morning. Dr. Helen Haugh, who is from Cambridge University's business school, is an expert on social enterprise and community investment funds. She was here with Dr. Ana Maria Peredo, who is from our University of Victoria business faculty. She's a nationally recognized research fellow on social economy initiatives. I would ask the House to make both of them feel welcome.

Debate Continued

G. Coons: It's an honour to rise to speak to this motion and the necessity of fiscal restraint to protect our children and grandchildren. But again, in replying to some of the concerns of government members on the other side, when we look at what has happened over their eight years of prudent fiscal government, we've just seen their hidden agenda come forward right to the forefront.

Despite inheriting the biggest surplus in provincial history in 2000-2001, they were able to transform that into a series of the largest deficits ever seen in the province — \$1.3 billion in 2001-2002, \$3.2 billion in 2002-2003 and \$1.3 billion in 2003-2004. So their record is clear.

As we move forward, we can think back or go back to the documentation from the Premier. We can remember the words when he was Leader of the Opposition, when he voted in 2000 against the NDP's balanced-budget legislation. This is a quote: "It's amazing how rewriting laws can work for a government that doesn't really care about the law."

That's what this government... We see this continually. Not only don't they care about the law; they don't care about British Columbians. They don't care about the students, the seniors, the most disadvantaged, the forestry workers, those in rural B.C., first nations, those worried about the environment, those worried about paying their bills, with the unfair gas tax, ferry fares, gas prices, homelessness up close to 300 percent — just disgraceful.

When we look at a deficit and/or referring to fiscal restraint, we need to look at a deficit out of control versus responsible deficit. Todd Hirsch, a senior economist with ATB Financial, says deficit financing, if controlled, can be extremely helpful in managing difficult economic times as long as there is a solid plan to prevent continuous deficit spending.

When we look at this government's hidden agenda, we've seen the gap between the rich and poor in this province widen over the first decade of this century. We have the highest overall rate of poverty. We have the highest rate of child poverty. We have the highest rate of working poor families, and the gap between the rich and the poor is widening and widening under this government.

[1135]

It's staggering, the depth of poverty. So when we look at wanting to ensure and protect our children and grandchildren, we need to ensure that the social networks and frameworks are there that this government has just decimated over the last eight years of their reign of terror.

Homelessness. Largest in British Columbia in years — up, as I mentioned, close to 300 percent.

Back in 2002, and this is from the B.C. and Yukon Community Newspapers Association.... They talk about the throne speech that was delivered in 2002 that opened the 37th parliament. "The speech reiterated the Liberal mantra of fiscal restraint, government cutbacks and economic revitalization. It...underscored the government's unwavering commitment to its agenda" — its real agenda, their hidden agenda. We don't know what's out there, but I'm sure the agenda is on the back burners or the front burners of this government.

They promised back in 2002 to "save and renew public health care" and "focus scant education dollars." A regurgitation, again, with this throne speech and budget, and we've seen what has happened to health care and education. We've seen dollars away from K-to-12. We've seen dollars away from post-secondary. We've seen what they've done to seniors and their promises for health care.

Other initiatives outlined in their speech back in 2002 looked at the Employment Standards Act. They were going to make changes to that and the Workers Compensation Act. And what do we see? We saw significant, substantial changes in these laws, and we saw the minimum wage not increasing in seven years. We saw the \$6 training wage.

We saw changes that hurt aboriginal workers and recent immigrants in low-wage and non-paying jobs. And now we have children as young as 12 able to work, with the permission of one parent. B.C. now, due to their changes in the last six years, has the dubious honour of having the lowest employment standards in Canada. That's a real shame.

One other thing that was promised back in 2002 in their speech about the mantra of fiscal restraint was looking at public-private partnerships, and we've seen what has happened with that. Public-private partnerships cost more. The assessment for them is biased, and there's no public accountability and transparency. We're seeing the detrimental effects of that as it falls upon us.

Back in 2002, in their mantra of fiscal restraint, they looked at IPPs and the failed IPP policies.... They talked about the new Community Charter. Again, we're just seeing an attack on communities with Bill 30 where they've taken away meaningful local input. They also talked about their mail-in referendum on treaty negotiations.

So we have this real chameleon change happening with this government, where a referendum six or seven years ago.... Now they are the friends of those first nations that live in adverse poverty throughout our province. This government cannot be trusted.

We look at forest workers. They talked about forest workers being part of their fiscal mantra, and they've abandoned communities — jobs lost, mills closed, forest worker safety compromised, log exports at the highest in British Columbia.

As we look at where we should be going with this government, they need to come clean on their hidden agenda, and I hope they do that in the days to come.

J. Rustad: I'm very pleased to rise to speak to this motion today, and I just want to reiterate the motion because of all the rhetoric that you've just heard in the last few minutes.

"Be it resolved that this House recognize the necessity of fiscal restraint to protect our children and grandchildren from bearing the burden of today's economic difficulties."

Madam Speaker, from the previous two opposition speakers, what you have heard in this House is that we need to spend more. We need to be spending more — let me just get this right here — on things like social assistance, on transit, on K-to-12 education, on post-secondary education, on child care and crime and safety, on forestry, on communities, on health care.

[1140]

This motion is in respect to fiscal restraint in a challenging time, trying to live within our means. You can hear very clearly from what the opposition have been saying over the last few minutes exactly what their idea of fiscal restraint is. "We need to spend more. We need to do more things."

They tried that in the 1990s, and what did they do? They rang up our credit card debt. They rang up our debt to the tune of doubling it in this province — doubling it. More importantly, if you're investing in infrastructure that supports our kids and our grandkids, that supports growth in our province, that's one thing. But when you're just trying to pay daily bills by borrowing for the debt, what you're doing is you're saying to that future generation: "I want to take money from your pocket and spend it for me today." That is what their policy has been.

It scares me — it actually quite disturbs me — the fact that we passed a piece of legislation just in January that talked about requiring a balanced budget in this province in 2011-2012. We recognize the fact that we are facing unprecedented financial challenges right now and that we cannot be balanced without seriously damaging programs like health care and education. So we said: "Okay, we need to do everything we can to hold back, to have fiscal restraint so that we can get through this with the minimal amount of damage in terms of the deficits and then get back to a balanced budget and grow from there."

That side of the House has voted in favour of it. The NDP have voted in favour of it. Yet, they come out and say... The member from Surrey suggested that perhaps they would repeal this legislation, saying: "It's the law at this present time." They just voted for it. If they didn't like it, why would they have supported it?

And yet every speaker that you heard and every speaker you'll hear after this will continually come at how they need to spend more dollars, how they need to ring up the bill and put us back into a situation where they have

one of two choices. Either they're going to have to crank up taxes and seriously damage our economy, or they're going to have to spend tomorrow's dollars today. They're going to have to run massive deficits with no chance at all of being back to a balanced budget by 2011-12.

This is about being honest to the taxpayers. This is about being honest and running in a fiscally responsible way. We have seen none of that. I challenge any one of the opposition members to come out and talk about how they're going to price out these increases that they want to do, to price out the way they want to have all these funding requests.

Here's the reality. In the 1990s what did they do? Right after getting into power, they cranked up taxes by about \$2 billion to the people in this province. Even with doing that, even with making us one of the highest-taxed jurisdictions in North America, or certainly in Canada, they still ran deficits. They still lived far beyond their means. They took our debt-to-GDP ratio, which stood at 11.8 percent in 1990, and they cranked it up to a peak of 20.6 percent in 2001.

We have been bringing that down considerably. We're at 13.4 percent. That will rise a little bit over the next two years because of our deficits, but the point is that we have tried to live within our means. We have proven that through sound fiscal management you can run a good government. You can run a province without putting a burden on our children.

That side, in the 1990s, has proven that they cannot do it. So when it comes up to election time, just remember the quote that the member for Nanaimo said back on April 1, 1993. This is from *Hansard*: "I haven't seen anybody die of overtaxation in this province." It's clear: that side of the House is for taxes. That side of the House is for unrestrained spending.

Back to the motion — the necessity of fiscal restraint to protect our children and grandchildren. Because of the challenge we're facing economically, it's the prudent thing to do. It's the right thing to do. It's what we are doing on this side of the House. I look forward to hearing the opposition at some point try to price out how they plan to spend these price increases.

[1145]

K. Conroy: It's obvious by what we just heard from the member for Prince George–Omineca that we've started the scare tactics before an election instead of actually debating the real issues in this motion.

I do agree that we must engage in some form of fiscal restraint to protect our children's legacy, but at the same time, I believe we also must invest in our children's and grandchildren's future. Similar to the member for Chilliwack–Sumas, I also feel that I have some credibility here, as I, too, have children and grandchildren — not as many as the member for Chilliwack–Sumas, but he has a few years on me. Maybe I'll catch up.

I believe the best way to invest is to actually invest wisely in projects that will have significant returns in the years to come. I'm going to talk about a few things, but

one of them is truly clean, green projects — projects that while ensuring power production, also provide good family-supporting jobs, jobs that ensure families can have a quality of life that does produce healthy grandchildren and children, jobs that pay a living wage.

One of the ways we can ensure our children and grandchildren have a healthy, productive future is to invest in them by raising the minimum wage — support for children now to raise healthy grandchildren, now while this province has the highest level of child poverty in the country. We must relook at how we can support families now, because children don't live in poverty alone. They live with families who are struggling to make ends meet.

The other legacy we should leave to our children is the green, power-producing projects that are truly green. Right now the only green thing that is coming from these independent power projects being proposed today is the amount of green money that's flowing into the pockets of the developers that are proposing these projects.

A legacy for our children and our grandchildren will be in ensuring that B.C. Hydro once again is the producer and developer of power, power that will belong to our province — and benefit the entire province — and not to corporations who have accessed our creeks, streams and rivers through the modern-day gold rush we see today.

First of all, I'm going to say for the record that I'm not opposed to independent power projects. However, they must be projects that not only benefit a community; they have to be supported by the community.

In the Kootenays we have one of the best independent power projects going, one of the best independent power producers, and that would be the Columbia Basin Trust with their partner the Columbia Power Corporation.

The return on the investment is huge — an investment that is there for our children and grandchildren for years and years to come, an investment that produces good family-supporting jobs and all done with the support of the communities in the basin, all done in the basin, all done in the '90s, all done when the members in the '90s looked forward to say: "This is how we're going to protect our children's investment. This is how we're going to protect our grandchildren's investment."

In fact, one of my granddaughters takes great delight in pointing out the dam she owns. She owns it because her grandpa told her so and because he was here in the '90s to make sure that that investment was protected — that investment that's going to have results for years and years to come.

Then I look at what's happening today. I look at the giveaway of one of our most valuable resources, the resources that our children and grandchildren should never have to worry about accessing. Now, it's hard here to focus on just one when this government is so prone to giving away our forestry land, our agricultural land, but I'm going to talk about the water and my concern about the number of water licences and applications for power generation on our small creeks and rivers.

To call these run-of-the-river projects is just a fallacy. They should be better termed "run-of-the-pipeline projects" — pipelines that will go on for kilometres and divert water out of its natural stream. To date there are 577 applications for these water licences, for these power applications, at 698 points of diversion in this province. Those are our small creeks and streams, streams that should be left there for the legacy of our children and grandchildren.

But what worries me even more is the fact that the developers who will get these licences will own these waterways, and our children and grandchildren will be denied access to these waters. They will be denied the right to swim, to fish, to skate in the winter. They will be denied the right to benefit from the clean water that they get from these streams. That's what we are seeing today.

My oldest granddaughter — she gets it. She doesn't understand why the government doesn't get it. She's only seven. She knows that the creeks need to be there for the future, that they are the people's resources, that those resources should be there so that she can take her children to them, that there should be creeks and rivers there that people are never denied access to.

That would be a true legacy to leave to our children, a true legacy of vision that would indeed protect our children and grandchildren from bearing the burden of this government's failed economic policies, policies that have brought us to where we are today.

[1150]

R. Austin: I'd like to take my place to debate this motion that the House be resolved to "recognize the necessity of fiscal restraint to protect our children and grandchildren from bearing the burden of today's economic difficulties." I'd like to follow on from the member for Chilliwack-Sumas and point out, of course, that there is more than a burden if we end up not spending and investing, in today's calamity.

We recognize that we are in exceptional circumstances here in British Columbia because of the state of the world economy. For that reason, the government came to the conclusion that they had to amend their own legislation, which they had enacted after coming to power, which banned deficit spending of any kind. At the time that that was debated, members on this side of the House pointed out to them that there needed to be a place recognizing that in exceptional circumstances you have to go into deficit spending. Otherwise, you can't provide, for the citizens of today, what is required.

I come from northwest B.C., where we have been in a massive recession for at least eight years, perhaps even longer. Those investments have not been made in the last seven or eight years, creating huge problems. So it's not enough just to talk about the future generations. We have to look at what has happened in the last eight years. There has been so much devastation in northwest B.C. from the lack of investments, from the ideological

reasons of this government to not spend to help people go through hard times — hard times that we've been putting up with for the last eight or nine years.

What is the consequence of that? Well, let me tell you. People in northwest B.C. who have not seen investments have seen schools closed, have seen four-day school weeks, have seen such extreme poverty.... Those are children who have spent the last eight years, their entire childhood, growing up in poverty.

What do you think the consequence of that is going to be? I can tell you. It is going to be families who have had children who have not been able to learn properly. It's families that have been split up as a result of the kind of financial stress that has happened. That alone recognizes that there needs to be a time when you have to go and take government spending into deficit spending in order to protect family life and family values and to protect communities. That has not happened.

I also want to just comment very quickly on the question of what our total debt is. This government here has taken many years to spend a gigantic credit card in the name of P3s. The Auditor General of this province has pointed out that P3s and the debt that comes from P3s should be a part of that debt. So for them to actually sit around here and say, "Well, you know what? Our debt has gone down...." When you include all of the debt that is actually on the P3s, which is what the Auditor General says very clearly should be there, in fact, our debt has not gone down.

Our children and grandchildren — and I look at the member for Chilliwack-Sumas smiling at me — will be paying those debts on the P3s for 30 years, for 35 years — whatever it is. Those are debts that have been incurred at greater expense than if it had been financed in other ways. Of course, governments can borrow money cheaper than anybody else and could have saved that money rather than going into P3s. In reality, we see a government that actually has increased debt and needs to acknowledge the debt of P3s.

Noting the time, I will take my place.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

R. Thorpe: I'm very pleased to rise in support of my colleague on this Motion 23, that the House "recognize the necessity of fiscal restraint to protect our children and grandchildren."

Mr. Speaker, you know how important grandchildren are to all of us today — and have been for a long, long time. But it's more important right now, as we look and see the toughest economic times.... I noted on TV very early this morning that it's now reported that the global recession that is taking place is the first since the Second World War. A global recession. I was so pleased that our government came forward with the budget that we did, which recognizes the challenges of today but keeps in place the principle of prudent fiscal management.

[1155]

We've heard members on that side of the House and members on our side of the House speak. There are choices that people can make. They can choose the way we like to do budgets, and that's fact. They can choose the way the NDP likes to do budgets. That's fiction. They can talk about how we like to do budgets — truth in budgeting — or they can look at how the NDP like to do it — fudge-it budgets.

They can look at how our side of the House wants full disclosure in their budgets, and we only hear talk from the Leader of the Opposition, who says that she is going to fully disclose the financial impacts of her platform. Well you know, she's been saying that for about a year and a half, and we know, for the facts, that they will not come clean with British Columbians. We've seen it already.

We've seen it already when we talk about the carbon tax, the vote against reducing pollution that the NDP are supporting. But they have their own secret plan that is on one of their sister websites, which says they are going to increase taxation to British Columbians by \$1.8 billion. That's what the NDP are going to do.

Why can they not tell British Columbians the truth? They just run away from the truth all the time.

They talk about their concern for communities and their concerns for small business. Their stated position in these very difficult economic times, these challenges where small business operators around British Columbia are having to work harder and longer hours.... Now they want to increase the minimum wage. That is part of their platform. They want to layer that cost of \$450 million a year on small businesses in British Columbia. They talk about caring. It is time for the NDP to come clean with British Columbians.

Their Finance critic struggled in a radio interview and said: "You know, it's the law at the present time." Now my colleague from Nanaimo, who likes to play with words, would say there's a message there. We should read that very carefully. If and when they were ever going to be a government in British Columbia, they are going to change the budget laws in the province of British Columbia so that they're not going to fully disclose. They're not going to tell people information. That's what they're going to do.

I am very, very pleased to stand in support of this motion that cares about our children and our grandchildren.

R. Thorpe moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. T. Christensen 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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